The Horizon's Limits:

Becoming the Global Middle Class in two UK International Schools

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

I warrant that this authorisation does not, to the best of my belief, infringe the rights of any third party.

All names have been changed to pseudonyms, and some personal details have been altered to protect the anonymity of the people who participated in this research.

I declare that my thesis consists of 79,435 words.

Abstract

Based on 18 months of comparative ethnographic research with students attending an international IB school and international Japanese school in the UK, this thesis investigates how students prepared for, navigated, and imagined their future educational and life transitions. My work explores the multitude of ways students experienced and understood school missions to cultivate global mindedness, as well as the challenges and anxieties over succeeding in realising their self-potentialities. This research complicates narratives of consumerist education by considering fears of downward social mobility, perceived precarity, as well as the achievability and desirability of cosmopolitanism for global middle class students. This thesis focuses on the complex ways in which global educational institutions, national educational policies, international job markets, structural inequalities, and family expectations, intersect to create aspirational pathways for students. I argue that the current globalised and corporatised education system of international schools offers a false promise of success, where educational opportunities are not equally accessible. Overall, this thesis explores the challenges of becoming the global middle class as a relational project through the student lens, contributing to a small but growing area of anthropological research on international schooling. Finally, this thesis offers a critique of cosmopolitan credentialism to illustrate not only how situated inequalities are reproduced and sustained through market driven education, but the effect that this has on students as agents navigating this system, challenging the reader to consider what's at stake for young people in the marketisation of education.

To my Grandpa Cleve, who always championed me.

(b. Bluefields, Jamaica 1931, d. London, UK, 2017)

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Smiles and Disappointments - September, 2018

We sat at one of the heavy desks in the little library corner of the main office. Shielding our eyes from the afternoon sun as it bore through the old windows, Hina handed me a stack of the pictures she had printed out and a pair of colourful scissors, the ones seemingly only schools use. The students were preparing for their annual school fête and this meant cutting out what seemed like hundreds of celebrities' smiling faces and sticking them to unexpected places in the corridors and around the grounds. Hina relished her responsibilities as class president and I had already been roped into making paper chrysanthemums the week before for a large installation her class was putting together.

"This year the theme is happiness" Hina stated proudly as she artfully freed an unfamiliar footballer's face from the paper she was holding. The pile included Japanese pop singers and K-pop legends, characters from anime, actors, and politicians. I looked down at the mess I was making of Obama's grinning head.

"I scored badly on the IELTS test. I took it over the summer." She smiled as she said it and kept cutting, but her slightly watery eyes betrayed her. There were plenty of opportunities to retake it, I countered. It was only her first try, but Hina was upset

and disappointed with her performance. There was no limit on the number of redos, but the cost of the test was enough reason for her to want to avoid multiple repeats. [1]

"Hmmm. I need a better score, where I study depends on my IELTS. I might have to go back to Japan for university if I don't improve. It's okay, I will practise a lot but the test is very specific. You need tutoring to do well, so it's okay."

Hina was a contagiously positive student and this knock to her confidence was sad to see. We continued our cutting out and chatted about her summer. Among her friends, Hina was one of the few who had decided to do the homestay[2] in Cambridge for a month. Though she had not been home to see her family during the holidays, her mum had come to visit her for a short time during the homestay. She had fun meeting new people, and had even made some new friends.

Hina's conversation with me was indicative of the concerns of many of the students I came to know, concerns with securing their chosen paths, the fragility of which were exposed during moments such as the one above. Over time, interactions with students revealed the contradictions, challenges, and complexities that shaped experiences of aspiring in everyday school life. For Hina, navigating her future meant dealing with failure and a shifting uncertainty, as well as creating transnational opportunities for herself. As with many other students I spoke to, the potential precarity of these paths loomed large. Alongside the constraints that students' positionalities imposed, I came to see their experiences as equally embedded in their interpersonal relationships, personal histories of marginalisation and privilege, and the ideologies of the educational institutions they attended. Students faced expectations on multiple fronts - families, teachers and peers, as well as those of

[1] IELTS refers to the International English Language Testing System, a standardised testing system for non-native English speakers that is used internationally.
[2] Homestays are where students stay with local families whilst their boarding houses are closed over the holidays.

national and global economies. The recent and rapid rise in the popularity of international schooling (Poole 2020), signalling the desirability of a 'global' education, has led to the proliferation of their provision and purpose (Bunnell et al. 2016). In this thesis I explore the various ways that international school students engage with the future, revealing a complex account of global middle class aspiration. Through an ethnographic examination of students' school lives, I attempt to refocus these very personal experiences, acknowledging the intersecting and overlapping demands placed on students, and recognising the interconnectedness and affectivity of aspirations (Froerer et al. 2022). These students are representative of more than their own dilemmas, and their educational experiences offer insight into the unspoken assumptions, motivations, and narratives of aspiration that operate within international schools.

A Brush with International Education - 2004

When I was 9 years old, I moved abroad with my family. We went from southeast London to southern Portugal. I went from 10p Freddos on the way home, violet velvet tracksuits for P.E., and older kids blasting Nelly in the playground; to polishing my school shoes on Sunday evenings, parents in Porsches doing pick-ups, and ice lollies at the local beach after school. It was only for one year, but it was a shock. Moving from a state school in London to an international school abroad meant a reverse in the ethnic, racial, and religious diversity I had grown up with. And despite the plethora of nationalities at the school, I had suddenly become one of two non-white students in my class of 21, one of four in the whole school (one of whom was my sister and another my then best friend). However, the worst culture shock I

experienced was not due to the difficulties of assimilation in a new country, in fact being quite young it was easy to adapt. It was the culture inside the school that eluded me.

As it turned out, shaking off my south London accent was the least of my worries, and much easier than pretending to know what a yacht did, or understanding why Tommy Hilfiger was written on so many of my classmates' clothes. Looking back, I was of course in a privileged position to be able to attend such a school, even if only for a short time. The school fees were very low compared to international schools in other European countries, the facilities were wanting, and there was little choice as there were only two international schools in the whole of the region some 19 years ago. The school itself no longer exists, perhaps testament to its questionable educational provision. Despite its shortcomings, this was where you went if you wanted to follow an internationalised version of the British curriculum. There were students whose parents owned multi-million pound successful businesses, business owning middle-class locals who wanted different opportunities for their children, and those whose parents struggled to keep up with their rent and provide their child with the education they thought was best. It was a mish mash of class, culture and economic security at a time when, and in a place where, there was little other choice. Whilst I still consider myself middle-class due to my education and upbringing, despite my parents hailing from Black Caribbean and white British working-class families, it was by no means like the ultra exclusive institutions which have now replaced it in the area.

The structure of the chapter emulates my journey through this research, starting with an introduction to my fieldsites. I then give an overview of the themes of the thesis

and my methodological approaches to conducting research in schools. Subsequently, I examine the bodies of literature relevant to my themes and theoretical orientations, what it means to be an international school, and finally, the overall structure of this thesis.

Finding my Fieldsites

Like many out of the ordinary experiences children have, it stuck with me. The world had never seemed small or knowable before, even my grandparents were from thousands of miles away, but it now felt larger somehow, and more competitive. Less than 10 years later, I experienced the nostalgia of this culture shock when I arrived at the LSE. Despite becoming well acquainted with the competitive world of grammar schools in Kent where I had attended secondary school, I was unprepared for the global and local elite that the LSE attracted. I am certain there is no linear path that led me to my research focus, it was in fact a very circuitous route that kept pointing me back towards international education, from my experiences, to those of my close friends who came to the UK as international students for an education which would lead them to LSE. Yet, I do know that the questions I wanted to ask and the issues I wanted to address, the purpose and appeal of international schooling, had found a home in my head a long time ago, back when I was an out of place 9-year-old, trying to seem more worldly than I felt, and more interesting than I was.

I started my PhD journey with a very different project in mind, as doubtless many young, keen, and naive students do. And whilst so many aspects of my original project changed, evolved, or were shelved, a few key elements persisted. These turned out to be the way that the global education market and student aspirations

intersected with experiences of social mobility, structural inequalities, and global and national economies. These are the themes that run throughout this thesis which is based on 18-months of fieldwork at two international schools in the UK. I transitioned to my PhD journey immediately from my bachelor's degree. After completing my undergraduate dissertation on emergent identities in Japan and debates around globalisation and cultural appropriation, I became increasingly interested in Japan's history of economic upheaval, moral panics in the face of economic uncertainty, and how this shaped practices of educating the self among the middle classes in Japan.

The economic downturn or bubble-bursting in Japan in the early 1990s, heralded a shift not only in the economic status of workers and salarymen who were stripped of their lifetime employment in place of part-time and short-term work, but also in the way that class as related to occupation was deployed as a social identity (Ishida and Slater 2010). The long-term repercussions of the recession have been felt widely in Japan, leaving a legacy of anxiety over occupational and class mobility and security, especially among parents concerned for the prospects of their children. By focusing on middle-class children, caught in the middle of this growing inequality and access to education, I hoped to generate a new wealth of questions concerning the impact of recent educational reforms in Japan, yet also potentially provide a starting point to look comparatively at the shifts in the aspiration of youth in other contexts. When I realised completing my fieldwork in Japan as a partially funded student would not be possible, I pivoted to consider Japanese schools here in the UK and started the search for an appropriate institution who, most importantly, would be willing to have me around for a year or more.

When I set out on my mission to secure a fieldsite, perhaps serendipitously, I was rebuffed by the more well-known schools, including flat out rejections from the Japanese ones I approached. With a forced hand, I started casting my net wider and ultimately found the first school who would graciously take me in as a researcher. As I came closer to the end of my fieldwork at the Japanese international school, I had a persistent feeling that I needed a comparative site, something to juxtapose the experiences of students that would push me to consider and question the things I had grown to see as a mundane part of school life. My first site was a rather unique and unconventional international school, a more traditional international school would offer opportunities to draw out how students imagined and pursued their aspirations, both institutionally through their qualifications and school missions, but also in everyday conversations with peers and teachers, and the environment of the school. Another research site would also highlight the different pressures, privileges and intersectional challenges with which students contended. By undertaking comparative ethnography, I hoped to be provided with a deeper insight into whether international schools acted as vehicles for the internationalisation of students, and the role that school plays in the construction of aspirational pathways for students in globally oriented spaces.

The search began again. Schools with world renowned reputations to protect were not going to be rolling out the red carpet for a researcher it seemed, especially one interested in spending long periods of time at the school as an ethnographer. By necessity I looked for schools whose reputation bordered on obscurity, and found my match. Perhaps most importantly, neither of the schools I conducted my research with were selective, and as such, the student body was incredibly diverse in terms of ability and ambition. Researching relatively marginal international schools presented

an opportunity for insight into student experiences of uncertainty and precarity, as well as providing fertile ground for discussions on social mobility and belonging. Whilst prestigious schools may have offered a radically different perspective on aspiration, success and achievement, schools and students that struggled to aspire, experienced frustration, reeled from the reality of inflated possibilities, and were on occasion quite ambivalent to their educational futures, presented rich fieldsites. Marginal schools offered a space where I could witness aspiring in a very tangible way, where hopes were high but success was not so easily reached, and failure was not an unfamiliar experience.

Before starting my fieldwork, I had not given due consideration to the why of the globalising mission and its implications for students. What if the school's mission failed to align with their beliefs or aspirations? What if the students were simply ambivalent? What if the career pathways or routes to higher education that were offered to students were less than optimal? These considerations inexorably bubbled to the surface during my fieldwork. The age group I chose to work with closely were 16 -18 years old, as this period of a student's life can bring about enormous moments of change, anxiety, and excitement as they begin transitioning between school and university or the world of work. During this age young people are faced with exceptionally difficult decisions about their futures, bringing unique concerns and worries about their opportunities to the fore. The significant diversity in the financial backgrounds of students, some from very wealthy families whilst others were merely comfortable, led me to consider more seriously the appeal of international schools within the UK context, the unique and socio-economically diverse makeup of the global middle class, as well as the surprising undercurrents of perceived precarity that became evident in my conversations with particular students.

Introducing my First Fieldsite: the Japanese International School (JIS)

The Japanese International School[3], or JIS as it will be referred to from here on, is a fee-charging independent, non-selective, co-educational, boarding school established in the late 1980s. Situated in the rural fringes within commutable distance of London, it boasted the beauty of the English countryside and national heritage sites nearby, while also luring students with the promise of easy trips to a global city for shopping, tourism and leisure. A small school with an even smaller student body, it aimed to give Japanese families the opportunity to send their children abroad to improve their English, it also served those who had been deployed abroad to international company branches in the UK, providing the opportunity for their children to attend a hybrid Japanese curriculum school whilst away from home. Describing themselves as an international school, JIS could be considered a fee-charging overseas Japanese school, accredited by Japan's ministry of education. However, it differed significantly from high schools in Japan due to its hybrid curriculum with focus on developing students' English language proficiency, alongside an arts and sports specialism. Students took compulsory lessons in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English for communication, and cultural studies. This was not including the extra classes in preparation for IELTS. They participated in cultural exchanges with local schools, private tutoring, homestays in Oxford, Cambridge and Brighton during the holidays, and school trips. JIS could also be considered an 'international' school due to its explicit aim to foster globally minded students whose proficiency in English would allow them to take advantage of

[3] This is a pseudonym I have chosen to protect the identity of this fieldsite.

opportunities to study and work internationally, or in more globally-oriented businesses in Japan. At the time of my arrival in January 2018, JIS had 52 students enrolled, only around 6 of whom did not board and attended as day students. A few of the day students commuted on the school bus, which I would eventually take too. The bus would pick us up at 8am sharp outside the station and drop us back off at varying times in the late afternoon depending on after school activities. The number of enrolled students was smaller than previous years. Over the past ten years the numbers fluctuated between 40 and 75 students with significantly more day students than when I carried out my research. Despite the school's capacity to house 140 boarders, it was running at only just over a third of its capacity. I was not informed directly that the school was operating with so few students. Instead I found this out while perusing archived the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) reports that had been carried out on the boarding facilities every few years. Whilst information regarding the popularity of the school was not forthcoming, it could be assumed that the relatively low number of students was not a fact that the school wished to advertise in case it be taken as suggestive of its quality and recruitment capacity.

The central school building, originally a Manor House built in the early 20th century, held the main offices of the school's administration and meeting rooms. Attached to the side was an extension for the open plan staff room/tiny library where I spent a lot of my time after lessons chatting with students and teachers. The Manor House was connected to the staff room via an outdoor sheltered path, which also led to another building for the student common room, kitchen and large canteen which was shared with the adjoining art school. The sprawling grounds were home to tennis courts, a football pitch, raised flower garden and stone patio leading up to the main house, a

picnic area, and many outbuildings for sports facilities as well as extra classrooms and a lecture theatre. On my first and only full tour of the school I was taken to one of the many outbuildings that was used as an indoor sports hall which also had a mysteriously unused swimming pool. The pool, which was being fixed before I arrived, was still under maintenance after I left. Boarders were housed in separate facilities for girls and boys. The dormitories that had been built especially for the girls in the style of traditional Japanese architecture, with a curved and elongated roof and dark tiles. Though this building was likewise unused and under repairs due to boiler problems. The girls did not move back in while I was there. After many months contractors appeared on site in the car park for building works, although it was unclear exactly what they were fixing or building. The school was modestly grand with beautiful greenery on all sides, and occasionally a few cows or deer grazed in the field that ran either side of the long driveway up to the main entrance.

Primarily recruiting from Japan, JIS hosted students for the three years of high school, which are the final years of secondary education and are non-compulsory. High school students are aged 15 to 18 years old, and cohorts were structured at JIS into KO1, KO2 and KO3. When I joined the school in January 2018, I started my fieldwork with KO2 students, who then progressed to KO3 early on during my time there, and whom I also followed through to their graduation from the school. These are the students who I spent the most time with and who I will predominantly be referring to throughout the thesis in relation to my research at JIS. Besides the students in KO3, there was a smaller number of students from KO2 (who had progressed from KO1 when I started) who I grew close to and can be considered key interlocutors alongside KO3 students. JIS followed a modified version of the Japanese curriculum and the rhythms of the academic year in Japan. This runs from

April to March and consists of three terms, with shorter breaks in spring and winter and a longer summer holiday. The demographic of students who attended JIS were primarily middle-class Japanese families, the majority of whom lived in Japan and chose to send their children abroad to JIS.

Students came from financially comfortable backgrounds and to my knowledge JIS did not offer any financial assistance to students in the form of grants or scholarships. Annual fees for the school ranged from £23,000 to £26,000 per year for boarders (depending on whether they took the standard, art, or football track) and from £14,000 to £17,000 per year for day students (as of my fieldwork in 2019). These fees were not inclusive of spending money, costs of school trips or any other study related expenses such as extracurriculars. JIS can therefore be considered a mid-range school for boarders in the UK as its fees were in line with the national average. Fees for international day schools in Japan vary, but school websites indicate an average of around £10,000 (boarding schools are uncommon in Japan), and therefore significantly cheaper than JIS.

Since my fieldwork at JIS, which ended in March 2019, discussions surrounding the constraints placed on students wanting to pursue higher education outside of Japan evidently came to the fore. As of winter 2020, JIS became engaged in the process of becoming an IB World School, which would enable them to offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) and its Diploma Programme (DP) to students in KO2 and KO3, giving them the opportunity to obtain internationally recognised qualifications and the ability to move straight to undergraduate degree programmes in the UK and abroad. In 2017 the Japanese government's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) announced it would be scrapping the standardised

test used for entry into Japanese universities (The National Center Test for University Admissions or the Centre Test) in favour of a new entrance exam, the first of which was held in January 2021. The new exam places more emphasis on English speaking and listening proficiency in a bid to improve students' comprehension. It could be argued that these changes are indicative of broader shifts in attitudes towards international experiences and qualifications in Japan, and the value of English as a second language, something I will explore in Chapters 4 & 6.

Introducing my Second Fieldsite: Global Citizens School (GCS)

Founded in the late 1970s, Global Citizens School[4] or GCS, is an independent, fee-charging, co-educational school which occupies an enviable location in central London. Surrounded by residential properties it was rather inconspicuous, and had almost no grounds at all, only a modest courtyard at its centre. GCS, like JIS is non-selective, meaning that there are no entrance exams or criteria that students must meet or pass to attend, apart from certain language tests, but these are used to gauge the students' level of proficiency and would not exclude them from attendance. It was clear that student numbers were not an issue, perhaps because GCS had an excellent location in central London, an enviable place to be a student, or perhaps because it was marginally cheaper to attend than the more well known institutions at around £28,000 a year for the Diploma Programme (as of my fieldwork in 2019). GCS ran the full International Baccalaureate programme, allowing children from the ages of 3 to 18 years to attend. As an accredited IB World School, GCS ran the four IB programmes: the Primary Years Programme (PYP) for students aged three to twelve

[4] This is a pseudonym I have chosen to protect the identity of this fieldsite.

years, the Middle Years Programme (MYP) for students aged eleven to sixteen years, and finally the Diploma Programme (DP) and the Career-related Programme (CP), which are for students aged sixteen to nineteen years. Originally founded as an educational facility for the globally mobile diplomat's child, GCS quickly transitioned from an English-language school to following the English national curriculum, finally becoming a fully accredited IB school in the mid-2000s. After my fieldwork came to a close, it had grown to become its own brand, reaching outside of London to establish schools in other European cities following GCS's absorption by a multinational education group in 2017.

The school hosted its primary and secondary facilities on two different sites across London. I only ever visited the secondary school as my research was with the students in their last two years of the International Baccalaureate, although I would be put on lunch duty a number of times to keep an eye on the younger year groups. The school was a subtly beautiful building made of large beige stones, squashed between residential buildings on either side. There were no signs leading up to the entrance and only a single school logo next to the front door. If you didn't know exactly where to look you might never know it was there, it had the aura of expensive company offices despite its subdued Victorian school facade. The give-away came at 8:30am sharp on weekdays when a private school bus pulled up to the curb and students of all ages would push their way loudly into the reception, a blur of backpacks and designer trainers. The principal's office was adjacent to the reception area, a little frosted glass room. For the first few weeks, whenever I happened to be passing by, there would be a sullen student on the bench waiting to be called in. Occasionally, a defiant teenager would be sitting inside yelling loudly enough that the

receptionist would smile at me in good humour. It was easy to bite off more than you could chew when students were quite unfazed by authority.

When I joined GCS in February 2019, spring had come early. The magnolias in the area were in bloom and the days were already brighter. The IB Diploma Programme (IBDP) is split into two years, DP1 is comprised of 16–17-year-olds, and DP2, of 17-18 years olds in their final year at school. Although I started my fieldwork with both DP1 and DP2 initially, the DP2 students soon went on study leave for their final exams. Therefore the majority of my research at GCS was with the DP1s, traipsing the hallways with them to and from Art and Business, turning a blind eye to the odd online shopping tab open in lessons, and occasionally lending my help to group work. They are the students I came to know well and on whom the majority of my research at GCS is based. There was only one class per year group, and only around 20 students in a class. GCS was a small school, but positively bustling compared to JIS which had roughly one third of the student population.

GCS attracted an impressively international student body. There were students from Kuwait, Brazil, Australia, Russia, South Africa, USA, Nigeria, Portugal, Italy, and Malaysia to name just a few. The school was a particular favourite for the children of foreign diplomats. The media teacher commented that he believed GCS must have made it on to the recommended schools list for a number of embassies, due to its popularity among diplomats despite its relative obscurity (and the unusually high number of students from certain countries e.g. Kuwait). Whilst there were a few British students in attendance, all had dual nationality. The strategies GCS used to recruit its students were not entirely clear, but they had a modern and easily navigable website, as well as some glossy brochures that they gave out to prospective

students. Alongside the free marketing embassies provided, it seemed that most found the school through recommendations from parents and friends or browsing online. Unlike JIS, the school did not offer boarding and it seemed that most of the DP1's lived well within walking distance, despite repeated lateness, although students' families had largely temporarily relocated to London for work and planned to uproot again once their children had secured university places. Students even lived away from their parents, staying with relatives in London, in order to complete their education in the UK.

During a search to find background information on the schools, I discovered that both JIS and GCS were inspected by Ofsted once upon a time. Both subsequently decided to remove themselves from its purview. Ofsted is a regulatory body that carries out inspections on organisations providing education, training, and care services in England (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own regulatory bodies for their education systems) to ensure they comply with the standards set by the UK Government. Whilst Ofsted oversees provision of education for all state schools, independent and private schools are technically outside of its remit, however, around half of all independent schools are inspected by Ofsted if they are not members of the Independent Schools Council (ISC), founded in 1973. Organisations that are members of ISC are inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), an organisation approved by the Department of Education to evaluate independent schools and especially boarding provision in the UK. GCS promptly left the grasp of Ofsted when it was subsumed into the multinational that bought it. Both JIS and GCS are now inspected by ISI as members of ISC, having previously been inspected by Ofsted, with less than glowing reports for failure to initially comply with the health and safety requirements set out in the independent

school standards section of the The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. As raised by Martin and Dunlop (2019) the ability of independent schools to choose their own school inspectorate "promotes choice in line with neoliberal values. If for-profit schools are dissatisfied with Ofsted's evaluation, there are other school inspectorates providing the same service"(Martin and Dunlop 2019:735). This represents one of the many ways that international schools distance themselves from national frameworks.

Themes of the Thesis

Throughout this thesis I present international education as a key site and strategy of global middle class reproduction. The questions I set out to explore through my research include interrogating the character of the global middle class, their aspirations, as well as their strategies of social mobility and reproduction. I do this through the student lens, examining the plurality of this experience. This thesis explores these questions through a consideration of the specific futures, experiences, and educations that young people and their families sought and aspired to obtain, educations that they believed were not available at state British or local private schools. I also consider the ways in which the desirability of cosmopolitanism was problematised by students in the context of school, and the roles of schools in mediating access to the global.

For students, attending JIS and GCS represented a multiplicity of different opportunities as well as expectations. To some, the schools offered access to internationally recognised qualifications, greater and improved access to higher

education and the opportunity to develop ‘cosmopolitan cultural capital’ (especially through improving English language skills). For others it provided alternative routes, as a way around rigid meritocracy through the institutional links that the schools provided and their connections to higher education. For others still, it was one in a string of international schools they would attend as their parents moved for work, but provided them with an immediately familiar environment and curricula to ease their transition.

In the context of a globalising job market, pressures to obtain internationally recognisable qualifications and experiences, international schools unambiguously promote the desirability of being ‘global’, promising potential students manicured yet well trodden paths to reputable universities, lucrative employment, social mobility, and a secure place within the global middle class. Despite this appealing offer, schools often fail to account for the ways that students' positionalities and interpersonal relationships impact their decision-making process. This will be particularly apparent through the considerations of race and gender. At JIS and GCS students experienced frustration, resignation and disappointment as they struggled to realise their self-potentiality, exposing the contexts and relationships within which students ‘choose’ their futures. In this thesis I argue that students' aspirations are inherently shaped by and with the experiences of others, and within feelings of doubt, perceived precarity, and affective debt.

In pursuit of a nuanced perspective on international schooling, my research also offers a critique of what I term ‘cosmopolitan credentialism’, referring to the ways that specific formal qualifications come to signal desirable forms of cosmopolitan cultural capital, often in line with existing neocolonial cultural hierarchies. While it

has been argued that international schools institutionalise cosmopolitan cultural capital (Igarashi & Saito 2014; Tanu 2018), they achieve this by promoting specific credentials as essential for engaging with the 'global' in desirable ways. However, as this thesis will show, the experiences of students from countries such as Japan complicates arguments regarding cosmopolitan credentialism. Japan's position as a former colonial power and its dominance within global networks of production, caused tension over the desirability and utility of cosmopolitanism for JIS students

I offer my voice to these conversations in an effort to illustrate not only how situated inequalities within the global middle class are reproduced and sustained through market driven education, but the impact this has on students as agents navigating this system and their aspirations within it. This thesis is therefore concerned with experiences of aspiring in transnational educational contexts, ideologies and pedagogies of schooling, cosmopolitanism and identity, as well as social mobility and precarity. Ultimately, this thesis examines the limits of international schools to provide access to global opportunities and transformative learning environments, raising important questions about what the marketisation of education means for students imagining and pursuing their futures within these systems.

A Global Middle Class?

In the case of international education, a consideration of class aspiration also opens up new avenues to think about how class itself can be constructed on a level above that of the nation state, producing global imaginaries of an emergent international class and identities for people to aspire to. Accepting that some degree of

reductiveness is inevitable, I hope that my discussion of class, specifically the global middle class, can provide a way to reflect on the particularity of the pressures, privileges, expectations, and opportunities that the young people I worked with navigated as they went about their educational lives. What united these young people was their participation in a particular dream of social mobility, whether they truly believed in it or not, through their attendance of international schools. A dream sold to young people and their families by schools recruiting on the basis of the future benefits of an international education.

Hagen Koo provides an excellent deconstruction of the two dominant ways in which the term 'global middle class' is deployed, referring to 1) as the middle class across the world and 2) as the global middle class that is wealthier, globally connected and mobile. Koo asks important questions, two of which I am able to address more concretely through my research, namely "what is the exact character of the global middle class?" and "What are their strategies of social mobility and class reproduction?" (2016:444). These are important questions to answer if we are to understand and situate students' desires within broader conversation regarding what it means to be international. The nature of the global middle class, and the way that students and their families construct aspirations for education, careers, and a vision of their future is only achievable if we are able to take a closer look at why students and families choose international education, including the ways they view this as a strategy to secure young people's futures. Ultimately this thesis aims to capture insights into students' processes of decision-making, as well as their dispositions towards their futures:

> The global middle class comprises people who possess adequate economic and cultural resources to participate actively in the global market of consumption and education and seek social mobility and identity in the new global environment. More succinctly, we can define the global middle class as a globally oriented, globally connected, and globally mobile segment of the middle class. (Koo 2016:449)

While Koo defines the global middle class as a subset of the middle class, it is important to highlight the distinct characteristics of the global middle class. Attempting to apply more traditional theories of the middle classes to this "globally mobile segment" often falls short because of the ways that national class systems are not so easily mapped onto transnational communities. To remedy this disjuncture, in this thesis I will be using the term 'global middle class' as a discrete analytical category instead of an ethnographic one, as it provides a lens through which to consider a vast array of experiences and backgrounds, united by a shared aspiration for a globally oriented future and opportunities. Class itself was never discussed within the schools, perhaps indicative of the necessity of employing new ways of conceptualising class in cosmopolitan contexts. The global middle class should therefore be understood as seeking out global connections, and acting on concerns for social and spatial mobility. In my research, what united students and their families as the global middle class was their participation in a dream of security, one in which students reaped the benefits that an international education offered. Additionally, I contend that the global middle class identity is inextricably tied to concerns over the acquisition of cosmopolitan cultural capital and international credentials and qualifications. Allowing for socio-economic diversity within its ranks, the concept of the global middle class provides a powerful tool for examining

students engaged in international education and those educated in transnational environments.

Thinking in terms of class also helps us to understand the 'perceived precarity' and the desire to avoid risks associated with downward mobility that students exhibit. As argued by Sherry Ortner, a key feature of the middle classes is a fear of downward mobility, who whilst seeming comfortable and feeling their personal standing secure, "transgenerational reproduction does not" (1992:4). In her work on American middle class youth and counterculture, Ortner (1992) explores how young people negotiate their class identity within their social worlds, cultural frameworks, and within historical context, showing how middle class subjectivity is shaped by the convergence of these in mutually constitutive ways. Though Ortner's work was limited to the American class context, it is imminently useful for considering how we might envision class identity and insecurity for those who are engaging with global labour markets. In my own fieldwork, considering the ways in which students' expressed and acted upon a sense of precarity helped to shed light on how students, as members of the global middle class, imagined potential instability and uncertainty in their futures, feelings which shaped hopes for the future, and the decisions that young people felt they *could* make. In Chapters 5 & 6, I demonstrate how the perceived precarity of the global middle class has tangible affective effects.

Many students at JIS and GCS were noticeably driven, by their own and their parents' concerns, to avoid particular lives, paths and educational tracks that might be less likely to lead to secure employment and financial stability. I explore students' experiences of this at GCS in Chapter 5, through the lens of negative aspiration, and for JIS students in Chapter 6, through affective debt. Here the idea of vertigo is

productive as international students, whilst benefiting from their families economic privilege, are more conscious of their position, and therefore concerned with avoiding potentially “risky” choices which could easily lead them to an undesirable life if they were not vigilant. I also consider the impact of students' family relationships and entanglements, and the role of perceived precarity in generating negative aspiration.

As this thesis will show, what was at stake for students who attended JIS and GCS was very different due to their respective access to internationally recognised qualifications and credentials, leaving students at JIS with limited options. Though what was similar included risks of affective disruption and familial emotional and financial support, or safety nets. By providing a more complex picture of educational privilege, through highlighting the plurality of student experiences, I show what is at stake for the global middle class as they are exploited by an education market which benefits from the institutionalisation of cosmopolitan credentialism and international schools which market themselves as mediators of global skills and opportunities. Through a consideration of the analytical value that the ‘global middle class’ provides, I offer a picture that takes seriously the affective dimensions of aspiration. One which considers what students feel they owe to their parents, and the fears, stresses and worries that accompanied thinking about the future in transnational contexts.

Methodological Approaches and Ethical Considerations

The research on which this thesis is based took place over 18 months across two schools. JIS became my first site where I was based for just over 12 months, and GCS my second, where I was based for 6 months. I did not conceive of this as a multisited or comparative project, however, in its evolution the transition towards this was smoother than I could have hoped.

In institutional settings such as schools there are often already well established hierarchies, whether professional or social, that structure the environments that one navigates as a researcher. This is something I was acutely aware of before beginning my fieldwork and during the preliminary phases of setting up the research I found it difficult to define what my role could be to potential schools, leaving it open to their interpretation. Before my arrival at both of my sites I completed relevant training on safeguarding and student wellbeing, as well as the onboarding provided to would-be new teachers at each site, even though I was not officially a staff member. The ambiguity of my position was a challenging aspect of my research as I knew it was important to set up boundaries with both students and staff, particularly regarding my responsibilities within the school hierarchy. Ultimately, my place in the schools was determined not by myself but by teachers and pupils who soon saw me as a resource to be drawn upon rather than a hindrance to normality. I was a confidante to their daily stresses and annoyances, and witness to their moods and dispositions. I remained aware of potential disclosures from students, though this did not become an issue I would face. And whilst I offered reassurance to students, I made sure to encourage them to reach out to support networks, speak to the relevant safeguarding leads, as well as friends if I sensed or they expressed emotional distress. Navigating research in schools proved to be a bureaucratic minefield. Nevertheless, once inside the institutions, university ethics and schools codes and rules did not offer guidance

on the “relational complexities and vulnerabilities” (Herron 2019:86) of research with students, revealing the limits of these institutional frameworks.

It is important here to reflect on the emotional wellbeing of students and the ethical limitations of my position within the schools, as well as the limits of my personal and institutional access to engage with potential issues that I identified during my fieldwork at JIS and GCS. At JIS this included a lack of discussion surrounding wellbeing involving myself, and a significant avoidance of this topic with myself on behalf of students, perhaps due to cultural stigma of mental health related issues in Japan. On the other hand, at GCS there was a strong understanding amongst staff and students regarding emotional wellbeing, something which was supported by my induction into the school. Nevertheless, even though I undertook safeguarding training for both schools, with no explicit disclosures from students, all analysis in this area was limited to my interpretation of student wellbeing based on observations and allusions to their feelings, something which is not based on psychological training to confidently identify mental health needs. As such, emotional precarity becomes relevant to this thesis as an implicit undercurrent to daily conversations, and through expressions of frustrations, hopes and disappointments, but without explicit framing of these issues as indicative of student mental health, and therefore it is not a central focus of this research.

Given that the majority of the young people who contributed to this research were between the ages of 16-18, there were ethical concerns and considerations I had to address with great care. School, particularly the final years, can be a stressful time for many students and whilst confident in the formalities of supporting students, the challenge of navigating their wellbeing filled me with apprehension. Due to the

relative closeness in age between myself and the students when I began fieldwork in my early twenties, I was in a unique position. I was neither a teacher nor a figure that commanded much authority. Instead I occupied a liminal position, which allowed me to slip easily between both student and teacher spaces within the schools. Though my age also came with a fair share of challenges. I had to continually correct teachers who thought I was joining the schools for a 'little' undergraduate or master's project. Despite this, students and staff came to normalise my presence and took interest in speaking to me about their lives and day-to-day goings-on at school. My position as an outsider to the schools, yet someone who was still a student of an educational institution granted me a kind of special status within both JIS and GCS. I was welcome in both student and teacher circles, though I chose to spend most of my time with students. I went to lessons and followed student timetables, arriving with the morning rush for registration, and leaving when after-school activities wrapped up. I listened to students' worries and stresses, gripes and gossip, I covered the occasional lessons when a teacher was temporarily indisposed, and spent most breaks and lunchtimes with students.

I made a concerted effort to emphasise the broad scope of my interests in the schools and the open-ended nature of my research. This was a strategic decision to ensure students and (teachers alike) were comfortable with my presence, with the hope that this would leave room for spontaneity (Benei 2008:29), cultivating a relaxed, informal dynamic. Though I leaned into this informality, I also conducted interviews and surveys with students towards the end of my fieldwork at each school, which benefited from having developed trusted relationships with me by that time. There were many students who were reticent or too shy to partake in interviews, unaccustomed to the format, though their stories are still explored in this thesis. I

argue that this is a testament to the necessity of being *present*, and *participating* in the experience of learning when working with young people in educational environments. I delivered workshops on university applications at GCS, as well as 1 - 1 guidance on personal statements for both UK and Japanese universities at JIS, which provided invaluable insight into student dilemmas. Teachers at both schools were used to being observed for training and assessment purposes, as such the act of simply observing took on a surveilling quality. On account of this, my presence in lessons was initially met with polite wariness and exaggerated performance of teaching. I quickly learnt to distance myself from this perception by sitting at the desks with students and actively taking part in all lessons. Educators responded well to this, enabling me to be a part of the daily rhythms of school life.

Being a boarding school, parents of students at JIS were not accessible as nearly all lived in Japan and only visited the UK for the graduation ceremony of their child, leaving me with little access to parents for interviews or opportunities to develop rapport. Though parents were not much part of school life at GCS either, many did live in the UK, however, I concluded that interviewing parents from one school and not the other would create significantly imbalanced data. As such, I chose instead to centre the student experience at both JIS and GCS, taking young people's own perspectives and interpretations of their parents' desires, involvement, and aspirations for their children's futures as the window into familial relationships, and whose shape came alive through the voices of their children. Due to the incredibly high turnover of staff at JIS, which made it incredibly challenging to develop trusted relationships, and general wariness of my interest in teachers at both schools, it was near impossible to formally interview teachers. There was apprehension from teachers (particularly at JIS) that my research may be turned towards assessing the

school or their quality of teaching, therefore to dispel concerns and retain my unfettered access to my fieldsites, I avoided formal interviews with teachers. Having said this, teachers remain core figures of this thesis, who I engage with ethnographically through their own reflections and encounters with students and myself in the daily informal and formal contexts of school life. This approach facilitated the development of stronger relationships with the teachers who remained at the schools, and who accordingly felt comfortable sharing their insights with me.

Gender, my own and that of my interlocutors, also played a critical role in the social dynamics of my research as it heavily shaped the interpersonal interactions I was able to have, and subsequently, the people around whom my research revolves. The imbalance in relationships is far more pronounced at my first fieldsite, JIS, than my second, GCS , due to the cultural differences between the two schools and the normalisation of 'girls' and 'boys' social circles and activities at Japanese schools. As a researcher who is a cis-woman, I was welcomed easily into the female student social circles and activities at JIS and excluded heavily from those that were considered male. I knew who to eat lunch with and where to beeline to with my red plastic tray in hand. Where to stand at break times for chats over watery coffee and bourbons, and who it was acceptable to sit with in lessons and in which corners of the overheated classrooms. There was by no means complete gender parity in my relationships with students at the IB school as it was still easier to forge closer ties with female students. There was rarely such conspicuous social splitting along gendered lines and everyone would congregate in the common room or the courtyard for free periods and break times, sit together during lessons, and sometimes leave school together at lunch for a sneaky cigarette under the pretence of going to Pret A Manger. As such I had the opportunity to talk to students, regardless of their gender,

forming stronger bonds of trust with male students at GCS, translating to easy conversations, an interest in my research, and a willingness to be interviewed.

Following Laura Nader's infamous (1974) call to anthropologists to "study up", Shore (2002) contends that of the many reasons affluent populations have been historically understudied in anthropology is their inaccessibility, where the method of participant-observation has proven to be a major obstacle to studying up due to the nature of exclusivity that accompanies this position. Whilst still very difficult to access, research in affluent schools provides incredible insight into privileged spaces. However, studying up also raises difficult questions for anthropologists – "Should anthropologists avoid being normative? Must our normative commitments only be voiced when they are aligned with the relationships we forge (and depend on) during fieldwork?" (Gilbert and Sklair 2018:5). Though not calling for anthropologists to subscribe to a particular disciplinary politics, Gilbert and Sklair suggest the necessity for "making explicit of diverse political positions and projects that shape ethnographic knowledge production" (2018:5). Reflecting on the shift in the expectations of researchers undertaking fieldwork from empathising with interlocutors to sympathising, Gilbert and Sklair (2018) challenge anthropologists to consider not only the complexity of studying up for researchers, but also the importance of anthropological critique. They challenge those advocating for taking an anticritical approach to studying affluent and powerful groups, which they argue is misguided at best and risks betraying those who are exploited by such power dynamics. In my own fieldwork there was a large spectrum – from the wealthy and entitled, to the self-aware and grateful, who understood, sometimes to a surprising extent, the privilege of their position and the opportunities afforded to them.

Studying up also challenges conventional ethnographic research as the power dynamics are often inverted, and in many instances the research participants are more powerful than the researcher. However, in my own research with young people the relationship dynamic was less clear cut due to my being older, and neither teacher nor student at the schools. The dynamic between myself and the students was also more complex due to the social indicators of wealth which young people displayed, as well as race - mine and that of my interlocutors. However, I remained aware of my positionality and the potential power I wielded within the schools as an adult.

Undertaking research in international schools proved to be a deeply reflective practice for me, and somewhere where my potentially ambiguous ethnicity became beneficial in the forging of connections with students. Race and ethnicity are concepts that are also used throughout the thesis, and at both JIS and GCS all students were self-identified regarding their nationality, racial and ethnic backgrounds. As such, I use race and nationality as both ethnographic and analytical categories to draw attention to the ways that students constructed their own identities, and imagined their positionalities, opportunities and responsibilities within global labour markets. The construction of race and cultural identity at JIS becomes important as an analytical category for examining students socialisation in school, and discussing ethno-nationalism in relation to the concept of 'Japaneseness'.

In the context of transnational spaces, the concept of 'home' ethnography becomes complicated. Home implies a particular kind of belonging to a space, typically a country, where the anthropologist is part of the 'in-group'. I completed all of my

fieldwork in the UK, split between central London and its outskirts. Although I was ostensibly doing ethnography at home, this research also calls into question what it means to do 'home' ethnography in transnational spaces.

In the following section I map the contributions of authors whose work relates most closely to my thesis, examining key trends, themes, and theoretical perspectives.

Anthropology and Education: Literature, Themes and Theoretical Trends

Anthropology has a long relationship with the study of education. Yet, there is a surprising dearth of writing on international education within anthropology, particularly based on UK research. Though some excellent ethnographically informed work has been written by scholars of education, sociologists, cultural and regional studies, as well as interdisciplinary academics. As such, I will be drawing widely on school ethnographies and those that engage with student concerns about employment and upward mobility, linking student experiences to broader demands of international job markets and higher education institutions. I have collated a diverse range of literature that will help the reader to situate my work within an emergent niche in the anthropology of education, whilst drawing attention to another interestingly overlooked group - the global middle class. The research themes relevant to this thesis can largely be grouped into three categories: social mobility and precarity, aspiration and social reproduction, and schooling and cosmopolitanism. I engage with each of these bodies and their implications for my work.

The anthropology of education has arguably been a subfield of the discipline since the 1950s and is often attributed to the American anthropologists Louise and George Spindler, who organised the first comprehensive conference on the subject in 1954. This conference would later set the groundwork for the Council on Anthropology and Education, established in 1968, and the eventual journal Anthropology and Education Quarterly in 1970, which remains the most widely respected English-language journal on the anthropology of education (McDermott and Raley 2011:39). George Spindler, who was largely inspired by Ruth Benedict's work in the culture and personality school, published the papers from the 1954 conference he organised in Education and Anthropology (1955). He was a seminal figure in the anthropology of education, not only during his time but indeed for subsequent generations of American and British anthropologists. This is not to say that before the 1950s, educational contexts were not studied by anthropologists - they were. However, like other sub-disciplines within anthropology (legal anthropology, economic anthropology, anthropology of religion), rather than a move away from 'holism', the focus on particular aspects of societies and people's social lives offered a perspective from which to make analytical insights. In this sense law, economy, religion, and education, for example, are impossible to separate from wider social life, however, viewing them as an analytical starting point can provide a deeper consideration of the role they play, often through institutions, in shaping people's social universe.

The anthropology of education is as varied as the anthropologists that practise it, in national perspectives, academic histories, and theoretical orientations, all of which

contribute to its growth as a subfield. Although, despite the solidification of the subfield within anthropology, many ethnographies of education are not by anthropologists but by a wide range of researchers from disciplines which also employ participant observation as a method (Anderson- Levitt 2011:13). The diversity of disciplines which take interest in education is represented in the work drawn on in this thesis. In large part I draw on academics who sit across the range of disciplines described earlier. Unsurprisingly, like my own, the majority of ethnographies of education are focused on schools as their primary research sites. Accordingly, I have narrowed the scope of my consideration to focus on school ethnographies.

Social Mobility and Precarity

Perhaps one of the most renowned ethnographies of social mobility and class in schools is *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (1977), by the British sociologist Paul Willis. Willis' account of a group of white working-class boys at a Birmingham secondary school was concerned with how the boys become socialised into their class position and their views on education. Willis determined that the boys' attitudes towards education and counter-school culture ultimately led them to work low-wage typically working-class jobs, trapping them in a cycle that did not allow for social mobility. Issues of the social reproduction of class and race in schools were widely taken up by anthropologists at 'home' (Lareau 2003; MacLeod 1987; Sefa Dei 1997) following the impact of his research. Gillian Evans (2006) contributes to this body of work through her research in Bermondsey, Southeast London, with white working-class children attending a local school and

their families who lived on the same council estate. Building on Willis, she foregrounds the relational dynamics of parents and their children, as well as the disjuncture between the values and forms of participation necessary in school to those in their homes and life outside education. The expectations of learning and its value in securing particular futures, prompted my examinations of the educational atmospheres and tensions this created for students and teachers. In privileged environments these tensions persist and possible futures are in part shaped by educators and education systems. I situate these conversations within the broader realities of the social and institutional constraints that structured these experiences, particularly students' narrative on their perceived precarity. As Maureen O'Dougherty's (2002) ethnography of Brazilian middle-class families demonstrates, precarity is not the preserve of the working-class. Parents' practices of consumption during Brazil's economic crisis included strategies to secure the futures of their children by investing in expensive private education. The families' search for distinction highlights the ways that parents sought to consolidate their middle-class identity through consumption and alignment with modernity.

As mentioned, a large proportion of ethnographies of schooling since the inception of the anthropology of education as a subfield have been concerned with the experiences of marginalised groups in 'home' contexts. Research on inequalities in attainment, race, gender, and class disparities has become increasingly reflexive and provided more nuanced analyses of student agency, identity, citizenship formation, and institutional objectives at home and abroad. See: Lois Weis' (1990) ethnography of white high-school students struggling to find work in a de-industrialised American economy; Ann Arnett Ferguson's (2000) ethnography of Black male US high-schoolers experiences of getting into trouble and the production of Black

masculinity; Véronique Bénéï's (2008) work on nationalism and citizenship formation in schools in India; and Bradley Levinson's (2001) ethnography of a Mexican secondary school in which he explores class, student identities, and the educational projects of the Mexican state. This shift drove anthropologists towards considerations of agency versus structure in schools, including explorations of identity politics, school agendas and political affiliations, nationalism, emotionality and the body. Particularly how state ideology permeates educational institutions and moulds citizens through education policy and political socialisation (Benei 2008; Levinson & Stevick 2007). Convergences of race, class, and schooling have notably evolved even further to locate these issues within broader political shifts, the labour demands of local, national and global economies, and processes of neoliberal citizenship formation (Davidson 2011b; Kulz 2017; Stahl 2015, 2016; Sojoyner 2016). This is indicative of a move in the anthropology of education towards the end of the twentieth century which places heavy emphasis on emancipatory projects and social justice (Yon 2003:425). Whilst I remain interested in the missions and agendas of schools, investigating "schooling as a state apparatus" (Benei 2008:22) becomes challenging in international schools, most of which operate as independent private bodies, with internationalised or international curricula. Instead, I contribute an approach which traces the connections between students' motivations for pursuing international education and their hopes for the future, to shifts in global and national labour markets and policies, discourses on 'globality' and place, as well as to local school ideologies and student identity.

Aspiration and Social Reproduction

Studies of schooling and aspiration in affluent contexts such as those by provide Elsa Davidson (2011b) and Peter Demerath (2009, 2013), provided a wealth of ethnographic insights into the lives of students at prestigious and publicly funded institutions, as well as contributing significantly to research on student aspiration, a key area of interest for this thesis. Demerath's work theorised that the prevalent achievement ideology at the competitive and successful Wilton High School, which he referred to as the Wilton Way, was crucial to student success in school and beyond. The Wilton Way was a locally articulated achievement ideology, which enabled the middle-class students attending to develop a strong sense of their own authority, authority that they would then try to exert on others to secure success inside and outside of school. Conversely, Davidson's (2011b) research focused on two very different groups of young people. Namely low-income Latino youth attending their school's Biotechnology Academy programme aimed at upskilling students to help reduce the socioeconomic disadvantage and aid their career prospects, and middle-income white and Asian students at a prestigious public school in Palo Alto, Silicon Valley. Davidson links the specificities of race, socio-economic status, and inequality, to state level discourses on education and at 'risk youth', showcasing how these intersect with the local knowledge economy of the area. When discussing future goals and aspirations, Davidson noticed that students went through a process of aspiration management, which she argues involves practices of self-regulation, with many Latino-youth internalising their 'at-risk' label. The contribution that "aspiration management" makes as a theoretical tool, helps to highlight the "active role students have in defining self-expectation, hope, and a sense of the possible, as well as the paradox of self-limitation and desire inherent in all aspirations" (2011b:41). Both theoretical tools, local achievement ideology and aspiration management, have informed and shaped the ways I have interpreted my own data,

allowing me to consider how students develop a sense of their own potentiality, alongside school narratives on success and institutional expectations and agendas (Chapter 3).

Though research largely focuses on development contexts, interest in the affective dimensions of aspiration represents a recent transition by anthropologists (Froerer et al. 2022). However, the affective work of aspirations has been undertheorised by anthropologists in educational contexts (Desai 2023:9), who have instead looked to "constructions of temporality" (Hall 2017:160) to understand student perspectives on the future. Desai's (2023) research considers the affective states of anticipation in a girl's empowerment intervention in New Delhi, emphasising its importance in contexts of material deprivation, I argue that this critique is also relevant to privileged spaces. As such, I contribute to this shift by looking at the relationality of students' aspirations, acknowledging the embodied experience of aspiring and its ability to generate feelings of authority, resignation and self-doubt in students, feelings which worked to reframe their outlooks on future.

Schooling and Cosmopolitanism

There has been a recent rise in the number of anthropologists and sociologists studying affluent national and international schools (Davidson 2011b; Désilets 2014; Gilbertson 2014, 2018; Meyer 2021; Poonoosamy 2018; Sander 2014; Tanu 2018). It must be noted however, that international education studies scholars have been writing on the pedagogy and expansion of this, now not so niche, market over the last ten years, from a perspective also informed by their experience as teaching

practitioners and scholars of education (Bunnell 2019; Hayden 2016). Much of the research on transnational education grew out of the interest in the concept of Third Culture Kids or (TCKs)(Pollock and Van Reken 2009 [2001]), which emphasises the experiences of transnational mobility and cultural displacement and their impact on identity and belonging, though issues remain with the usefulness of this terminology as an analytical category (Tanu 2018). The transnational education literature relevant to this thesis can largely be grouped by their concern with pedagogical methods and the global education market (Bunnell 2019; Gardener-McTaggart 2022; Poole 2020), belonging and identity (Emenike & Plowright 2017; MacKenzie 2009), and cosmopolitanism (Weenik 2008), some of whom I discuss in the subsequent sections, and in Chapter 4. Drawing off of these interdisciplinarily diverse works provides crucial insight into international education elsewhere. Nevertheless, due to their disparate methodological approaches and concerns I use much of this work to frame students' engagement within the wider global education market, building off their insights to contextualise my own research.

Contemporary ethnographies of education have sought to capture a historically understudied demographic – affluent student populations. Despite this developing interest, there is still a large gap in anthropological scholarship on international schooling and a few of the ethnographies referenced so far are set in international schools (Désilets 2014; Emenike & Plowright 2017; Meyer 2021; Tanu 2018). The research undertaken by Heather Meyer (2021) and Danau Tanu (2018, 2019) represents the work most closely aligned to my own, not only because they also conducted their fieldwork in international schools but because of their thematic concerns. Tanu's research investigates the ways in which the international school context, in which she completed her research, reinforced and legitimised Eurocentric

forms of cosmopolitanism, where the school only recognised westernised forms of cultural capital as 'intranational' despite students' abilities to engage across difference in other ways. Tanu argues that the school, known as TIS and located in Jakarta, Indonesia, institutionalised this Eurocentric form of cosmopolitanism, producing inequalities along racial and cultural lines and reproducing racist hierarchies within TIS. Whilst the young people that Tanu worked with at TIS occupied very privileged positions like those at JIS and GCS, she raises a critical point when she argues that many TIS students were "not in a position of privilege relative to the dominant culture within elite transnational spaces because these spaces are not neutral" (2018:27), or free from existing national and international cultural hierarchies.

Tanu's interests lie in critiquing the ideology of being international espoused by schools like TIS, with the aim of denaturalising Eurocentric cosmopolitanism in these supposedly neutral environments, whereas Meyer (2021) explores how the idea of the 'global' has become an incredibly successful commodity for international schools to exploit. Meyer's fieldwork at International School of Germany (ISG) explores the ways in which the school constructed and cultivated the 'global' in order to bring a global imaginary to life through everyday practices. International schools "define what it means to be global for their communities to suit their position within the market" (2021:34), and Meyer emphasises the strategic value for schools to invest in the cultivation of a global imaginary, whilst creating boundaries which rely on the exclusion of the 'local'. My thesis endeavours to add to the critiques made by both authors by combining their focuses on school ideology and the ways that students navigated cosmopolitanism. I build on these arguments to examine students' experiences of aspiring in the contexts of international schools, recognising

the importance of place for creating proximity to the global within the schools, as well as by probelmatising the desirability of cosmopolitanism for students.

The absence of gender in much of the research on cosmopolitanism as cultural capital remains problematic (Gilbertson 2018). In her ethnography of the Indian middle-classes in Hyderabad, Gilbertson (2018) examines respectability and cosmopolitanism as moral discourses, tracing their use to create distinction both within and between other classes, particularly how gender shapes the performance of cosmopolitanism as a strategic resource for women who were expected to balance them. I address students' experiences of gender, race, and cosmopolitanism within transnational spaces, further complicating these arguments by examining instances where cosmopolitan cultural capital is not experienced only as a strategic resource to be deployed, but ultimately as undesirable and unresolvable 'otherness', a potential erosion of identity.

Education and Cosmopolitanism as Cultural Capital

The term 'cosmopolitanism' appears not infrequently throughout this thesis. It is a term I have chosen to use to describe the various ways students and their schools spoke about being "international", "internationalised", "globally minded", "a world citizen", "a global citizen" or "gaining a broad view". It represented one of many words students used to describe a sense of changing mindsets, outlooks and skill sets, and that schools used to refer to their missions. Following Gilbertson's appeal for the continued usefulness of the term, cosmopolitanism allows us to:

> move away from binaries of global and local, urban and rural, modern and traditional, and to recognize the centrality of relative claims to transcend the local to status games across the class spectrum…[and] that the definitional ambiguity of cosmopolitanism is central to the legitimation of upper-class cultural capital as merit. Appearing as a utopian vision of universal values, it floats freely between the experiential, the attitudinal and the performative, between exposure, open-mindedness and communication skills. (Gilbertson 2016:310)

It is with this broadly encompassing understanding of cosmopolitanism that I employ the term in my own research. Cosmopolitanism is not simply a nifty phrase that is conveniently put in the mouths of interlocutors. It is a term that encompasses much of what is unspoken in the everyday lives of students navigating their education in transnational spaces, and in the context of the international school, it has its own specific currency. I explore this in Chapters 2 & 4, linking discourses around cosmopolitanism to place, recruitment and marketing, identity and pedagogical practices within JIS and GCS.

Education systems increasingly define cosmopolitanism as "a desirable attribute of the person who needs to thrive in the global economy" and are thus "central institutional mechanisms that determine the definition and value of cosmopolitanism as cultural capital" (Igarashi and Saito 2014:226). Attending international schools, pursuing higher education abroad, proficiency in English, experiences of living abroad, and the ability to navigate transnational spaces. These competencies and experiences constitute cosmopolitan cultural capital to the extent that they are taught and sought in schools and by parents, particularly from the

global middle class, and as such they are not easily and readily available to families who do not first possess the economic and social capital to pursue them (Iagarashi and Saito 2014; Gilbertson 2016). By sending children to international schools parents seek to protect their future financial security, which may be viewed as precarious due to their history of transnational mobility, and because many are from countries without strong ties to English speaking cultures. Through the inculcation of 'internationally' recognised and desirable traits, acquiring cosmopolitan cultural capital promises employability in a shifting global economy through the creation of open minded, flexible students with cultural adaptability and sensitivity. Critically, and problematically, it also comes with the promise of unfettered success, regardless of other structural barriers.

Gilbertson's research in Hyderabad, shows us that the legitimation of cosmopolitanism as cultural capital profoundly facilitated the reproduction of privilege in private schooling. She argues that the newly urban middle-class of Hyderabad converted their economic capital into cultural capital by sending "children to expensive private schools in an effort to secure the legitimacy of their class position and in the hope that this cultural capital will in turn result in economic capital through high-paying jobs for their children" (2016:299). Cosmopolitanism is therefore key to this legitimising process as it enables forms of cultural capital which affluent groups have privileged access to, "to be misrecognized as indicative of merit or talent, through 'the moral superiority implied in claims to transcend the local' [Moore 2013, 98]" (Gilbertson 2016:298). Students' failure to develop cosmopolitan cultural capital was then conceptualised as a lack of merit, and "inability to adapt" (ibid:310) to the changing social order, rather than a lack of resources and unequal access to education.

On one level, it might seem that cosmopolitan cultural capital is but a tool of the wealthy, primarily secured through education (attendance of international schools, globally respected qualifications, exposure to foreign ideas, languages and cultures), however, this is only a small part of the larger picture. It may also be considered a product of the neoliberal education complex, where the middle and upper classes, as argued by Bourdieu and Passerson (1990 [1977]), define legitimate forms of cultural capital. As such we cannot ignore colonial legacies. What constitutes cultural capital, and more importantly, cosmopolitan cultural capital, is inextricably tied into broader political and racial hierarchies and histories, where specific forms of cosmopolitanism are championed and recognised over others (Tanu 2018). As the global education market has grasped the potential marketability of this particular skill set, the rise of cosmopolitan credentialism further reproduces these inequalities, as access to the resources needed to pursue these educational tracks is wildly uneven, following the lines of already deeply entrenched global disparities.

(Re-)Defining the International School

It is important to unpack some of the terminology I will be using throughout this thesis. Most importantly, my definition of an 'international school', which has grown by necessity in order for me to situate my research within the broader literature, to include schools which rely on teaching curricula outside of the International Baccalaureate (IB) and outside of solely English-medium instruction. What constitutes an international school, and moreover what makes a school *international*, have become hot topics of debate amongst international education

scholars over the last few years as the growth of the sector has increased rapidly (Bunnell et al. 2016; Bunnell 2019; Poole 2020). This exponential growth of the international education market has also given rise to new forms of international schooling, and hence, new types of institutions that claim to provide it. Whilst there are no definitive figures on just how many international schools exist, mostly due to the lack of consensus over definition, their ever-rising popularity is evident if we consider the number of institutions now offering IB programmes, which has grown by a third in the four years between 2016 and 2021 to total 5,400 schools in 159 countries (IBO website 2021). Data on the exact number of schools currently undergoing the authorisation process to gain IB World School status, a process necessary to become certified to teach the IB curriculum and offer its courses, is unfortunately unavailable. Anecdotally, but critically, JIS became involved in this very process less than a year after I left, a decision which in my eyes can be seen as indicative of the rapid development of the international education sector and demand for the IB, as I will discuss later in this thesis. Meyer (2021) and Tanu (2018) have already provided excellent histories of the international school and its origins, both of which acknowledge that there is little consensus over an exact timeline of their first appearance. In their modern form, they can be traced back to Yokohama International School in and the International School of Geneva which were both coincidentally established in 1924. In the interests of brevity, I will avoid retelling this story and instead give a brief discussion of how the international school has been conceptualised.

Data from the International School Consultancy (ISC), the only research organisation focused solely on the English-medium international schools market, shows that over the last 10 years the international education market has grown exponentially, with

the number of International Schools increasing 62% world-wide from 2011 to 2021 (ISC website 2021). However, the criteria used to determine what is in fact an International School for data collection purposes is quite vague, and the ISC cites two identifiable criteria that schools must meet to be included in their research:

1) Schools that deliver a curriculum to either pre-school, primary or secondary students (or any combination thereof), wholly or partly in English and outside an English-speaking country.

2) Schools that offer English-medium curriculum (other than national curriculum) in a country where English is one of the official languages and are international in orientation.

These criteria, and the general focus on international schools being primarily English-medium, located in a country where English is not the primary language, are particularly interesting as there are a number of self-identifying international schools which operate in English speaking countries but teach in another language as well as English, in order to cater to the needs of a foreign national community residing there. The exclusion of these schools, and many others, from ISC data and international school definitions, speaks volumes about the kinds of schools considered to be *international* and harks back to critiques that have been made about the international education sector more generally, which is that it essentially perpetuates a form of cultural imperialism (Tanu 2018). The IB itself, seemingly the hallmark offering of an international school, officially offers their programmes of education in three languages, English, French and Spanish but provides limited teaching materials in languages such as Russian, Arabic and Chinese to name a few

(IBO website 2021). It is fair to say that the category of 'international school' is a nebulous one, most often used to describe 'traditional' early types of schools which catered to Western expatriates and their globally mobile children as they travelled around for work.

Despite some of the scholarly gatekeeping of which kinds of institutions may be classified as international schools, the label has metamorphosed multiple times to include: English-medium schools which serve students of different nationalities; schools which accept students of a specific nationality/national community in a foreign country and operating outside of the local education system; schools which cater to different nationalities and encourage transnational or global identities, while nurturing the students' individual cultural identities; and schools which view internationalism as their guiding philosophy and cater to a range of ethnic and national backgrounds (Lallo and Resnik 2008). Arguably the most famous categorisation is offered by Hayden and Thompson (2013) who argue that there are three main subgroups under the umbrella of 'international school':

- 'Type A' 'traditional' international schools: established principally to cater for globally mobile expatriate families for whom the local education system is not considered appropriate.
- 'Type B' 'ideological' international schools: established principally on an ideological basis, bringing together young people from different parts of the world to be educated together with a view to promoting global peace and understanding.
- 'Type C' 'non-traditional' international schools: established principally to cater for 'host country nationals' – the socioeconomically advantaged elite of

> the host country who seek for their children a form of education different from, and perceived to be of higher quality than, that available in the national education system. (ibid 2013:5)

Poole (2019, 2020) contributes another typology of the international school, the 'internationalised school' which offers a blend of national and international orientations, as well as national and international curricula. These internationalised schools are very popular, especially in countries such as China where these schools are the preference of the wealthy local middle classes, due to their international focus compared to Chinese national curricula schools, and the belief that attending these schools will give their children a competitive edge (Poole 2020). However, even these more recent categorisations are somewhat redundant as the landscape of the international education market is constantly shifting, giving rise to new institutions not based on local need (such as 'traditional' international schools meeting the demands of globally mobile professional parents or, more recently, the aspiring local middle classes) but on commercial interest (Hayden 2011:216). As Bunnell notes, the field of international education has become "big business" (2020:764), drawing in vast sums of money and, as of very recently, much needed sociological interest. The sheer proliferation in the types of schools offering an international or internationalised curriculum and self-identifying as such, means that many schools either fall through the cracks of labels or are snubbed as inferior to their more traditional and successful counterparts. Defining exactly what an international school is (and is not) seems like a rather futile task in the face of so much ambiguity:

> Aside from the questions of curriculum and parental choice, a further notable characteristic of international schools is the absence of any central

> international regulating body that can determine whether a school may be defined as such. The fact that no central criteria exist on which to base such a judgement means that it is impossible to provide exact data about numbers of international schools in existence at any time, though generalised estimates point with little doubt to the conclusion that they are increasing (Hayden 2011:218).

I appreciate the value of this kind of boundary work for conceptual delineations and the academic endeavour of indexing. I have, however, chosen to focus on schools' self-identification as the point of classification or criteria of inclusion into my research. The who and why of self-identified international schools is more interesting to me than gatekeeping and authentication, the consequences of these are important to consider. This is not to say that there are not failed or exploitative international schools, there are many, but that understanding the complexity and variety of their goals, orientations and self-stated purpose is more productive for my inquiry and allows for the exploration of contradictions and relational school identities.

Nevertheless, for the purposes of defining my 'field', I will give my definition in loose terms: a school that self-identifies as international, espouses a guiding philosophy of internationalism or 'global mindedness' to some degree, and aligns their purpose with the demands of the international job market. The last criterion may seem quite different from those previously discussed but this is a conscious choice to open the field of inquiry, as for too long, 'international' has been synonymous with 'ideologically western' and English-speaking in the context of education. JIS ran a hybrid programme which incorporated a national (Japanese) and international curriculum (EFL was compulsory and students could opt to take IELTS), as well as

stating a commitment to cultivating global mindedness in students. The second school, GCS, was an established IB World school which offered all three of the organisations' programmes (PYP, MYP and DP). As we have seen, the common conception of an international school, even ones that may fall into Type B or C, is that they tend to be based in countries where the primary language is not already English, cater to globally mobile families from primarily western countries travelling for work, or for local elites. As I mentioned earlier, what made these schools all the more interesting during my time there, is that neither were renowned for their provision of education, nor for their grandiose histories like other institutions capitalising off of their legacy. They are in fact two middle-of-the-road institutions, neither exceptionally excellent nor failing, existing quietly in mediocrity.

The comparison of these two international schools provides a unique look at schools operating in an English-speaking country as well as in the already 'international' context of the UK. It provides fertile ground to ask questions about the role schools play in shaping student aspirations after graduation, what the value of an 'international education' is for different young people, the role of international education in the social reproduction of the global middle class, as well who these schools aimed to recruit and why. For many marginal international schools, the enabling of social mobility *at home,* through engagement with the global economy, cosmopolitan experiences, or internationally recognised qualifications, may also be a key aspect of their appeal. If we conceptually limit the definition of international schools to ones we believe meet our criteria of what internationality *should* look like (e.g. successfully achieving the 'noble' mission of internationalising students and creating 'global citizens'), we are in fact missing an opportunity to interrogate the plurality of what it means to be 'international'. This includes who it benefits, its value

in different educational and national contexts, and its use as a branding strategy aligned with market interests.

Structure of the Thesis

Separating this thesis into two sections, in Part I, I engage with the roles that place, achievement ideologies and cosmopolitanism play in shaping student orientations and expectations of the future. In Part II, I explore these ideas through a focus on students' constraints, dilemmas, and personal journeys within each institution through two school focused chapters (Chapter 5 & 6).

Part I

Chapter 2 describes the ways students encounter the global in school. I illustrate the practices of boundary drawing that both JIS and GCS engaged with to generate legitimacy as institutions that could provide students with desirable skills and dispositions towards the global. I show ethnographically how the local, national, and global become material in the schools to create transformative educational atmospheres, and argue that the proximity to the local (UK and London) played a crucial role in the construction of the global both within the schools themselves, as well as in their branding and marketing strategies.

Chapter 3 considers student behaviours in school, as well as their interactions with peers, staff and myself to understand the development of achievement ideologies, exploring how these are underpinned by assumptions and experiences of gender, race and privilege. The expectations of teachers, pedagogical practices, and school

values all contributed to students' visions of the future and the development of their 'self-potentiality', or an individual's understanding of what they should conceivably aim for, and be capable of achieving, in the future. I argue that whilst students' views and expectations of educational success and failure were shaped by these experiences, they were in fact also closely tied with the on-the-ground ideology of the schools themselves.

In Chapter 4, I examine the contradictions, ambivalences, and burdens of navigating cosmopolitanism, providing a more complex picture of educational privilege. I explore the limits of the schools' ability to provide students with access to the global, and problematise the desirability of cosmopolitan cultural capital for all students. For students' at JIS, their race and gender generated even more complex negotiations for those living at different intersections of identity and privilege.

Part II

Chapter 5, offers a closer look at the experiences and contexts in which GCS students 'chose' their futures as they navigated the IB Diploma Programme, calling attention to their complex negotiations with themselves, their personal circumstances, and their families' designs on their futures. It considers the instrumentality of grades, the 'risky' nature of particular choices, and teacher discourses on talent within the school. GCS students tended to internalise parental narratives regarding these 'risky' educational choices, as such what constituted an undesirable life and circumstances, were equally important frames of reference for students. I theorise this as 'negative' aspiration, where students formulated and expressed their hopes for the future in

relation to what they explicitly did not want, or hoped to avoid as a critical characteristic of global middle class aspirations.

Finally, Chapter 6 describes the school lives of JIS students and the multitude of competing constraints, pressures and expectations that complicate decisions surrounding university. It explores student experiences of choice, where parental anxieties over the financial stability of their children's futures created new and complicated relations of care for students. These dynamics produced forms of resignation in students, as they sought to reconcile their visions for the future, whilst taking seriously the concerns of their families. I argue here that self-potentiality also offers analytical value as an embodied concept which has the potential to reconfigure student relationships with their experiences as successes or failures, reshaping the framing of student futures.

The conclusion of this thesis, Chapter 7, discusses the insights gained from my research, drawing together the many threads and arguments presented and offering future avenues for research in international schools. I argue that ethnography reveals the gendered and racialised dimensions of aspirations, the impact of educational ideologies, and the unintended consequences of international educational models on students' aspirations. My research at JIS and GCS highlights the complexity and fragility of global middle class aspirations, influenced by family expectations, individual goals, conflicts of language and identity, and the marketisation of education. I provide further theorisation of self-potentiality, offering it as a relational model of subjectivity to understand these intersecting pressures and experiences which shape students orientations towards the future. As such, I emphasise the need for anthropological perspectives on international education and aspiration, ones

which complicate our understanding of student 'choice', and traces the effects of cosmopolitan credentialism. Finally, I offer avenues for critical reflection on these issues within international schools.

Part I

Chapter 2

A School in a Place: Boundaries, Branding and Marketing at two International Schools

Introduction

Place matters. Schools do not exist in a vacuum of space, they are embedded, embody and are constructed against the places that they operate within. Place in fact shapes nearly everything about international schools, because without a conception of what is and is not 'global', there would be no point of reference from which they could differentiate themselves as providers of a niche educational experience and product. The global, national and local all play a part in the mutually constitutive formation of the international and of the international school itself. This was true at both JIS and GCS, who relied on student and parent imaginations and desires about place and the relevance of global competencies and cosmopolitan capital for their future careers.

However, in the context of the UK, particularly London, an interesting question arises: Why do students choose international schools? All mainstream state and private schools in the UK provide respected and recognised qualifications such as GCSEs, A-Levels and the International Baccalaureate. What's more, UK cities are cosmopolitan, culturally and ethnically diverse, and most importantly, the common

language is English. Why then would students choose to attend international schools in the UK over other excellent available British schools which have an equally international, and in some instances equally wealthy, student body? In this chapter I explore these questions through an engagement with ethnography of place in schools.

In this chapter I draw attention to the ways in which students encounter the global in the everyday, as well as the significance of the materiality of the national in cultivating the creation of transformative environments and atmospheres for students. Through a consideration of the impact of the national and local within schools spaces, this chapter offers a new perspective on international schools as institutions that can leverage proximity to the national and local to raise the esteem and global persona of the institution itself. Embedded within the British context, I argue that the study of UK-based international schools offers unique insight into the ways that educational institutions create atmospheres of globality and distinction, which are marketed to students. I explore ethnographically, how the local, national and international presented themselves in the contexts of the two schools.

In the second half of the chapter I will discuss the schools mechanisms of recruitment, the role of place in branding and marketing strategies, and these strategies as transformative, aimed at fostering senses of community, globality, and belonging. I also discuss the methods of brand cultivation that JIS and GCS engaged with in order to recruit students, and the work (or lack thereof) that went into maintaining their images. I interrogate some of the practices within the schools themselves that supported the cultivation of their brands, which included boundary drawing between national & international, the local & the global, and inside &

outside, as well as identifying the key structural players in the operation of the schools. The brand, self-promotion and marketing strategies of JIS and GCS are particularly important to understand as they offer insight into the lure of international schools for foreign students over the appeal of British private or state schools. Ultimately, I argue that not only do international schools craft and sell desirable ways of being global to young people through promises of a transformative educational atmosphere, but that these schools are in fact highly skilled in cultivating techniques of resisting emplacement, creating environments which conspicuously and consistently remind students of their positionality as *international* students through their proximity to globality, and as members of a national community at JIS.

In recent years there has been increased attention to the decisions and transitions of international students, particularly at university level. Where international students choose to study, what professions they move into after graduation and why, is of interest to academics and policy makers alike, "as the flow of these students is deemed highly important in developing and maintaining national/regional competitiveness within a knowledge-based economy" (Lee 2021:404). Incidentally, large proportions of university revenues in the UK also come from international student fees, where the income from this group alone was nearly £7 billion, 37% of total fee income (around 17% of the total income of the sector) (Institute for Fiscal Studies 2020), and without which, university finances would suffer greatly. In their 2019 policy report *'International Education Strategy: global potential, global growth',* the UK government set out the national agenda for exporting UK education globally, it's two key ambitions to 1) increase education exports to £35 billion per year, and 2) to increase the numbers of international higher education (HE) students studying in the UK to 600,000 per year (Department of Education & Department for

International Trade 2019), emphasising that "education exports contribute to the UK's soft power, as well as generating economic value. The flow of international students, international collaboration between institutions and partnerships all help to generate goodwill towards the UK" (2019:15).

The increasing competitiveness of the global higher education sector and international job markets has led to international experiences and qualifications carrying exaggerated weight for applicants. It is no surprise then that the international school sector is booming as the appetite for study abroad, development of 'global mindedness', and recognisable qualifications such as the IB Diploma is growing, with the enthusiastic support of the UK government, and by extension, the UK higher education institutions. In the following discussion I provide a closer look at GCS and JIS's recruitment practices, school branding strategies and the role of the global as a brand, the successes and constraints in attracting students and parents from radically different pools of potential clients.

Ethnography offers opportunities to witness everyday manifestations and representations of the global in students' school lives, from posters on notice boards, to student fashion trends, national flags in classrooms. It was students on their phones browsing social media in lessons, trying unfamiliar foreign foods and hating them, it was conversations in other languages that only a few people could understand, it was looking at university website admissions pages, it was shelves that didn't stock familiar snacks, and time differences with family which made it hard to call them. The global was apparent in material ways, sometimes in the tangible differences between students, but also embedded in the environment that they moved through and the places that they interacted with in strategic ways.

Somewhere in Between at JIS

The door to the school minibus never wanted to play ball, and before eight o'clock in the morning, few could muster the right momentum to slide it shut. The knack was to stand and throw your weight at it with both hands. Only one person had it down to a fine art and we praised their skills, mumbling our appreciation and with tired nods, thankful to be saved from the driver's long suffering aid. We would peer out the windows towards the station and watch for the telltale signs of late comers, scurrying and flustered in their uniforms, backpacks bouncing around like a loose tortoise shell as they darted across the road. In the winter, the fields that blurred by were frosted and calm in the weak morning light, the street lamps still barely giving a dirty orange hue. In the summer, the grass on the verge grew long and the hedges began to absorb the fences around the clustered residential houses. Tescos, Prets, and bus lanes gave way to weed-lined pavements and cul-de-sacs, brambles, smooth roads, distant sheep, and the unwelcome waft of manure. Most of the time the only words spoken were brief greetings stepping into the vehicle, stooped and collapsing into a seat, thankful to be on time. Conversations rarely drifted past the back row where phone screens might be shared for a Youtube music video, or earbuds occasionally split between friends. Devices reigned in silence over the sound of the engine straining up the slightest incline and Capital FM, the preferred ignorable radio station. On a good morning, six, cold, bleary eyed, and sometimes damp, day-students began school without having to apologetically ring reception for a cab.

Drop-off was around the back of the school, along the winding driveway and path to the manor, beyond the cramped security guard post where Ahmed would wave us on with a heavily moustached smile of recognition and waterproof jacket. Past the staff car park and ever-present building works, we parked next to one of the main classroom blocks where registration took place, a square-ish redbrick building with a flat white roof and unimaginative design. After offering polite thanks to the driver, it was a beeline for the classrooms, fronted by a small patch of grass and a narrow path of drab concrete slabs which led to the entrance. During the spring the plum tree blossoms would be so thick on the ground that the path all but disappeared under the wilting pink petals, slowly becoming a slippery mulch under foot when it rained. Inside the classroom block, it was clean and bland, with off-white hallways, inset fluorescent lights, standard issue speckled ceiling tiles that were always attracting stains, and dark scratchy carpets. The main school library appeared immediately on the left and was easy to miss, rarely used apart from for private tuition sessions and oral exam practice. The door always stood ajar despite it being perpetually empty of students. Loud chatter, laughter and the occasional shriek flowed and ebbed when passing each classroom door in the short hallway. It smelt of whiteboard markers, pencil sharpenings, overly sweet perfume. Notes of warm dust and plastic when the heating was on, and cut grass and cold paint when it wasn't.

EFL was in the last room on the right and we sat at square tables which, depending on the class, were set up as three sides of a square facing the teachers' desk or spread out in rows. Everyone had their unofficial and unassigned side of the square, Kasumi always sat near the door, dramatically swinging her bag onto the desk, and Mei reluctantly close to the board when she didn't have her glasses. A sign stuck above the whiteboard indicated no phones in class, and student displays from a previous

year were pinned to a notice board along one wall mapping the various geographical regions of Japan with some colourful pictures and neat words. This particular room had a wall of windows which faced the lush sprawling grounds, green as far as you could see, and the playing fields where the boys football team could be heard during training. On any given morning the gardeners could be seen driving past the lesson on the lawn mower, doing daily inspections and maintenance, or creating compost piles of leaves and bracken. The outside could be a distraction for a tired student, head and arms in a heap on the desk, face turned towards the windows in contemplation, or tactfully hiding closed eyelids. Lessons meant sharing textbooks, rubbers, & rulers; jokes, laughter & knowing looks; exasperation, annoyance, & boredom. The textbooks asked difficult questions: 'Climate change is a serious issue, what might you recommend to prevent it?', 'What could be done to reduce poverty?', 'What are the health advantages and disadvantages of living in a city?' - all demanding discussion and debate. At least one student was quickly completing homework questions in the lesson, conspicuously avoiding the gaze of the teacher. Classes meant ideas and quiet snacks were traded and phones were half-heartedly hidden beneath the desks.

Break times meant heading outside to the wide, squat, architecturally wanting brutalist building ten metres away. Light wooden floors and four huge rows of wooden tables ran the length of the dining hall where the island salad bar, kitchen, and hot drinks machines sat at the far end. Another wall of windows with dark brown painted panelling lit up the subtle lime green hall. It felt as dated as the outside, but it was warm even in the winter and had the charm of an English village hall, familiar, airy and communal. Unlimited hot chocolate, tea, and coffee in brown paper cups were better appreciated when the popular chocolate biscuits were in stock. The

biscuit selection was an important factor: after all, who wanted the ones with raisins? Custard creams came a close second to chocolate bourbons, but the novelty had worn off a while ago for many and half eaten packets found their way to the bin. The KO3 girls preferred to hang around the table closest to the drinks machines, reapplying sheer pink lipgloss, replying to messages, chatting about upcoming holidays or weekend plans. They lamented homework that needed to be done, or idly scrolled on Instagram, presenting pictures of food, usually artfully arranged deserts, to the group for approval. On occasion the class president came over to recruit their peers to help with preparations for a school event. Sometimes books would be out for some last minute cramming, but above all, it was a time of decompression before the next lesson.

By lunch time the general malaise lifted and the queue that snaked along the wall was chatty, energised by the smell of carbohydrates. The food was either under-salted or over seasoned, garnering surprisingly few complaints even if it was largely inedible, but great excitement when it involved fried chicken. The stout middle-aged Indian head chef was generous with his portions, well practised hands deftly plating requests. In line with proper British tradition, Fridays meant fish and chips, whilst Tuesdays brought the possibility of leftover Japanese cuisine from Monday's dinner menu. Teachers sat at the first table, boys and girls separated by unspoken divides of gender and year group spread out across the other tables, with the rare exceptions of romantic relationships that had endured the week. The boys were loud and fidgety, chairs scraping the floor constantly as they tried excitedly to get each other's attention, and despite there seeming to be more talking than chewing, they were always first in the line when seconds were available. Lunch was rice pushed around plates and opportunistic friends enquiring about the things you didn't fancy, or

hadn't finished eating. Lunch was too-thick soup drunk too quickly, furikake (a Japanese seasoning for rice) sprinkled too liberally, the sound of scraping plates and chatter, and stray paper napkins. Meals were a knife and fork only affair and chopsticks were reserved for special events or celebrations. After eating, plastic trays and all went back to the kitchen staff to be brought out again in the evening, the never ending circle of polypropylene life. If the weather was warm enough students could play tennis or basketball on the outdoor courts during the sports period after lessons. The grounds were beautiful in the summer, and at break times the picnic benches on the grass next to the art block were a popular place for KO3 girls to relax, complain about work, and share their plans for the upcoming holiday.

To get to the dorms after lessons to retrieve a stashed supermarket snack you had to go to the main office for your keys. Through the canteen and the heavy swinging doors into the covered glass hallway where the school trophies and tournament badges were kept. The narrow glass display cases also held mementos from alumni long graduated, signed books, and a miniature union jack flag in an X-formation with the school flag, bearing their emblem and motto. The flags sat proudly in a cup on the top shelf. If you sat on the little bench opposite the cabinets you could see into the oversized games room where the pool tables and table tennis bats lay abandoned until the evenings, and the TV permitted a limited selection of British channels, mostly news. Outside, the path took you through the hedge to the beautiful raised courtyard garden where graduation photos were taken, a large stone fountain in the distance. The little backdoor of the manor house was where the teachers' sanctuary of open plan desks led, then on to the main reception opposite the grand entrance. A tiny makeshift library had been created out of low shelves. Students loved to sit around the small table and bother the teachers with questions or pleas for things that

they were not allowed to do or buy, trying to reason that they needed their room keys back early for 'legitimate purposes'. The staff room was not a social place for teachers, most of whom would diligently tap away on their computers when they were actually there, and was instead a place of great enjoyment and mischief for students. Robert could be found sitting at his desk, which was closest to the adjoining mini library, poker faced and pretending not to hear the lurking students' conversations, only to chime in when they least expected it, with a clarification or rare chuckle. Marin, whose desk was neatly personalised with photos and often had a small stack of sweet delicacies on it for distributing to students in classes, was much more amenable to indulging their sociable loitering, occasionally bursting into laughter as she was drawn in by ridiculous remarks and over-exaggerated whinging from students. The little library alcove, despite being so close to the teachers territory, felt relaxed if not cosy, a little corner of informality.

GCS in the Global City

Past an omnipresent Starbucks and the tiny Italian deli, a favourite with the teachers, but with questionable quality coffee, the school was easy to miss, tucked away as it was. A little reminder of residential life in central London - no available parking and trees with spread roots that lifted the pavement. Walking towards the school, the angry honking of morning traffic faded to a petty hum and the residents of the peach stone houses, now flats, that lined the road provided ample opportunities to collide with you as they darted out of their homes, some with singing and sniffling children in tow for the hurried school run. In the early spring the magnolias started to bud

and when they finally bloomed in the early summer the road was painted with long pink and white brushstrokes. Smokers who worked in the local area sat on the corners of the road, by the exits of the laundrette and back doors of cafes, or leaning by the railings of the houses which were thick with black shiny paint. In the summer DP students joined smokers' corner, most with the vapes that smelt of watermelon and strawberries, feeling less bothered about teachers seeing them close to the school as the end of the academic year fast approached.

Students trickled in from all directions, speed walking to pass the threshold of the school before 8:45am when the receptionist Macy, a warm woman whom nothing went by unnoticed, began to take names and no hostages in the blue plastic sign-in book that sat on the desk for late comers. The principal's office, a frosted glass room built into the wide reception, presented a compelling reason to be on time, unless you wanted an impromptu meeting.

Hurtling towards registration, the stairs were packed and loud with students on the way to their home room. The older parts of the building offered narrow corridors and stairways that smelt like cleaning materials and old paint, the blue lino squeaked underfoot when students ran.

When rounding the corner from the main hallway towards the hall which doubled as a canteen, the large white archway greeted everyone with the school motto. It was impossible to go to lunch without seeing the bold phrase:
"We aim to be an inclusive community of compassionate and inspired world citizens" written in huge black letters.

The displays in the hallways changed periodically as students completed art projects, posters for world awareness days and to showcase their knowledge. Leaving the main building through a small door, students spent most of their time playing table tennis in the courtyard when the weather permitted. Round benches, flower beds and paving stones, made up the rest of the small but social space. The DP common room sat on the ground floor of the adjacent building. A little dingy and with bars on the windows, it was well loved. Next to the light switch was a permanent fixture of every classroom, the blue rectangle of the IB Learner Profile, laminated and stapled to the fuzzy green display boards.

On the way up to the second floor there was an old bookcase which had a new poster bluetacked to it almost every week, for Anti-Bullying Week, Earth Day, International Women's Day, Black History Month, World Mental Health Day. During break times a teacher would stand in the small doorway by the bookcase, watching for students trying to sneak out of the courtyard to the office upstairs when they held the prize new ping pong balls. A rare commodity.

The main building was always bright, and large windows adorned every turn of the main staircase, an old building which smelt like cold stone and sellotape. On the top floor the art and business rooms were adjacent. The art room was never empty and a steady trickle of students popped in and out to see Ms P whilst she ate tangerines at her desk. Almost everything in the room once had glue, paint or charcoal on it and it was a popular place to socialise while catching up on projects that should have been finished weeks ago. An artist's work was never done and as such there were always deliveries of new paints waiting inside.

The business room had an altogether different feel, but the room was small and warm and a good place to watch Netflix during lessons if you were a student who wanted to pretend to revise. The walls were covered in pictures and quotes from famous international figures. Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Oprah, Greta Thunberg and Malala. An eclectic mix of philosophies. During lunchtime the IBDP students would boil the kettle in the common room and make dubious smelling noodles which lingered. Mr M would often pop his head in during this time to offer biscuits he had been keeping in his desk, and check in to see if anything was afoot, particularly if the door was shut, something which was against the rules. Usually it was to tell students to take their designer trainers off the tables.

The Appeal of an International Education

The rise of international education and its continued rapid growth and popularity as the chosen medium for educating not only wealthy immigrants, but also local elites and students from overseas (Bunnell 2017), can be attributed to a multitude of factors. These include but are not limited to: the easy transferability from one school to another often across different countries, as in the case of IB schools which benefit transnationally mobile families (Poonoosamy 2018), the focus on international or global mindedness, diverse student bodies encouraging cross-cultural engagement, as well as the increasing favorability of an international education and qualifications to elite universities and employers. International schools market themselves as institutions that cultivate cross-cultural competencies and prepare students to enter the global economy, equipped with the skills necessary to thrive and compete in a

globalising marketplace, following the shift towards global corporate culture. The term 'international school' is an umbrella term for a diverse set of institutions that can have radically divergent goals, ethos, educational practices and most significantly, curricula, as discussed in Chapter 1. Self professed international schools can range from national elite and pragmatic institutions that focus heavily on employability and the cultural capital receiving international qualifications confers on students in their home economy, to ones that have a more global citizenship approach that champion transnational mobility and recruit from a diverse and international pool of students.

International schools ostensibly solve the issue of combining culturally enriching experiences and a diverse student population, with focus on educational attainment, while avoiding crippling underfunding of state schools. This is particularly favourable to the global middle class, who like many are interested in achieving upward mobility for their children, whilst maintaining their exposure to and experiences of a diverse range of cultures. In affluent areas what makes a person or community cosmopolitan primarily relies on shared consumption practices as well as a shared capacity to consume e.g. wealth and travel. As Horst (2015) points out, unlike in multi-ethnic schools in the UK and US inner cities, where difference and diversity is often equated with 'other-than whiteness and lower socio-economic status', diversity in affluent areas is instead equated with positive multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism, premised on the assumption that a variety of experiences and exposure is beneficial to student's global awareness:

> The recognition of multiple cultures and connections to locations 'around the world' in this region can be distinguished from the circumstances of

> multi-ethnic schools in US and UK inner cities, where difference and diversity is often equated with other-than whiteness and lower socio-economic status. (Horst 2015:622)

The choosing of international schools was a strategic choice, one which families made over local British ones. The desirability of cosmopolitan and multicultural environments was contentious, and not to be taken for granted.

International Education and Mitigating Precarity

The international school supports the growth of the 'global middle class' through its flexibility as a mode of education available to transnationally mobile families and those seeking respected and widely recognised qualifications, and remains as a significant site of its social reproduction. A kind of early networking ground, international schools are generally geared towards socialising students for success in transnational environments but also in their home economies. Employers and higher education institutions around the world, particularly in high income countries, increasingly only recognise international qualifications such as the International Baccalaureate Diploma, and internationally recognised national ones such as the US high school diploma and advanced placement program, and European diplomas including the French Baccalaureate, German Abitur, and the Singapore-Cambridge GCE A-Level. Additional exams such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Cambridge English Qualifications such as C1 (advanced) and C2 (proficiency), and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) are also now commonly set as entry requirements for non-native speakers of English. Only national curricula which are considered to be 'rigorous' are accepted as legitimate for

admittance to UK universities, the fact that 'rigorous' happens to coincide with curricula from majority wealthy Western nations and ex-colonies is questionable. These stringent requirements, in the name of quality control (I use this term unironically to identify educational qualifications as consumer products), leads to specific forms of cosmopolitan cultural capital becoming a prerequisite for acceptance.

Cosmopolitanism has long been equated with high levels of education, merit, success and modernity and is considered a legitimate form of cultural capital wielded by those wealthy enough to travel and consume particular forms of education and material goods. As Cambridge (2002) argues, international education can be considered a branded product sold by organisations such as the International Baccalaureate (formerly known as the IBO), a consumption practice which I argue is a strategy of global middle class reproduction, whilst also one that is potentially expensive and burdensome, yet necessary for those who want to participate in the economy. This is not to argue that international students do not experience global mobility from a very privileged position, but to reiterate Tanu's (2018) point, the transnational spaces in which they must move are not neutral nor free from existing national and international cultural hierarchies, forcing students to learn specific forms of cosmopolitan cultural capital acceptable to reputable higher education institutions. In fact, the emphasis on cosmopolitan cultural capital as breeding mutual intelligibility is a false friend, when the only form of cosmopolitanism that is recognised is fundamentally Eurocentric and English speaking:

> In fact, mutual intelligibility is situational. Those growing up in the 'third culture' are diverse and their sense of mutual intelligibility shifts in relation to

> various factors. Factors such as cultural background, nationality, 'race', and class do not become irrelevant; they instead continue to shape the subjectivities of those with a transnational upbringing. While some research suggests that young people may not automatically transcend difference by virtue of their transnational upbringing, these works are still few and far between. (Tanu 2018:17)

If the right education is the key to unlocking global opportunities, both in education and employment, then the onus to accrue accepted qualifications and become 'cosmopolitan' falls on young people and their families. Whilst, the construction of the international school as a site of multicultural ideals, opportunities and global mindedness, perpetuated most frequently by the schools themselves, is well known, it begs the question: what does it mean to be global for the students themselves? And how is this realised and cultivated within the spaces of schools? Here I have discussed international education as a way to secure class status amongst the global middle class, however, I engage in depth with conceptions of cosmopolitanism at both JIS and GCS in Chapter 4.

Drawing Boundaries: The importance of Place in Shaping School Brand

Addressing the issue of combining Indian values with an international education, Babu & Mahajan (2021) examine the ways that Golden Harvest International School in Bengaluru branded itself as distinctively Indian and international. Babu & Mahajan argue that schools present themselves as sites uniquely equipped to resolve these tensions by offering parents peace of mind that their children will still remain

'Indian' whilst pursuing international education. The history of UK imperial rule in India has generated specific ways to be acceptably international and where English is a highly desirable global language, but this must be gained through specific engagements with the global. School then plays a critical role in navigating boundaries between desirable and undesirable. As such, how does place shape the unique selling points of international schools, and how does it provide context to envision the global? I explore these questions through journeys into the schools themselves, revealing the ways the global was made material and legitimate at both JIS and GCS.

Much like in other international schools, especially those that follow the IB curriculum, the performative nature of internationality requires there to exist a multitude of practices which reinforce distinction between different nationalities. Whilst a sense of community and collective identity are deliberately fostered at international schools, evidencing the globalness of the schools' brand and outlook requires that they actively draw attention to difference. Meyer (2021) astutely points out this practice of creating difference at ISG (International School Germany), an IB school almost exclusively attended by migrant students (or 'expats' as she refers to them), of which she is an alumnus. ISG dedicated a day to celebrating the school's wide array of nationalities in what they termed 'Mosaic of Cultures Day' where students and staff were encouraged to dress in traditional clothing and carry the colours of their respective national flags in a parade around the school (Meyer 2021:59). In effect, she argues, sustaining "the brand of 'internationality' forces a degree of boundary drawing on a number of fronts" (Meyer 2021:58), and in order for a school to present itself as outwardly 'international', that is visible and recognisable, the school must engage in a process of othering and boundary drawing.

‘Mosaic of Cultures Day’ illustrates the ways in which ISG both fostered a collective sense of ‘internationality’ through a celebration of different nationalities, whilst also reinforcing its brand as international, precisely by drawing attention to the number of nationalities present within the school. This process of othering, calling attention to difference, and boundary drawing was a clear way that ISG solidified and made visible its brand as international within the school itself.

Events of boundary drawing expressed themselves very differently in the context of GCS and JIS and, as I will demonstrate, did not always revolve around internal practices of differentiation and othering, although these were present too. At ISG and undoubtedly other IB international schools, the local (sometimes substituted for the national) often serves as a backdrop against which the school asserts itself as ‘international’ by comparison. The local is conceptualised as exactly that, a local place with local people, and therefore the opposite of global, a place to which you should not limit your horizons. This is common practice in schools which are located in non-English speaking countries, western or not, where the local serves as something students should distance themselves from in the pursuit of aligning themselves with other international people deemed ‘like them’ (Tanu 2018). It is clear then that the local plays an integral role in shaping the process and purpose of these boundary drawing practices in which schools engage. ‘Othering’ the local in order to underscore and reiterate their own internationality. And yet, whilst the motivations and practices of schools setting themselves apart from the local context has been well theorised (Meyer 2021; Tanu 2018), I suggest that proximity to the local can be leveraged conversely to emphasise a school’s ‘internationality’ and can be employed as a unique selling point. A consideration of the importance of place for schools which are already based in what might be called an ‘international’ context,

turns this argument on its head and reveals new questions about how and why schools draw their boundaries in such contexts.

The associations made between the UK and the global are undeniably strong, particularly in educational contexts. From the supposed invention of the school uniform to the exporting of British language and culture through schooling under colonial rule, successive UK educational institutions and governments have worked indefatigably to maintain its position in the imagination of students around the world as a 'global hub' of knowledge, and a key exporter of education (Department for Education & Department for International Trade 2019). The UK also has a long established history of educating foreign nationals, in large part due to its imperial past (globally exporting British imperial culture), creating the connections through which a privileged few could send their children to the UK to study, as well as its reputation for being home to many of the most prestigious, and oldest, educational institutions in the world. London in particular is home to multiple internationally respected universities, and reputation precedes it as one of the most diverse and cosmopolitan global cities in the world. Why then would GCS and JIS, located as they are in and just outside London, want to distance or separate themselves from the local? During my time at the schools, I found that they in fact tactically cherry-picked aspects of both local and global, benefiting from global imaginaries whilst leveraging local appeal.

A School of the World: Global Citizens School

GCS prided itself on its diverse student body and its positioning in the heart of London. In any given week there would be an outing, event or assembly that the students would be preparing for which aimed to be culturally enriching. Events and assemblies tended to focus on championing the variety of different nationalities within the school as well as the collaborative efforts that were required to make them happen. This included celebrations of different religious and national holidays, the school's annual International Food Festival, presentations dedicated to various causes such as Eco Week and global initiatives such as Mental Health Awareness Week and International Women's Day. These activities were geared towards highlighting the internationality of the student body, drawing attention to global issues and the ways students could help solve them, as well as educating everyone on the different religious and cultural backgrounds of their peers.

During the International Food Festival, students (with help from their parents) would bring in a variety of dishes and traditional foods from their home countries to be sold at stalls, decorated with their national flags, in the main dining hall. At lunch the halls of the main building were crammed with students, wallets and small change in hand, vying for a spot at the front. Students taking art were encouraged to attend exhibitions at the weekend and make the most of their proximity to world-renowned galleries. GCS students also took part in competitions run by the International Baccalaureate organisation across all IB schools in photography and art, and participated in Model United Nations (MUN) events and music competitions within their wider parent group. On a more mundane level, besides the community service component of the IB that all DP students had to fulfil, a few of the DP1s like Jason had part-time jobs locally or an online side hustle where they would sell their own artistic designs and prints. Students did not just study in the area, some also lived

and worked there, integrating them further into the local community (although it has to be noted that in London it is also easy to live in a flat for years and never know your neighbours). Even the student council focused on charitable activities that supported the local community, including donating clothes and collecting food for the local food bank throughout the year.

In this vein, GCS made no attempts to separate itself from the local but merely utilised it to emphasise the benefits of its unique positioning. The prospectus given to interested parents and potential clients hailed GCS as an international school in an international city, where students would experience the full benefit of studying in the centre of London through regular arts and culture trips, events and activities. And it was true, there were trips and activities organised all the time for all year groups in the school. Notably, every week students in the lower years went to the local park for outdoor activities and games, when the weather was particularly nice. In late spring or autumn they would be able to eat their lunch there too. Even the sporting facilities the school used were embedded in the local community, where they had memberships to the leisure centres and permission to use park sporting grounds.

For GCS, being part of the local community in London was not a sign of being 'un-international' and was definitively not at odds with maintaining its global image. Unlike many other international schools, particularly those outside of 'international' cities or English speaking contexts, the local was, in actuality, a fundamental part of the school's identity and brand. Students were drawn to study at GCS precisely due to its proximity to a 'global' local, and the promise of an education which integrated and leveraged the offerings of London into their everyday learning. GCS's positioning in London served not just their current educational needs but their future aspirations

too. A large proportion of DP1 and DP2 students hoped to stay in London after they graduated from school, having applied to universities like University College London, University of the Arts London, the London School of Economics and Political Science, Bayes Business School (formerly known as Cass), Imperial College London, and King's College London. GCS's marketing strategy was quite simple and very effective as their location did much of the work in soliciting interest: London sold itself, and the school piggybacked off of this. GCS was in close proximity to the educational and employment opportunities London offered and for which it is famed, so accordingly they presented themselves as embedded in the perfectly positioned global city. GCS did however differentiate itself in other ways, not from locations as such, but from other schools in London by belabouring its small size and favourable staff to student ratio, whilst avoiding an air of exclusivity in favour of a 'small community' rhetoric. The boundary drawing that GCS engaged in worked to situate the school as both local and global by highlighting its internal diversity as well placed within the context of London, here the local and global are not pitted against each other but are complimentary. Instead, it could be argued that the othering that GCS engaged in was to differentiate itself from other international schools by clearly identifying itself as a member of a global network of schools under the same brand, an interconnected family with a unifying ethos and worldview which was of great benefit to the students that became part of it.

A School in the World: Japanese International School

One of the classrooms we sat in for morning EFL lessons had a wall dedicated to posters that the KO1 students had made. I would often arrive to the lesson early with

my rapidly cooling coffee in hand, still reeling from a 5am wake up, and stare half-seeing at the display, occasionally making small talk with the teacher whilst they set up and we waited for the students to arrive. Perhaps I only paid as much attention to it as I did because it was on the topic of food and I had rarely eaten the breakfast in my bag by that time, but it was one of the few examples of individual student work around the school apart from the pieces that the art students produced that hung in the art block windows. The posters were on the regional cuisine of Japan, with each poster dedicated to a specific area complete with a map and pictures of the different dishes, underneath which there was a brief explanation of the ingredients and what time of year or on which occasion you would expect to eat it. I never really paid much mind to that display again after finishing my fieldwork at JIS, and yet it must have stuck in the back of my mind, squirrelled away. I later realised the significance of the posters in that they represented the only formal acknowledgement of internal difference amongst the student body that I had come across in the school. I knew for example that Hina was from Osaka and Meko was from Okinawa, however this was rarely brought up outside the context of conversations about food or visiting their families. Perhaps pure coincidence, but it was interesting considering that JIS spent a good deal of time fostering a strong sense of collectivity and community within the school whilst also providing many opportunities for students to present Japanese culture to others outside of the school.

Japan Day, cultural exchanges with local schools, and the school fête were all events during which JIS prided itself on its students' ability to represent Japanese culture. These events were surprisingly regular and spread out through the school year. They required a lot of preparation, coordination and practice to put together and students generally enjoyed the task of working as a group, especially when it meant that

lessons were not running that day. What was most interesting to witness was the transfer of knowledge between students and from teacher to student. There was a correct way or method of doing the activities, whether it was tea ceremony, origami making, even the mode of explaining these activities to visitors. Everything was meticulously planned (admittedly mostly by the teachers and the class presidents), and a great deal of pride was taken in being able to teach others about Japanese culture and history. I argue that these events and activities not only acted to strengthen a sense of community and shared identity within the school, but also served as the means by which boundaries were drawn between JIS and non-JIS, and Japanese and non-Japanese. This process of othering was repeated regularly through cultural exchanges where students from local schools would visit JIS for the afternoon, and the annual events hosted by the school which were open to the public.

Nonetheless, these boundaries were prone to slippage every now and again and students used this to their advantage. JIS took part in a speech competition with a local British private school, some of whose students were taking Japanese language as one of their subjects. The competition required students to write and perform a five minute speech in either English, if you were a JIS student, or Japanese, if you attend the competing private school. I offered to help the JIS students who were competing to settle their nerves, and we spent a few afternoons reading through and reciting what they had written. I was taken aback, however, by the choice of students who were encouraged or expected to participate in the competition as they were all either bilingual or mostly fluent in English, and definitely far beyond the level that the competition was aimed at. Of course, Fumika, whose reticence to demonstrate the true extent of her language skills in classes (as explored in Chapter 4), won the competition easily. She had, after all, completed all of her secondary education in the

UK, the majority of which had been at a state school in Swindon before joining JIS. I suggest that the competition provided a context in which Fumika was able to re-draw the boundary between herself and 'other', effectively enabling her to demonstrate her bilingualism without fear of seeming too British to her peers or jeopardising her sense of cultural identity. Although JIS wanted students to make the most of their time in the UK, the ritual nature of events which required them to present themselves as outwardly Japanese, to learn and share their culture with others, seemed to bely a desire for students to also maintain a safe distance from Britishness by staying in deep connection with their cultural heritage and continually drawing the boundary between the school and the outside. JIS was a school of contradictions.

Whilst JIS expended a lot of time and energy differentiating itself from the local, not only by presenting the culture of the school as one that was distinctly Japanese and not British, it also attempted to make some connections locally through encouraging after school activities like volunteering in the community, and events such as the aforementioned speech competition with a local private school. The volunteering was decidedly unpopular amongst students, mostly because they found it boring to stand in charity shops, yet the speech competition was well attended. The connections to the local were however, almost always in a controlled setting where engagement could be monitored and witnessed. Students could not freely wander into town or go shopping in London, primarily because this always required a taxi but also because there was designated time for these activities on the weekends. The school trips themselves to London were almost always to attend afternoon tea, or visiting museums. Trips further afield focused on tourist attractions such as Stonehenge, or to go skiing in France. The majority of the engagement students had with British culture was through touristy or highly curated encounters. Although there were

exceptions, there was little effort made, apart from by Robert, to encourage students to take initiative over how and where they engaged with the local outside of school. This can of course be chalked in part down to the nature of boarding school and the limited freedom students are allowed to come and go as they please for reasons of safety and security. Regardless, JIS advertised themselves as a school benefiting from a prime location in the English countryside and close to culturally significant historical sites, within easy reach of cosmopolitan London. Whether this was the reality is another question.

JIS marketed itself as a safe environment for students to foster their global mindedness by presenting itself as both Japanese and international, where international was really a synonym for British. British culture was represented as the culture of internationalism and at the school this was an unspoken truism. Tanu engages critically with the importance that host countries play in the development of a school's ideology of being international, where place has a crucial role in shaping attitudes within the international school itself. At TIS, the international school in which she completed her research, the school inadvertently reinscribed "the national among transnational youth at every turn" (Tanu 2018:24) in their constant promotion of the value of 'being international':

> Students internalized the Eurocentric sociocultural hierarchies that informed the school's ideology of being international (i.e., the rules of the game) in varying ways that reflected their diverse backgrounds. [...] Despite the school's ideological commitment to nurturing a spirit of engagement with the Other on equal terms, the internalized Eurocentric structures remain powerful in

> mediating social interactions at TIS. A teacher referred to it as the 'hidden curriculum' (Snyder 1970). (Tanu 2018:24-25)

At JIS there was no hidden curriculum as such, but there was a game to be played, one where students endeavoured to acquire just the right amount of cosmopolitan cultural capital through exposure to the 'international' in a safe and controlled way, enough to navigate transnational spaces and improve their employment prospects. Interestingly at JIS, I contend that students had internalised cultural hierarchies to a much lesser extent that at TIS, though obviously young people were not unscathed (a discussion further explored in Chapter 4 and 6), and where in other contexts the sociocultural hierarchy may have placed Western or Euroamerican culture at the top, at JIS this was in fact the reverse. As a global economic superpower with far reaching cultural influence and its own colonial legacy, Japan has already solidified its position at the top of the East Asian sociocultural hierarchy. At JIS the reverence for Japanese culture, and its superiority, including over British culture, was evident. This did not mean students were not often critical about aspects of their culture they didn't agree with, but the overwhelming sentiment I picked up from my time at JIS was that they were learning a set of skills which would enable them to move more freely in international spaces, to be able to represent themselves in a way they wanted to be seen, and not to become less Japanese in the process. The idea of cultural 'dilution' in Japan would require its own thesis to fully interrogate, but at JIS there was a distinct sense that pursuing 'internationality' could come at the cost of being less 'Japanese', something felt acutely by students like Fumika. Japanese and the 'international' were juxtaposed by students, as though the two were mutually exclusive identities, despite their own efforts to the contrary. These seemingly contradictory views and behaviours can also be centred around issues of race and

cultural and ethno-nationalism in Japan, which I discuss in relation to Japanese identity and the concept of 'Japaneseness' later in the thesis (Chapter 4).

Place and Brand

Place, then, plays an important role in deciding the porosity of boundaries. At ISG and TIS (Meyer 2021; Tanu 2018) these boundaries were drawn starkly around the schools, as the local (rural Germany and Jakarta respectively) was shunned and dismissed as un-international. At JIS these boundaries were regularly re-inscribed in order to strengthen school identity and a sense of cultural belonging, but were equally flexible for the purposes of gaining international skills and exposure, precisely through engagement with the local. Whereas, at GCS boundaries were drawn internally to highlight the diversity of their student body, but they were also drawn to include the global British local. GCS drew its boundaries starting from the local and reaching beyond to include their global network of sister schools, thus drawing the local into the global, and vice versa. I suggest that the drawing of boundaries, whether inside or outside of the schools, was always for tactical purposes and served as an important branding strategy that supported their marketing efforts. As a school, GCS built its brand based on its novel location in London and touted this as one of its key selling points in recruitment materials. Another of its major selling points to students was its membership to a family of interconnected schools around the world, offering pupils the opportunity to make connections and network with other young people across the globe through coordinated events and competitions. Similarly, JIS built its brand on its unique location, emphasising its historical significance and tranquillity, whilst remaining within easy reach of the cosmopolitan hub that is the capital city. As a boarding school, JIS presented itself as a

self-contained safe environment, one where opportunities to engage with British culture and heritage, enjoy culturally enriching experiences, and foster global mindedness were provided, but in a controlled way that parents could trust was safe and well monitored.

In schools' brochures, proximity to the local was in fact a unique selling point, not a hindrance or quaint local environment to be looked down on. Instead, for GCS and JIS the local became a proxy for the global, where the UK, or Britishness, represents more than just a country, but a major producer of global goods, including people. I argue that for students attending JIS and GCS, the host country was marketed as the point from which the global is spun out from, and the backdrop against which the international is imagined.

Recruitment and Advertising

With the importance of school branding in mind, it is critical to consider the aspirations of the schools themselves, what they aimed to achieve, who they aimed to recruit, and what limited their ability to do so. Although both schools were operated by larger parent bodies which oversaw their operations and continued existence, GCS had a far more established and cultivated brand than JIS to aid in its recruitment of students. GCS's parent organisation, a multinational education group, was embedded in every aspect of school life and GCS drew on this connection to market the school to potential students and their families. Conversely, although part of a larger Japanese university group, there was almost no discernable connection between JIS and its parent group in the school itself, apart from their shared name. In the next

section I reflect on the different recruitment strategies and aims of each school, as well as considering the efficacy of their methods.

The ‘Global’ as a Brand

As discussed earlier, both JIS and GCS placed great emphasis on the unique benefits to students bestowed by their locations, and leveraged this to their benefit in marketing materials. However, another brand that I have not yet discussed is that of the 'global' which has real cultural currency in many countries and for employers. As Meyer (2021) argues, the concept of the global itself has become an invaluable resource, a brand which schools draw on to prove their legitimacy. Thus through aligning themselves with the global, international schools are able to create a complex image of what they provide with very little effort or examination of what the global actually refers to or entails. The global is therefore a brand outside of their creation, one that schools such as JIS and GCS capitalise on in their recruitment of students, and serves to add value to their offering. But what did the 'global' mean to students in relation to their educational aspirations?

Much like Gilbertson’s (2018) fieldsite Riversdale school, students at JIS repeated interest in broadening their ‘horizons’ and gaining different perspectives when I asked what they thought were the benefits of studying abroad. The idea of engaging with foreign ‘others’, developing an awareness and understanding of other cultures and religions, and most importantly learning to communicate across those differences was, theoretically, a benefit of attending JIS. This was not reiterated by all students but it seemed a stock answer, something which they had clearly heard

frequently and repeated easily, despite many students actions and attitudes towards the contrary. This is not to say that there were not many students who emphasised the importance of studying in the UK for their future plans, but to highlight that studying abroad was sometimes discussed as an end in itself, where the value of the global had gone largely unquestioned and unchallenged despite their ambivalence towards it.

Recruitment at GCS

As previously discussed, GCS represents a rather classic example of an international school. Its vision to educate global citizens ready for international careers, effortlessly navigating multicultural spaces to solve the world's problems, was writ large around the school. Classrooms and hallways were filled with student made displays, as well as sleek posters with colourful graphics and snappy slogans which were presumably meant to remind students of their responsibilities and values as future world leaders and students of the IB. I use the word slogan here in the literal sense as the posters were effectively selling the IB programme using methods reminiscent of consumer branding. The International Baccalaureate logo could be found on many of the materials dotted around the walls, and served as a constant reminder of belonging and pride. The other logo competing for wall space was that of the multinational company that had acquired GCS and now operated the school, and who interestingly underwent a total rebranding in recent years, in line with its rapid growth. Despite the feeling of unity and collective identity that the IB undoubtedly fosters in the students enrolled on its courses, the spectre of International Baccalaureate felt almost overwhelming as an outsider stepping into the school,

particularly in classrooms which contained identical posters in each. Though a non-profit organisation, the IB's marketing strategies and investment in successful, everpresent branding were impressive, and as some have noted:

> It may be argued that international schools operate in local markets as the franchised distributors of globally branded international education products and services, such as the programmes of the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO), Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) and the US-based College Board Advanced Placement International Diploma (APID). The establishment of quality standards through accreditation constitutes an important part of the franchising process. This is evident from the way in which the International Baccalaureate Organization, for instance, is now promoting 'IB World schools', which are authorized to offer the programmes of the IBO, using a trademarked logo (IBO 2001a). (Cambridge 2002:231)

GCS had clearly spent a lot of time, effort and money on the development of their brand. Their logo was modern, their website was polished and continuously updated, even their social media was thoughtfully curated. If you wanted a copy of the prospectus it was easily downloadable along with various other resources which might help you make a decision as a parent considering the school for their child's education. Open days and guided tours were easily bookable through the website as well as virtual meetings with the headteacher. They even provided welcome videos and testimonies from students and alumni available to watch online, alongside links to their instagram account which was used to document the events and activities throughout the primary and secondary school.

The established network amongst schools within the parent organisation, effectively building student connections and creating an international community that reached around the world, was a key aspect of recruitment to GCS. As such, the school boasted an impressively international student body, attracting students from Kuwait, Brazil, Australia, Russia, South Africa, US, Nigeria, Portugal, Italy, Morocco, and Malaysia to name just a few. As previously mentioned, the school was a particular favourite for the children of foreign diplomats. Whilst there were a few British students in attendance, all had dual nationality. Alongside the free marketing embassies provided, it seemed that most found the school through recommendations from parents and friends or browsing online. It was clear that student numbers were not an issue, perhaps because GCS had an excellent location in central London, an enviable place to be a student, or perhaps because it was marginally cheaper to attend than the more well known institutions.

Recruitment at JIS

There were no such sleek posters at JIS. In fact there was very little in the way of internal school branding apart from the JIS emblem which students didn't even have to wear on their uniform, they were instead just expected to wear ties with the JIS colours. Although JIS's stated mission was to educate globally minded students who would pursue equally global opportunities, the school put seemingly little effort into actually recruiting. Even in Japan where the majority of their students were based, the recruitment that did happen was not through much official advertisement. As was evident from the questionnaires I circulated to students, it seemed that the majority of them heard about the school through word of mouth: a recommendation from a friend already in attendance or recent alumnus, a promising review from the

parents of other students, or mentioned by a teacher. There were only five students who were day pupils, primarily because of their parents' relocation to the UK for work. And since most students were boarders whose families resided in Japan, the degree of recruitment in the UK was very limited. The few students whose families were based in the UK, by and large, had parents who worked for Japanese multinational or international companies, and had migrated temporarily (for a few years) due to deployment at a branch overseas.

There remained a small range of parental professions for those whose families were based in Japan; predominantly students described their fathers as 'businessmen', a common term to denote employees of mid to large corporations. This general term is closely linked to that of the 'Japanese Salaryman', which refers to the trope of the loyal white-collar worker who would stay with their company for their entire working life (Aronsson 2015:12), slowly but surely rising in the ranks year on year. However, students noticeably did not describe their fathers as salarymen, perhaps choosing businessman as the closest equivalent in English. But also, potentially due to the negative connotations of the former as excessively devoted and static (Suzuki 2015), and to acknowledge their more successful international careers and higher pay that enabled them to send their children abroad. Once a post-war symbol of prosperity and success, the salaryman can be considered an outdated reality, now in decline due to the dwindling availability of lifetime employment and guaranteed promotion, careers cut-short by corporate restructuring (Gagné 2020:382). In recent years, the Japanese economy has seen a significant increase in the number of workers pursuing multiple careers due to precarious employment from fixed-term and temporary contracts, particularly for Japanese women. Interestingly, male students would also use the term 'businessman' when describing their future career plans, despite its

relative vagueness. Other parental professions included entrepreneurs who ran their own businesses in Japan (unconventionally Kasumi's mother), parents who worked for foreign companies (which had kept them somewhat transnationally mobile), and a few creative outliers in the culinary and fashion industries. In the rare conversations discussing parental professions, by default students would describe their fathers' careers, often entirely omitting their mothers, suggesting that they considered their fathers to be the primary breadwinners. This is in line with cultural expectations for wealthy middle and upper-middle class mothers in Japan to stay at home and care for their children (Kobayashi 2020), despite their high levels of education. However, this ideal has seen extensive change since the 2000s which experienced a sudden surge in media campaigns encouraging women to join the labour market in the hopes of invigorating the floundering economy, crippled by the effects of the 1990s crash (Aronsson 2015:15).

Due to the private nature of information regarding the specifics of professions and parents' complete absence from the school, it proved difficult to probe deeply into which companies they were employed by unless it was raised organically in conversation. For example, in February 2019, the Honda factory in Swindon announced that it would be closing its doors from 2021, leaving many in uncertain positions regarding the future of their jobs. These rumblings led to students such as Fumika to disclose to me that her father worked in management at the factory, and that she was unsure whether her parents would be based in Japan or still in the UK when she attended university in Japan. It so happened that a few other parents of JIS students were also employed by Honda, something which I discovered incidentally through staffroom chatter. It was suspected that fears and speculation over the

effects of a hard Brexit in the UK, and a waning demand for non-electric cars, had forced the factory to close.

Whilst it was common knowledge amongst students that attending JIS provided a direct route into their parent university group, there was only a small amount of information available about the history of the school-university connection on their website. The fact that JIS provided this opportunity to students studying with them was surprisingly loosely marketed in their few promotional materials, with only a brief paragraph explaining the possible transition from JIS to university admission. Whilst JIS was not what we might call an ‘active’ recruiter, as was evidenced by the issue of their dwindling student numbers, it did rely on the relative notoriety of their namesake in Japan to attract potential applicants to the school. The majority of students had never visited JIS before they enrolled and moved in, and to my knowledge, even open days were not organised by the school whilst I was there, although potential students could arrange to visit of their own volition.

During the last few months of my time at the school during early 2019, the JIS website underwent extensive remodelling. Previously the site contained not only outdated information, but formatting which looked distinctly outmoded. It was difficult to navigate and despite the homepages claims to 'developing globally minded students' and proficiency in English, there were pages which had only partially been translated. JIS's later efforts to modernise the website, join social media platforms, and add online marketing materials such as pamphlets and videos of student events and school trips, was part of their border thrust to improve their recruitment strategies and boost student numbers. The school had been suffering

from low enrollment for a few years and the dwindling student body seemed something of a financial worry. Inevitably, JIS had to reform their methods.

Conclusion

In the course of this chapter I have explored the practices of boundary drawing that schools engaged in in order to align themselves strategically with the global, self-affirming their legitimacy as institutions that could provide students with the necessary 'global mindedness', qualifications, and skills to excel in transnational spaces. I have offered an ethnographic account of how the local, national, and global, became material in the schools, as well as how they create transformative educational atmospheres. I have argued that these strategies represent techniques of resisting emplacement, creating environments which remind students of their positionality as 'international' through their proximity to globality, and the national (e.g. Britain and Japan). I have also discussed the importance of place for brand cultivation, as well as for the marketing and recruitment strategies that JIS and GCS engaged with, and the work that went into maintaining their image. Practices of boundary drawing through the everyday materiality of the schools such as posters, flags, mottos, and events, remained fundamental to creating atmospheres of community, globality, and belonging, as well as serving to remind students that there were desirable, and undesirable, ways of being global.

Chapter 3

Developing Self-Potentiality: Achievement Ideology and Privilege

'We aim to be an inclusive community of compassionate and inspired world citizens'

- GCS motto

'Our second aim is to foster globally minded individuals through international opportunities…I believe that all our students should aim to become resilient global citizens.'

- Introduction from Head Teacher, JIS website 2020

Introduction

This chapter examines how, at two international schools, the multiple achievement ideologies, or the beliefs of how one succeeds, are underpinned by particular assumptions and experiences of economic privilege, gender and race. I will explore how these elements impact on the development of self-potentiality - put simply, an individual's understanding of what they should conceivably aim for, and be capable of achieving, in the future. This will be important for understanding how student views on success and failure, whilst shaped by and often symptomatic of privilege, class, race and gender (Brantlinger 2003; Davidson 2011b; Demerath 2009;

Fordham 2008; Fordham & Ogbu 1986,; Howard 2008; Lareau 2003, 2015) also seem to be very closely tied with the on-the-ground ideology of the schools themselves and the expectations of teachers. I will also be exploring how these experiences inform the development of students' understanding of themselves as 'international': whereby students conceptualise their place in a global society and navigate international opportunities. As is evident from the discussion in Chapter 2, if you were to read the brochures, websites and student testimonials advertising international schools such as JIS and GCS, their aims appear ostensibly to be the same – to provide students with a modern global perspective and prospects. However, radically different strategies were used at JIS and GCS in the pursuit of creating 'globally minded' students, strategies which ultimately shaped student understandings of what being 'global' entailed, the value of achieving this, and how it would impact their futures (although the extent to which students believed this will become apparent). We need to also consider here not just the kinds of international 'values' and ways of being globally minded that students are being taught, but the privileges and prejudices that are present in their home economies and more systemically, including the gendering of work and constructions of race abroad, in the shaping and self-diagnosing of their own potentiality.

This section will explore the development of self-potentiality through a closer examination of student behaviour in school and decision-making processes, as well as through their interactions with staff, their peers, and myself. The chapter will also evaluate the usefulness of achievement ideology as an analytical lens through which to understand the development of student self-potentiality. In subsequent chapters I will explore the scope that self-potentiality offers as an embodied concept that reconfigures our relationship with our experiences as successes or failures and

reshapes the framing of student futures. Taussig et al. (2013) aptly summarise the value of anthropological inquiry into potentiality within biomedical sciences and I would here like to extend this into educational settings (Lewis 2014, 2016):

> As a conceptual apparatus, potentiality does complex work: to imagine or talk about potential is to imagine or talk about that which does not (yet and may never) exist. It provides an epistemic space filled with unknowns, and nevertheless "potentials" figure in the most casual and accepted manner in our everyday speech, in scientific inquiries, and also in anthropological texts. It is a term rarely explained. Given its ubiquity, the notion of potentiality is remarkably underanalyzed. In some respects, potentiality can be understood as the partner to, or flip side of, "risk"—also defined as a set of possibilities—though it has yet to be theorized in the same way. (Taussig et al. 2013:S4)

JIS Graduation, 2019

On the morning of the ceremony, a biting breeze blew around the school's grounds. The extensive winding school driveway had fields on either side where the local farmer would occasionally graze his cows. This was to be my last day of fieldwork at JIS and it was still early, but I could already see students rushing around between buildings. I walked the gravelly drive to the staffroom entrance, feeling strangely sentimental about my last day at the school. It also marked the last day of the academic year. The main school entrance, grand wooden doors and a manor-house-styled front emerged to my right as I circled round to the other side of

the car park and into the central maze of white buildings. I had kindly been invited to attend graduation for the second year in a row. There were always two ceremonies – one to award the graduating final year students (KO3) their high school certificates, and the second to officially signal the end of the academic year for first-and-second-year students (KO1 and KO2). I arrived in time to help KO3 students don their graduation gowns and mortar boards (the right way around), as they chatted nervously and fixed their hair under the ill-fitting hats. Most of the third-year students' parents had arrived from Japan. They came to the staff room in a steady trickle, dressed in smart outfits. Mothers in black jackets pinned with white flowers and matching pencil skirt and pearls; fathers in black suits with dark ties. Parents were laden with Harrods bags, boxes and flowers – gifts for long-suffering teachers as well as their graduating offspring. This would be the only time I saw parents during the year, and for a few students the first time they had been reunited with their parents since last year. It was an emotional time and many mothers and female students cried throughout almost the entire ceremony. Representing a significant moment in their lives as young adults, the KO3 boys also cried openly during the final presentation of their leaving certificates. Graduations are tearful events for Japanese students as they represent an appropriate forum to express strong feelings. The reality of leaving friends and teachers behind was emotional. They were moving on to the next chapter of their lives and students hugged their friends tightly as the ceremony ended.

The graduation ceremony at JIS in 2018 had been a surprisingly sombre affair, and I had unknowingly gone against convention having worn green, standing out like a leprechaun at a funeral. The ceremony was held in the largest teaching room, which resembled a grand university lecture hall with its lectern and ascending rows of seats.

The graduation format and order of events was the same every year, only the colour of the pamphlet paper changed from pink to yellow and a few of the names inside. Beginning in the morning and finishing just before lunch, it was conducted in Japanese and English to give the students a chance to show off their language skills to their parents who had been ushered into the middle rows for the best view. After singing the Japanese and British national anthems and a brief speech of praise and well-wishing from the incredibly elderly headmaster, the third year students were presented with their high school graduation certificates. This year, the class had been unusually small with eight students in total and only one girl. I had only known five of the eight, as students were allowed to leave the school for their final term to prepare for university exams in Japan. The certificates were beautiful and ornate; a single embossed piece of paper to represent their three-year journey. I watched that morning as they were hand written by Marin, a flamboyant long-time English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and cultural studies teacher. Marin brought in her own set of traditional Japanese calligraphy brushes and inks every year for this special occasion. She complained about her aching back in good humour as she hunched over the meeting room table in artistic concentration.

The students collected their certificates, each individually called out to the front, bowing deeply to the headmaster, standing to receive the scroll, and then bowing again with arms outstretched holding the certificate. Following this, the Minister and Consul-General from the Embassy of Japan spoke about students' bright futures, after which a school alumnus, who now worked for a renowned movie studio, reminisced on his time at the school. While the second-year class president, Koshi, thanked the leavers for their support, friendship and their success as role models, the third years cried openly. Lots of singing ensued as the tearful first and second year

students stood up from their seats to warble a heartfelt Japanese pop ballad in farewell, accompanied by the piano. The leavers then sang a song back to the younger years, voices wavering and choked. Teachers sat at the front of the theatre behind the lectern and dabbed their cheeks. Mothers cried into handkerchiefs in the parents' rows. One mother had hidden a make-up sponge into her handkerchief, so as she motioned to wipe her nose with the cloth she was powdering it to a less pink hue. After the songs there was the presentation of the graduation gift, something which every graduating class's parents contributed towards each year and the students presented to the school as a sign of gratitude. Previous gifts had included trees for the garden by the back of the manor, and the graduation gowns and mortarboards which had since become traditional to wear. That year's gift was a set of wooden picnic benches for the courtyards so that students could eat outside when the weather was nice.

As I walked back to the theatre from the courtyard with Kasumi, Mihiro and Mei for the second ceremony, Marin rushed to join us, black and white skirt swishing and heeled boots clacking on the stones. In her fifties, she was a larger than life presence among the teachers with her highly fashionable and elegant clothes, convertible BMW and gregarious demeanour. She beamed at me and laughed.
" Not what you expected right? I'm sure it's very different from what you're used to, much more serious and sad!"

And Marin was right. I realised as I sat in the second ceremony for KO1 and KO2 that there were many things about JIS of which I had been unaware, including how procedural and serious Japanese graduation ceremonies were, especially compared to the usual atmosphere of the school. It was during this second ceremony, as Robert

was translating some of the relevant speeches that were in Japanese to me, that I asked him about some of the parts I had found confusing during the brief reprieve of trophy and certificate collections.

“Are all of these awards for sport? What about subjects?”

“Ah, we don’t actually have academic awards for students. The ones being presented are all for sports achievements, the cups are for the football players. We only have the one award for best English.”

Robert smiled in his wry way and went back to scanning the rows of students, ready to wake up any drifters with a pointed stare and a few quiet words of discipline from our row at the back. A self-confessed cynic, he was not fond of the ceremonies anymore, describing them as quite boring after five years of the same.

“They are just too similar and organised. There’s no room for humour or spontaneity” he told me flatly as we stood in the blooming garden after the ceremony and watched the students throw their mortar boards into the spring sun.

This brief exchange put into place a few of peculiarities of the school that became apparent during my first three months of fieldwork. Traditionally, awards are a large part of the Japanese graduation ceremony, so why were there so few here and why were none of them for academic achievement? What I had thought was merely a resignation on the part of the teachers was actually a well-established and acknowledged acceptance of the academic mediocrity of the school itself and of many of the students. The school did not promote a sense of academic pride, they did not give out academic awards, they did not talk about the academic record of the school, and the only major recognitions students would receive during their time at JIS was for community service and sportsmanship. The lack of emphasis on rewarding and acknowledging students’ academic achievements was not the standard in schools in

Japan, as Robert later explained to me. JIS really was, as teachers kept telling me, not a “normal” Japanese school.

A Learning Environment: JIS

In his analysis of contemporary Japanese education, Cave notes that while most high schools in Japan offer a regular academic program, “nominally, all such programs follow the same curriculum, but there are large differences between the level of difficulty of regular programs at higher-ranking and lower-ranking schools” (2014:285). Due to this intense stratification of high schools in Japan, it is incredibly competitive to gain a place at the higher-ranking high schools and their entrance exams are difficult, requiring intense revision and reliance on the attendance of *juku* (academic cram schools) after school hours (Okada 2016). Robert had told me at our very first meeting that students went to JIS primarily to avoid this competitive admissions system. JIS, therefore, provided an easier entrance into university in Japan as the school was part of a larger university group which allowed students to funnel through from their affiliated high school, with the only admission hurdle being an interview instead of examinations. As such, JIS was not competitive to attend, it required no entrance exams and it almost guaranteed a path to university which did not require academic merit.

Despite this, students’ practical reasons for attending JIS were varied, such as parents working abroad in the UK or because they had attended international schools in the past and wished to maintain their English level. The students themselves also explained their attendance to me in ways that supported easier attendance of university and lack of academic competition, but that were contrary to

the school's stated mission to create global citizens with international opportunities. This was apparent in the answers I received back from the surveys I circulated on students' school experiences, most significantly from male KO1 and KO3 students. Shiro and Kyo from KO1 wrote "it's easier to study here and I can go to university in Japan without taking an entrance exam" and the "academic level of this school suits me". It turned out that in fact many male students had no plans to study abroad, and did not see themselves working abroad in the future either. Though by the end of the year, some had changed their minds, seemingly more open to working outside of Japan. By the end of my fieldwork at JIS, only a handful of students, mainly girls in KO3 such as Kasumi, Mei, Mihiro, Risa and Fumika, still expressed plans to leave Japan for work or study at some point in the future. The choice to attend university outside of Japan was split dramatically along gendered lines, with male students far less inclined to move abroad for any reason and something they had apparently not even considered when I asked about it during interviews, apart from Seijin a KO2 student. Male students also tended to explain their attendance to me in terms of easy access to university in Japan, after which they would apply for secure professional employment, something which they mentioned far more than their female counterparts.

The JAOS 2019 Statistical Report on Japanese Studying Abroad conducted by the Japanese Association of Overseas Students (JOAS) in association with the Japan Student Services Organisation (JASSO), estimated that in 2018 there were around 200,000 Japanese students studying abroad. This figure is significantly more than previous estimations of around 80,000 by MEXT and the OECD, as it takes into account not only students in tertiary education, but also those who are in secondary education, or are studying abroad through a university programme, as well as adults

abroad for language learning purposes. Unlike their neighbours South Korea and China, Japan has a comparatively low number of students studying abroad, with the 2012 study of student mobility by the OECD concluding that "Asians account for 52% of all students studying abroad worldwide. In absolute terms, the largest numbers of international students are from China, India and Korea" (2012:24). Analysing OECD data from 2021, in proportional terms, China despite its immense population has nearly three times as many students studying abroad per capita compared to Japan, and Korea has more than seven times as many per capita. A compelling argument for the relative lack of interest in study-abroad programmes or higher education outside of Japan generally, is made by Yoko Kobayashi, Associate Professor in the department of Human Sciences and Cultural Studies at Iwate University, who cites the prevalence and preference of monolingual hiring practices by Japanese corporations and lack of language requirements for working at their international counterparts:

> Furthermore, Japanese companies continue to favour the employment of domestically educated Japanese job seekers over their peers with overseas education and bilingual skills. Not surprisingly, many Japanese male students are unwilling to study abroad or invest in English study more than required because they can access mainstream employment irrespective of their language acquisition and cross-cultural experience. (Kobayashi 2018:732).

This goes a long way to explain the starkly gendered aspirations of students at JIS, where the majority of male students could not contemplate working or studying abroad in the future, despite their current attendance of JIS in the UK. Conversely, female students desired to work or study abroad at some point in the future,

potentially to avoid Japan's discriminatory hiring practices where companies favour monolingual male graduates even for dispatch to their international branches (Kobayashi 2012; Park 2016; Shin 2016). According to the Economist glass ceiling index, Japan ranks second worst of all OECD nations for representation of women in managerial positions, surpassed only by South Korea (The Economist 2019). I would suggest that the disparity of opportunities between men and women in Japan went some way to shape JIS students' rationale for attending the school and their aspirations for the future. It appeared that male students were set on pursuing the typical Japanese university-to-'salaryman' career path, whereas female students were far more inclined to study or work internationally. This was also illustrated by the divergence in English language ability between the male and female students; teachers regularly pointed out that their male students were uninterested in improving their English, while female students excelled.

Whilst students had made it clear that attending JIS allowed them to more easily attend the affiliated university in Japan, I did not anticipate the lax attitudes of many JIS teachers towards their students' learning and behaviour. Students openly slept in lessons, frequently took days off and missed school due to claimed illness or tiredness and often did not complete their homework or lesson work. Many students half-heartedly hid their phones under the table during lessons to play games or message on Line (the Japanese equivalent to WhatsApp). And for the most part, with the exception of a few members of staff, including Robert, teachers turned a blind eye to this behaviour. With so few teachers willing to reprimand students, enforce rules or re-engage them in lesson material, students took advantage of the opportunity to avoid work and relax. This is not to characterise every lesson as dull or disengaging, there were many enjoyable lessons where students played Pictionary in English,

role-played and wrote about social issues. However, the atmosphere of many lessons and teachers more generally, was one of apathy and complacency, not towards the students themselves, but towards their learning. Teachers would provide one-to-one help for students who needed extra tuition, but this was an additional cost and organised separately.

It is this teacher's apathy and the self-awareness of students' perceived 'potential' by others, that led me to question the logics that underpinned these beliefs. Not only because it turned out that many students desired to attend reputable universities, but because it created a lack of academic confidence in students when they discussed the future with me and a sense of trepidation and anxiety which was not as present at GCS.

Achievement Ideology in Two Schools

"Our students have, what you might call, 'high-aspirations'…"

- Secondary School Head Teacher at GCS during our first meeting

"Most students use the school as a route to university without having to take highly competitive entrance exams [in Japan]…the school is not academically brilliant… I wouldn't say the student's have particularly high aspirations…"

- Robert (Head of English) at JIS during our first meeting

Artful Dodgers of "hard work"

The conversation following the first quote above, from the newly appointed head teacher of the GCS secondary school, occurred during a meeting in a small Italian cafe in central London where we were to discuss the possibility of me completing my fieldwork at their school. As previously mentioned, I had already pitched my research to numerous international schools who had hastily rejected my proposition, citing the impossibility of accommodating researchers, or 'safeguarding issues', in their emails to brush me off politely. This particular meeting with the head teacher and another teacher from the school was therefore of substantial importance if my research was to continue as planned. It was February and half term was about to start at GCS. The meeting was a success and the head teacher was almost as keen to have me there as I was to be there, citing interest in student attitudes at the school which I might be able to shed light on. He explained that whilst he found students in the current IBDP years to have "high aspirations", he glanced knowingly to the other teacher present and smiled wryly, "they don't have a very good work ethic".

This was my introduction to what unfolded as one of the main challenges of teaching at GCS - managing students' academic expectations. The other teacher present at the meeting, Miss M, was to become my 'buddy' at GCS, in charge of showing me the ropes and checking in with me on the progress of my research. Over the course of my time at GCS, Miss M also became the teacher who spoke the most frankly and frequently to me about school issues and the tackling of, what she viewed as, problematic student attitudes towards work. Having attended an international school in Switzerland and completed the International Baccalaureate (IB) herself, Miss M would make frequent reference to the studying and revision techniques she had used to do well in her IBDP exams, chastising her students to work harder if they wanted to attain the grades they desired. During our occasional conversations at lunch times, especially during April when DP2 students were going on study leave, she would

anguish over how unprepared her students were for their exams due to their relaxed attitude towards revision and exam practice. Her experiences trying to instil a work ethic of perseverance, dedication and diligence in her students had left her frustrated and sure that their easygoing attitude towards learning was due to their privileged backgrounds, something which had also come across during her studies in Switzerland. Miss M's observations of her students' avoidance of "hard work" and her theorising of their self-confidence, led me to consider the role that school achievement ideology played in the shaping of student attitudes towards success and to consider what kinds of student selves were created in response to this narrative.

During one of our scheduled catch-ups, Miss M described the students undertaking the IBDP who expected to do well without "putting in the effort" as "deluded". The imagining of an easy ride to academic success was viewed as dangerously prevalent, while a few students were recognised as genuinely hard-working and dedicated, the pervasive view was that the majority of IB students at GCS needed to develop a more serious attitude towards their studies. The resilience to teacher criticism and confidence of students compelled me to consider the role that certain forms of privilege play in shaping student self-potentiality. Demerath writes about how local beliefs in the mid-western suburb of Wilton championed the bestowing of authority to young people in order to aid their success at school. He argues that this aspect of the local achievement ideology "led many of these youth to develop a deeply-felt sense of authority that led them to think they knew what is best for them, and to constantly try and exert influence over their lives in and out of school." (2009:43). Local achievement ideology here refers more explicitly to the Wilton way, which he argues "provided an ideological basis for the class-cultural beliefs, identities and practices that characterised its residents' every day lives" (Demerath 2009:30). I

would be cautious to draw too many parallels between GCS and Wilton (and not only because of their geographical separation). Nevertheless, it does raise important questions regarding why students at GCS, not only displayed confidence and authority in their everyday interactions, but also why they retained this confidence when directly challenged by teachers on their academic underachievement. Was there a particular GCS achievement ideology at play? Were family backgrounds of students more important for shaping their behaviours inside school? Or were these intrinsically linked in the production of students' self-potentiality? In this section I will attempt to explicate both GCS and JIS's school achievement ideologies, as well as the impact these had on the development of students' expectations of their futures and self-potentiality in the process.

At GCS the structure and values of the IB already provided the ground-work for the school's achievement ideology. As mentioned previously there were IB learner profiles posted in all classrooms which laid out the core characteristics that the IB aims to develop in students. The profile says "it aims to develop learners who are: Inquirers, Knowledgeable, Thinkers, Communicators, Principled, Open-minded, Caring, Risk-takers, Balanced, Reflective." (IB website 2019). At DP level this was reflected in the mandatory independent research components and the emphasis on community service. The IB emphasises that the learner profile will be necessary beyond academic success and posits these qualities as important for everyone to pursue in order to be well rounded and respectful of themselves and others. While the learner profile provided a structure to the DP course more broadly and dictated elements of its content, it did not constitute the school's achievement ideology so much as inform it. The school level achievement ideology was shaped strongly by teachers including Miss M, the headteacher Mr B and the art teacher Miss P, who

viewed dedication, perseverance, open-mindedness and focus as the key elements to success. These were the qualities teachers most admired in DP students as well as being polite.

A GCS Staff Meeting

These teacher values were made exceptionally clear near the beginning of my research at GCS, when I was invited to attend a staff meeting by Miss M, specifically to discuss the mentoring programme the school was running, whereby teachers were paired with DP students. Each teacher had one to three mentees due to there only being one small class per year, this allowed teachers to provide 1-1 support to students. As Miss M put it "it's really an opportunity to reflect and discuss their plans for the week, how to improve things and well you know, boost their UCAS applications essentially". The weekly meetings focused on aiding students with writing personal statements for university applications, tracking the progress of their CAS (creativity, activity, service) projects and making sure students were doing enough extracurricular activities to stand out on paper to universities. The staff meeting was in the Biology room, just after school had finished for the day and Mr M the film teacher and head of pastoral care was running the session. Mr M explained that they would be discussing how each student's mentoring was progressing, but that their subject teachers could also add to the discussion. Mr M then wrote the name of a student down on a piece of paper.

"So let's start. Who has Francesca?"

"Me. Things seem to be going well, she's very motivated." Miss M replied.

This format continued as they made their way through all the DP students with the teacher mentoring the student giving feedback on their progress, or lack thereof. The discussion of students' goals and whether they would achieve them, what they

needed to improve on and who was a lost cause, was surprisingly frank and I felt like a student who had accidentally wandered into the staff room where I should not be. "He's being unrealistic with that work ethic" chimed one of the teachers. I was not prepared for the very apparent favouritism mostly based on their studiousness and likelihood to achieve academically.

"Who has Raphael?" Mr M waved a piece of paper with the name written in bold purple.

"I do. Of course he's amazing!" the English teacher cooed. There was a round of agreement and exclamations of "He's a star!", "Just a perfect student, he's a smart one.", "He'll go far!"

I leaned over the bench subtly to ask Miss M who Raphael was, surprised by the level of praise he was receiving.

"Oh he's just a great kid" she smiled.

Raphael turned out to be a joggers and hoodie wearing Australian DP1 student. His family had moved to the UK from Australia for work, his father was white and his mother was a Pacific Islander, something which he spoke of with pride. Raphael was very popular with the teachers and unanimously liked and respected for his dedicated approach to work, good grades, down-to-earth attitude and thoughtfulness. According to the teachers at the meeting he was just a great student, someone to be admired as a model pupil and was bound to succeed in life after school. The same could not be said for his girlfriend in the same class and teachers were more than vocal about their wariness of the relationship, hoping that they did not break-up before exams or it might negatively impact his grades.

The qualities that students like Raphael embodied, underpinned the core achievement ideology prevalent among teachers: that hard work and respect for your education was the key to success in school. It was, however, at odds with many other

students' achievement ideologies, as their individual goals shifted and their belief in their own autonomy led to increased confidence in the fact that teachers were there solely to support them. This is not to say that students did not understand the value of hard work, they just wanted to "take shortcuts" teachers complained, and having said teachers work harder to deliver content was a successful strategy.

Jason, Raphael's classmate and friend, was one such colourful individual. Japanese by heritage and born in Tokyo, he grew up in the USA and was a proud Floridian with significant time spent in NYC (a story I expand on in Chapter 5). Jason's love of American designer streetwear burnt strong. Supreme, Nike, Adidas, Off-White, HUF. He would talk loudly and self-righteously about which had the best current collections and which were "whack". However, trainers were where his entrepreneurial spirit and passion for fashion really coalesced. Jason would buy limited edition Air Jordans, wear them with extreme care for a few weeks, then sell them online as new when the limited editions had sold out and the market price was high. He was incredibly proud of his ability to turn over a profit whilst also wearing the latest designs to school, as there was no strict dress code or uniform, something which Mr M was trying to change. As a rule of thumb, you could normally hear Jason before you saw him at any given time, barring when he was wearing his air pods in an attempt to feign studiousness in class. If there was a conversation going on when work was meant to be done, Jason would be part of it. His extroverted energy wreaked small havoc in film lessons, rubbing off on his five other classmates including Raphael, so that even in such a tiny class, Mr M had to constantly refocus their attention to work. If there was work that Jason could avoid, avoid he would, especially if it was for the new ESS (environment systems and societies) teacher.

“Jason. Where’re the assignments you said you’d catch up on? Mathis has. You haven’t uploaded anything yet!”

“Er what assignments?” Leaning back, Jason checked his laptop and sipped on an iced Starbucks which, now the weather was warmer, he was rarely without.

“Nah, I definitely put something up there. For sure.” He shrugged defiantly and crossed his ankles where he had rested his Air Jordan clad feet on the empty chair next to him.

Confused, Mr P pulled up the online portal for submitting homework, projecting the evidence of no received work onto the whiteboard.

“Look, I haven’t got anything. I’ve been chasing you for weeks now, so frustrating. You know, you can start catching up in detention.”

“Like okay, bro.”

“Don’t call me bro” Mr P huffed “that’s so disrespectful…”

“What’s with the attitude bro?” Jason put his hands up defensively, tone challenging.

This exchange may have led to Jason’s removal from the lesson, but it was a success for him in that he never caught up fully on the missed homework he owed Mr P. While the resistance to completing set work was quite prevalent, Jason provides an (extreme) example of a student achievement ideology at work: to succeed, hard work is absolutely not necessary, success is getting good grades with the least work possible. Circumventing work that did not officially contribute to Jason’s final IB grades was a success. Feigning to have no knowledge of homework, pushing teachers buttons, forcing teachers to recap content students did not pay attention to the first time. These were just some of the ways in which students avoided thinking for themselves, in turn compelling teachers to “spoon-feed” lesson material as Miss M described it. Jason’s banterous and sometimes antagonistic relationships with

teachers meant that he received more help and attention, effectively allowing him to get away with completing less work overall, and what he did complete was rarely without the teachers or his peers' input. Students' almost economical view of their time was at odds with the fact that they, more often than not, missed their desired grades. Which, inevitably, led to the question which I heard many iterations of, and very frequently during my time at GCS - 'What do I need to do to get X grade, specifically?' The answer from teachers was usually the same. Pay attention and work harder.

This also fed into the belief of some teachers as incompetent or lazy, when they only committed limited amounts of their time, and conversely led to the praise of those who were perceived to go above and beyond their role (e.g. giving up weekends and evenings to mark late work). Jason's avoidance of "hard work" as his teachers put it, was quite easy when he could utilise the resources at his disposal, including smaller classes, one-to-one help on homework, mentoring sessions, additional classes, private subject tutoring, and out-of-hours support from teachers. I would argue that this certainly was not the case for all of the DP students, but nonetheless, this ethos did contribute to the general, complacent attitudes of students towards their learning and lack of fear of punishment for uncompleted work. Whilst a few students, such as Raphael, shared the achievement ideology of the teachers, others turned to more creative strategies to excel.

A regular discussion that took place between Jemimah, Francesca and Marcella during free periods in the common room, was how to do the least work to get the best grade. They would strategise in the DP common room about how to maximise their success efficiently, including sharing homework, writing revision timetables, reading

marking schemes, and limiting their time on social media. Not that these were always adhered to, especially by Jemimah who would spend most of her free periods and lunch times in the common room chatting animatedly, one earbud out, seamlessly drawing the whole room into conversation or debate, and distracting herself from work.

Self-Taught

On an afternoon in May, Jemimah scrolled through her instagram feed, laughing as she showed me the photos Raphael had recently suggested she was cat-fishing with, and commenting on how little she really used the platform. Fahad came to sit with us, as usual wearing one of his £600 oversized streetwear sweatshirts paired with square thick-lensed prescription glasses. He and Jemimah had been friends since the Primary Years Programme (PYP) and loved to annoy each other. He looked over at her screen and shook his head jokingly "So vain."

"What?! No, I am not. Like I barely post." She flipped her braids over shoulder and shoved him away. He sat down in a chair by the table next to us grinning.

Turning to me "you know what, high-key most of the accounts I follow are for like gynaecology and obstetrics. I watch so many birthing videos omg." She looked over to Fahad and we laughed as he cringed in distaste.

"So weird. Why?!" Fahad asked, half curious, half horrified.

"You want to study medicine right, obstetrics specifically?" I chimed in.

"Yeah exactly, so I think it's a good way to learn and become familiar with birthing and you know it's amazing to watch. Fahad you wanna see? Have you ever seen a woman give birth?" Jemimah leaned over with her phone teasingly.

“No, why would I? Fine.” He shrugged and Jemimah scrolled to a video and walked over to show him.

After about ten seconds of morbid fascination Fahad covered his face in horror, “ugh, that’s so nasty, why would you watch these?!”

“It’s natural!” Jemimah was hunched over laughing.

“You were birthed by someone too” I reminded him.

“I’ll never look at a vagina the same way.”

Jemimah and I howled at his comment.

What I want to highlight from this exchange is the incredibly creative ways that Jemimah became more familiar with her chosen career path; learning the terminology used and becoming familiar with the process of birth. She viewed this as a way to stay informed, learn and bring herself a few steps closer to her career goal. However, she often struggled to work if there was an opportunity to socialise. Closer to the exam period Jemimah uncharacteristically forced herself to sit in the empty classrooms above the common room during free periods as a way to ensure she revised. By the end of May 2019, and with their predicted grades in hand, the disparity between what students wanted to achieve and what they were currently achieving was becoming more and more obvious, causing anxiety and a re-examination of their achievement ideologies and study behaviours.

These conflicting achievement ideologies are then complicated further when we consider the role of privilege in their expression. In anthropological terms, achievement ideology can be described as the belief of how one succeeds. For example Demerath (2009) suggests that broadly American schools, such as those in the Midwest where he conducted his research, promote the achievement ideology

that one can focus solely on hard work and education in order to overcome barriers and secure success. This is problematic in that it fundamentally flattens the other socio-economic, gender, class and race-based factors that can realistically disrupt the pursuit of goals. However, for students such as Jemimah, despite being a Black Angolan woman, she did not problematise race and gender to the same extent as female JIS students. From Jemimah's stories of her childhood in South Africa after her parents emigrated from Angola, she was more than aware of racial inequalities, nevertheless, whenever we discussed her future goals she never presented race or gender as a barrier to her personal achievement.

I found that teachers at GCS would still perpetuate a form of American-style achievement ideology to students; they preached hard work and a studious attitude as essential if students wanted to reach their goals. However, teachers did acknowledge that academic success was not the only form of achievement and encouraged students in their aspirations, whatever they happened to be. Since the GCS teachers viewed students as economically and often socially-privileged, most other barriers to success such as race-based discrimination were not a consideration, and underachievement could be chalked up to a deficit in work ethic. The sentiment that 'the world is your oyster', if you apply yourself, was the view, I would say, that most aptly summarised teachers' attitudes towards students' reaching their goals. Alongside this, teachers also held their own personal beliefs about students' latent capacities which often conflicted with students' self-potentiality. IBDP students' awareness of their privilege varied but by majority they were aware of their relative wealth and social advantage, however, I doubt the extent to which they understood just how this impacted their real-world opportunities or attitude towards their learning. IBDP students' self-potentiality was high in the sense that they believed

that they could reach the goals that they had set for themselves, regardless of the reality of their work ethic or external barriers, which, ironically, may have limited their actual potentiality and reaching of goals.

The Struggle to Success at JIS

As explored in previous chapters, and as the quote at the beginning of this section exemplifies, attitudes and expectations of success at JIS were significantly different from those at GCS. The overarching socially defined measures of success in Japan permeated the school. The school followed a modified version of the MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) approved curriculum but their focus on English language acquisition meant that their timetable was language heavy compared to high-schools in Japan. Hina, introduced in the opening chapter, an enthusiastic second-year student known for her organisation and reliability as class-president, lamented to me that she missed the cleaning time that schools in Japan set aside for students to work together and clean their classroom and school. Hina had been talking to me about her time at school in Osaka during the language development after school session that I ran for students on Tuesdays. She missed the collective responsibility of clearing up with her classmates and the value of collaboration that it taught. It would seem that these small deviations in the structure of the school day indicated a shift in the values that were being emphasised to students, altering what Hina viewed as core elements of her educational experience. There were, of course, other collaborative ventures that the school hosted such as the school fête and Japan Day, but the everyday teamwork was something which Hina missed. JIS was considered to operate very differently from high-schools

in Japan, this was in fact often explicitly stated by teachers and students. These differences included a strong focus on English language development, sports and football coaching, lack of student-led maintenance activities, and at least in theory, an emphasis on developing international awareness and global mindedness. The objective of the school was to help students develop skills, qualities and qualifications which would enable them to successfully pursue diverse paths, and internationally, which did not necessarily require excellent academic achievement or attendance of top universities. However, where JIS diverged from high-schools in Japan in its curriculum and school aims, students and staff had not parted ways with the achievement ideology and academic measures of success that Japanese high schools promoted. In this respect the school had not developed its own local achievement ideology to reflect its different educational approaches, opportunities and emphases. Rather, success at JIS was judged on the ability of students to weave themselves back into the socially dominant narrative of academic achievement in Japan, and indeed back into Japanese society, despite the fact that their opportunity and ability to pursue this narrative was somewhat pre-defined and potentially limited by their very attendance of JIS.

As such, JIS students were generally considered to be 'unacademic' or not particularly high-achievers, this sentiment seemed to be pervasive regardless of the reasons for students actual attendance of the school. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, JIS students' behaviour and outlook seemed in complete contrast to the majority of GCS students as they lacked confidence in their academic work and talked about their university options with uncertainty and trepidation. During the university application period of 2018/19, as I read through students' personal statements and cover letters, I became increasingly aware of the self-doubt that

surrounded not only university choices, but the students' belief in their own ability to attend their chosen courses. The vast majority of anxiety around the writing of personal statements came from female students, who almost exclusively sought out my help to edit and talk through their university applications. Reading students' statements was an insightful experience as it became clear they had a strong and developed view of how Japanese people were perceived outside of Japan, something which they wanted to change. Fumika was especially articulate in her statement about challenging stereotypes of Japanese people abroad, twisting the sleeves of her blue school jumper in her hands as she voiced her frustrations once I had finished reading. Having completed her GCSEs in the UK and lived here for almost 6 years she felt it was important for Japanese people working abroad to combat negative impressions by setting a good example.

> *Japanese students are reluctant to give their own opinions to others, whereas British students are willing to share their ideas. This results in Japanese people appearing shy or reticent. By learning to discuss with others, Japanese students can develop skills that will be useful when they work in a global society and need to give their opinion. If they don't learn these skills, they may be disadvantaged in situations where their input and opinion is important, and this may be viewed negatively by people from other countries.* (Fumika 2018 personal statement draft).

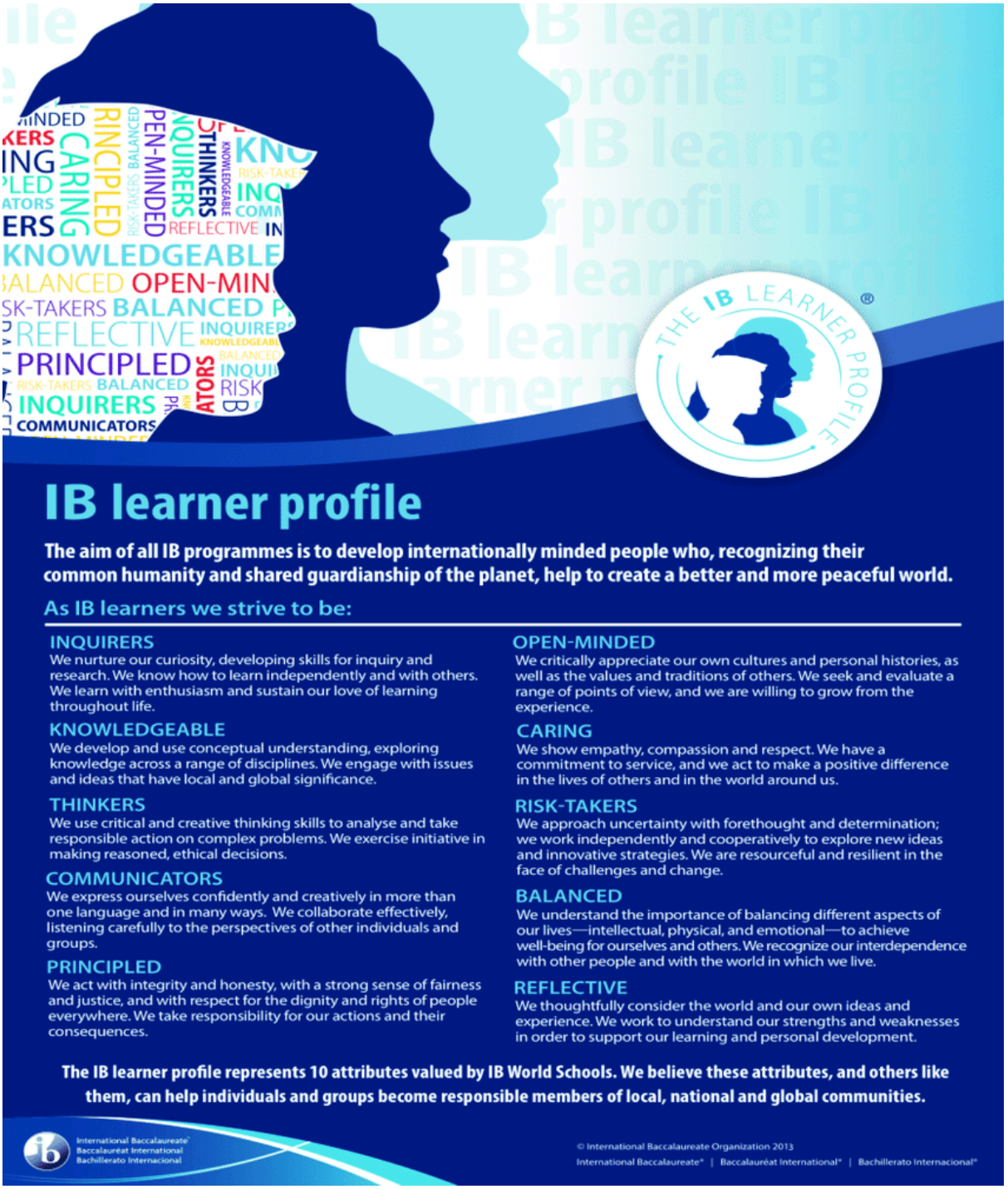
Despite her acknowledgement of racial stereotyping abroad, Fumika blamed the common style of Japanese teaching, where the teacher would dictate from the front of the classroom, for discouraging discussions in class, which she believed then led to students not developing their own opinions or practising giving them to others. Her

concern for how she and other Japanese people were thought of abroad is evident, and she believed strongly in the need for working abroad to challenge these assumptions and represent Japan positively. The construction of 'Asianess' and race based stereotyping was a common theme in my discussions with students who wanted to work or study abroad, as they often cited a responsibility to make sure Japanese people were properly represented on the world stage. Another prevalent belief, expressed most strongly by female students, was how important speaking English would be not only for their future employability outside of Japan, but for the future of Japan as a global economic power. As Fumika contemplated in her statement:

> *A more effective or practical approach would be for children to learn how to communicate in English combined with arming them with cultural skills, so they have the knowledge to connect and communicate appropriately with people from other countries. I believe globalization of students is the key to the growth of international companies.* (Fumika 2018 personal statement draft).

From this it could be said that JIS students had developed a much lower self-potentiality, more persistently female students, as they either worried they would not reach the goals they had set for themselves, pursued more easily achievable goals, or over time expressed that they had no goals at all. I will expand on this further in the next section when discussing Kasumi's school experiences. In the next section I look to consider how the achievement ideologies in the two schools and teacher attitudes towards students' prospects, significantly impacted their development of self-potentiality and was underpinned by student imaginaries of the

global. I will also be exploring how privilege might intersect with school achievement ideologies in different ways to create senses of authority and an ideal of success without hard work for some students, and for others self-doubt, as they found themselves without the innate abilities teachers stated were necessary for 'success'.



1. IB Learner Profile Poster (ibo.org website)

Privilege, Authority and Self-Doubt

As studies on inequality in education have shown, there is a strong link between student confidence, entitlement and outspokenness with privilege. In her research on student inequality in the US, Lareau (2003) discovered that middle-class parenting strategies which emphasised the importance of the child's role and opinion in navigating their education, and socio-economic privilege, led young people to develop a strong sense of authority. Although many of these studies have been conducted in public American schools and with a more socio-economically diverse student body (Lareau 2015; Howard 2008), I believe that there is much that can be learnt from an analysis of student behaviour. I therefore seek to delve into how student behaviour and self-potentiality was shaped by socio-economic status and school achievement ideologies, and in the next chapter, how this is further complicated by attitudes towards cosmopolitanism.

One of the key questions that developed from a consideration of how privilege shapes student behaviour is: how do students develop and mobilise their relationships with teachers? At GCS students had many opportunities to engage with adults and authority figures, often on an equal footing where they felt able to make demands of staff. The school promoted confidence in stating your opinions and debating with others as excellent preparation for university settings, where students will be independent learners and responsible for their own education. The school's emphasis on developing personal opinions was prevalent to an extent at JIS as well, however, as I was told by many of the students, it did not come naturally to them as it was counter to what they had been encouraged to do in the Japanese education system.

The ability to take responsibility for their own learning and develop independent research skills (IB website 2019) are key tenets of the IB, designed to prepare the students for university. As teachers constantly stressed - higher education required the ability to self-manage. However, GCS students used multiple strategies to push the responsibility for their learning back onto their teachers, ostensibly transferring the responsibility for their academic success, as well as the blame if this success failed to materialise, to teachers. Exclaiming that they had not been taught something that was on a test, arguing with teachers if they did not understand part of the lesson even though they had been talking throughout the explanation, ignoring advice on revision and not completing homework so that they did not understand lesson material. These all tended to lead to one outcome - the teacher refusing to take responsibility for students' claimed ignorance and blasé attitude, whilst going above and beyond their role to repeat teaching, re-explain concepts and 'hand-hold' students through tasks.

There were many other ways in which teachers were unwittingly manipulated to aid students, where students in the IBDP at GCS mobilised their relationships with teachers to their own ends, including securing recommendations, support for applications, and capitalising on a sense of obligation towards students when pressuring teachers to mark late work. Students were also allowed to use first names of teachers (e.g. Miss Paula) which was meant to make students feel closer to teachers and create a less formal boundary and a sense of familiarity with teachers as trustworthy authority figures. The emphasis on developing individual opinions,

familiarity with teachers and belief that teachers were responsible for their learning, led to many issues with the conduct of students towards teachers. IBDP students challenged the content of the classes by interrupting the teacher, argued over homework assignments, made feeble excuses for missing deadlines and watched Netflix shows during classes. Confident students would waste time in class arguing with the teacher, most frequently and ironically, over their disrespectful behaviour and informality when speaking to the teacher. GCS IBDP students wielded authority in the classroom, effectively disrupting the hierarchy that teachers fought to maintain. Student behaviour at GCS seemed to corroborate Lareau's (2003) conjecture that socio-economic privilege in education contributed to the development of students' sense of authority. However, the positionality of students' parents as middle-class is something that becomes loose and ill-defined in the context of diverse international student bodies, where class status is often locally articulated and understood. Here I would like to turn to the useful and relevant term proposed by Hagen Koo and discussed in chapter 1, which would describe students at JIS and GCS as the 'global middle class'. The international school acts as a site of reproduction of class aspirations and supports 'global middle class' formation by acting as an early networking ground, geared towards socialising students for success in cosmopolitan environments.

The student identity that emerges from this analysis is one shaped by the student achievement ideology that I encountered at GCS. Confidence, authority and an emphasis on the development of specific aspirations over work ethic were the common elements of student identity and seemed foundational in the students' achievement ideology. Student socio-economic privilege worked to support this identity through access to school and parental resources, allowing students to

develop a self-potentiality that was seemingly quite detached from their academic achievements or attitude towards school work. In contrast, the low self-potentiality that characterised student identities at JIS could be said to be informed by teacher attitudes towards students' prospects as well as an exclusionary achievement ideology that required academic success.

Privilege and Self-Doubt

Kasumi had moved from Tokyo to JIS for the three years of high-school. Shorter than the other girls in her year she kept her hair shoulder length. A sleek bob which rarely deviated a few centimetres in length, coupled with a thick fringe and the occasional bright or fuzzy hair clip. Her boyfriend had graduated from JIS the previous year and Kasumi was determined to stay in the UK to attend university so she could be near him. Kasumi was the most outspoken of the girls in KO3 and we got along well because of it. She was not afraid to challenge ideas in lessons or try to get out of homework by reasoning with her teachers. She could be seen at the beginning of lessons religiously applying the sheer pink lipstick that had become popular with all of the third-year girls, and carrying a blanket to lessons during the winter. There seemed to be an unspoken consensus among the girls at JIS that they would not wear tights, no matter how cold it became. When I asked about it, Kasumi told me "socks are much cuter". And so, from October to February the blanket came to class.

Legs crossed under her, Kasumi sat opposite me on a picnic bench in the school courtyard. Laptop in hand, phone in the other, she pointed to the foundation course page on the SOAS website, leaning over excitedly.

"SOAS have art history too, it's very good!"

Her university choices thus far had included Birmingham, Sussex and the University of East Anglia (UEA), none of which she was set on. I had pointed out SOAS previously as another alternative with a good foundation course and a large Japanese faculty, student body and active Japanese society. Since then, she had been very focused on researching SOAS as a potential university to apply to. Later that day in the staff room I mentioned to Robert and Marin how excited Kasumi had become about this new option. Robert cautioned me not to get her hopes up too much as the language requirements might be too high. Kasumi had to achieve a certain level in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam to be accepted onto any foundation course in the UK. Whilst this active discouragement was aimed at me and might seem innocuous, I believe it is a clear representation of the achievement ideology of many of the teachers. The low expectations of students became an issue in the way it created self-doubt in students where before there had been confidence. When I was nearing the end of my fieldwork at JIS in February 2019, I asked Kasumi how her personal statement was progressing since we had planned the draft together. She looked at me slightly sheepish and said that it had been finished, but that she had not written it all herself. Robert later clarified that she had paid for a service through SI-UK to write her personal statement for her. SI-UK or Study in the UK is an organisation that specialises in university applications for international students, and describes itself as a global UK university recruitment agency. SI-UK holds university fairs around the UK which students could attend to meet representatives from various universities and discuss entry requirements as well as the international student experience. Kasumi had visited one of their fairs only a month before.

I questioned whether this was legal and Robert explained that they sent students a questionnaire to fill in so that they could base the personal statement off their

answers, meaning that there was still source material and therefore still constituted the student's work. I asked Kasumi how much she had paid for the service.
"I think it was about £400. It was a bit expensive." She shrugged and looked at the floor. A steep price.

Kasumi, who once had been very confident in her conviction to attend university in the UK, now seemed uncertain that she would meet the basic requirements of entry. Having worked on her applications with her, she was indeed very capable, however, self-doubt had pushed her to pay an extortionate fee for a personal statement with which SI-UK assured her she would be successful. It could be argued that the low self-potentiality, lack of freedom and responsibility at school, went some way to undermine students' independence, lowering their expectations of themselves. However, Kasumi's experiences led me to consider the extent to which economic privilege itself shapes self-confidence and student behaviour. For Kasumi, her economic privilege was not reflected in her behaviour in school in the same way as students at GCS. Her wealth did not foster confidence or a higher self-potentiality but it did mitigate her exposure to failure. Wealth acted as a safety net, or way around the system, JIS itself was promoted as a way into university through unconventional and expensive means. Unlike at GCS, the economic privilege of students attending JIS did not endow the majority of them with particular confidence or authority, though there were exceptions. Instead, it promoted a reliance on wealth as a buffer to perceived failure. The positioning of students within broader narratives of academic achievement in Japan, meant that students found it difficult to develop an alternative achievement ideology, one that was not premised on traditional academic attainment, that would allow for them to be successful.

Conclusion

At GCS there was not one dominant model of success among students, but there was an identifiable achievement ideology that guided their behaviour and attitude in school. The endgame for students was to successfully pursue their chosen career or interests. Whilst teachers wanted to aid students in achieving the best grades possible, they respected student career choices that did not require 'high' academic achievement. The difficulty for teachers arose when students' self-potentiality was much greater than the amount of work students put in to, and teachers believed was required for, the achievement of their goals.

Students at JIS and GCS were very financially comfortable, however, as this chapter demonstrates, this did not always translate into confidence, but also doubt and ambivalence (which I discuss further in Chapter 6). In some cases students even displayed reliance on their socioeconomic privilege to overcome these feelings of doubt, as Kasumi's story demonstrates. Additionally at GCS, students such as Jason exhibited extreme confidence and charisma, however, this social presentation might be considered a 'performance of confidence', one which should not be used to obscure students' potential emotional precarity and investment in their futures, or the psychic burdens of aspiration. As will be explored in Chapters 5 & 6 students' self-potentiality and personal journeys towards the future were informed not only by their relationships with others but by the structural constraints which bound them and within feelings of ambivalence, doubt and affective debt. Jason himself had a difficult past and these experiences came to shape how he imagined his future, regardless of whether this was undermined by his behaviour in school.

Students at JIS had internalised expectations and importance of academic achievement typical of the Japanese schooling system. Despite the fact that the school's purpose was to facilitate the development of other skill sets and credentials, including internationalised aspirations vis-a-vis learning English and gaining cosmopolitan cultural capital, teachers did little to encourage students to pursue these as realistic goals, nor did they dispel the idea that it was necessary to participate in this competitive market driven achievement narrative to be successful. Students such as Fumika and Kasumi, who I discussed here, were consumed by worry when they did achieve above their own expectations. Fumika was particularly worried as she was anxious that she would be unable to keep up with the other students on her course academically, as I discuss further in chapter 6. Students at JIS framed their own achievements and valued their aspirations against the broader narratives of Japanese success, rather than viewing them as legitimate goals in their own right. What constituted a good university, a good job and a good school was not relative to one's abilities, but rather, in the minds of students, there was a strict hierarchy against which their achievements could be judged.

Students at GCS, guided by their own achievement ideologies, viewed their goals as legitimate and somewhat independent of the wider, societal framework of what constituted 'success'. This is not to say that the self-potentialities, hopes and desires of the GCS students were not shaped by their own economic privilege and the ideologies and pedagogies of educational achievement, they were. But the extent to which students then further judged their individual goals by, and shaped their self-potentiality to match these same standards was limited, even when it meant that their behaviours and choices were counterproductive to achieving their goals.

Chapter 4

Everything, Everywhere, All at Once: Navigating Cosmopolitanism at School

Introduction

Whilst students were not exploring the multiversal versions of themselves as the title of this chapter might suggest, they were embroiled in a messy, non-linear, and confusing search for what could be. For some young people the search did not last very long and hearts and hopes were set on particular professions, universities, and lifestyles, some already forged by their families, where others were still figuring things out or contending with rude 'wake up' calls from their teachers and parents. There is nothing quite like school to entice a young person to imagine their future, or consider who or what they might become, as "the time of education orients continuously forward, toward the immediate and near-term future, sometimes relentlessly" (Stambach 2017:2). As such, school is inherently future oriented, whatever that future might look like, and this could generate contradiction, contention, and sometimes complacency in students.

International education has become synonymous with concepts such as 'global citizenship', 'cosmopolitanism', and 'global mindedness'. Whilst these terms are used lavishly in marketing materials and school campaigns (as discussed in Chapter 2),

they can also be found entrenched in academic discourse and research on the ideological and philosophical basis of international schooling and its teachings. However, well rounded these concepts seem in theory, the reality of creating aspirational global citizens in classrooms is not as linear nor as predictable as international schools might suggest. Throughout this chapter, I instead draw attention to the messiness (Law 2003) of students' engagement with these concepts, and the ways that this messiness manifested in everyday school life. In this chapter, I look to highlight the contradictions, the burdens, and at times the ambivalence, that students showed towards becoming cosmopolitan in ways that aligned with the schools' missions. This is not to say that there were not students who could be viewed as ideal global citizens in the eyes of the schools, but that by paying due attention to the points of conflict and disjuncture that they experienced, we are able to see how structural barriers shaped students' ability to embody specific forms cosmopolitanism.

This chapter will also problematise the view of cosmopolitanism as transferable and transnational cultural capital, offering international and social mobility and employability to those privileged enough to have been socialised in international spaces. I do this by exploring the limits of international schools' ability to provide students with access to the global, considering what it meant to be 'international' at each school, and the schools reliance on the desirability and proximity to global English. Problematising this view is essential to our understanding of what is at stake more broadly for the global middle class who are currently exploited by this system, and challenges us to consider a more complex picture of educational privilege. In the following discussion I will explore what being 'international' and 'cosmopolitan' meant in the contexts of the schools, including the ways that gender and racial

politics shaped student behaviours and choices, opportunities and future employability. As Woodward & Skrbiš point out, “being cosmopolitan is itself a culturally located competency, perhaps even a strategy, that affords individuals the capacity to see, identify, label, use and govern dimensions of social difference in ways which reproduce patterns of cultural power.” (2018:132). As such, I explore the complex personal circumstances and positionalities of the students with whom I worked at JIS and GCS. Although as we will see, cosmopolitanism was understood, practised and embodied in radically different ways by students at both schools as they navigated contradictory school narratives on its value and resisted attempts to engage with the schools’ ‘transformative’ pedagogy.

Why Cosmopolitanism?

As discussed in Chapter 1, ‘cosmopolitanism’ is a term I have chosen to use to describe the various ways students talked about being ‘international’, 'globally minded’ or ‘gaining a broad view’, as well as an attempt to capture behaviours in which students engaged. Though it could be argued the term is vague and capacious, in the context of my comparative research, it has left room for ‘emic’ notions of what cosmopolitanism *could be* to emerge, particularly in contexts where this is already an assumed identity or an institutionally foundational ideology. It has also enabled me to appreciate the transformative intent of educational environments, and take seriously the ways in which students may view cosmopolitan cultural capital as something that has the *potential* to change their lives, or as skills that will be necessary to their futures. I am therefore more concerned with what students believed cosmopolitan cultural capital could do for them, and what it could not, and

how this manifested in their daily lives (Weenink 2008). This is not to suggest that the word cosmopolitan was never used by the students I worked with, nor that it never came up, but that it was one of many words students used to describe a sense of being or becoming international. What is most important to note here is the different ways students at my respective fieldsites mentioned or discussed this concept at all. At JIS, it was something students mentioned when talking about their career plans or university decisions and was often related to ideas of becoming globally oriented or globally minded professionals. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there was no one view of what it meant to be 'international' or 'cosmopolitan' at JIS, however, students, whether intentionally or not, made clear there was one skill that was necessary to call oneself international and thrive in a globalising world - speaking English. Conversely, this was rarely mentioned by GCS students, as I will discuss later, because there was an assumption operating at the school that their very attendance of an international school was de facto evidence of their already existing cosmopolitan identities. In many ways it was what was not said, that was the most telling, particularly in transnational environments where what we might call 'assumed cosmopolitanism' is commonplace.

In Chapter 1, I discussed how students at GCS and JIS could be considered members of the global middle class, and that in order to understand how students and their families construct class aspirations for education, careers and a vision of their future, it is necessary to take a closer look at why students and families choose international education and how they view, or do not view, this as a strategy of global, as well as social, mobility and class reproduction. To this end, an examination of the significance to students of acquiring cosmopolitan cultural capital through attendance of international education, as well as strategies of acquisition and

transmissions in the schools themselves, will be a key focus of this chapter. Cosmopolitan, deriving from the Ancient Greek *kosmos*, meaning 'world' or 'universe', and *polites,* meaning 'citizen' or 'of a city', in its contemporary usage has come to describe someone as a citizen of the world. One of the most well accepted definitions of cosmopolitanism comes from the distillation of two key arguments (Hannerz 1996; Beck and Sznaider 2006) in cosmopolitan theory, as "an awareness of global connectedness and second the idea of an orientation of open-mindedness towards the Other." (Weenink 2008:1089-1090). Whilst in many ways similar, internationalism, by contrast, is a political principle that emphasises the need for economic and political collaboration and cooperation among nations for their mutual benefit.

Drawing heavily from Bourdieu's writings on stratification and cultural capital (1990), sociologists Hiroki Iagrashi and Hiro Saito's (2014) work aims to further critical approaches to the study of cosmopolitanism by exploring the central role that educational systems play in legitimising and institutionalising cosmopolitanism as a form of cultural capital. They argue that "education systems operate as central institutional mechanisms that legitimate cosmopolitanism as a desirable attribute of the person living in a global world, while distributing this universally desirable attribute unequally within a population" (Igarashi and Saito 2014:223). I hope to add to this inquiry an examination of how cosmopolitanism becomes institutionalised as cultural capital, specifically in the context of the international schools. However, this chapter also aims to further Iagrashi and Saito's arguments by challenging assumptions about the universal desirability of cosmopolitanism. Becoming 'cosmopolitan' was also sometimes experienced by students in JIS as incommensurate to maintaining Japanese national identity, compromising their

feelings of belonging. This led them to reject developing cosmopolitan cultural capital to different degrees. The chapter will also consider schools as spaces that might also advocate cultural nationalism and forms of pragmatic cosmopolitanism as a counterpoint to becoming 'global'.

One of the key distinctions made by Weenink (2008:1093), in their study of parental opinions on schooling in the Netherlands, was between parents who could be identified as "dedicated" cosmopolitans and "pragmatic" cosmopolitans. The study aimed to understand the parental motivations of those who chose the internationalised stream for their children at Dutch secondary schools (e.g. the International Baccalaureate) and how these translated to particular interpretations of cosmopolitanism and its purpose. Weenink argues that parents who were dedicated cosmopolitans:

> have incorporated the world into their perspectives on their children's course of life. Therefore… try to teach their children flexibility and the capacity to feel at ease within foreign cultural contexts. […][Whereas pragmatic cosmopolitans] saw the advantages of appropriating an international orientation, mainly learning English at a high level. But they did not relate this to a vision of a world without borders that is open, to be explored for everyone, or to a dedication to cultural openness. They stressed the advantages of such an international attitude for the future of their children as they regarded it as an instrument for a later career or study (2008:1095-1096).

Broadly speaking it could be argued that GCS was institutionally aligned with dedicated cosmopolitanism, although this was inseparable from the importance placed on future career and study prospects, and JIS with pragmatic. However, simply labelling students or the schools themselves as aligned with dedicated and pragmatic cosmopolitanism obscures the entanglements and intricacies of the student experience. In their quest to balance and navigate conflicting expectations of themselves, parents, their schools, alongside the lived limitations that students face related to race, gender and their ability to conform to a school's cosmopolitan ideal, the dichotomy of dedicated and pragmatic cosmopolitanism falls short. I am therefore more interested in the ways that students and schools did not conform to these categories, and the nuances of particular students' struggles to, and ambivalences towards, transforming themselves in particular ways. The complex experiences of JIS and GCS students furthers our understanding of the disparate make-up of the global middle class, facilitating deeper insights into the relational network of influences and pressures that shape young people's engagement with cosmopolitanism.

In the next sections I consider how the educational context plays a key part in how cosmopolitan cultural capital was championed by the schools and how this was interpreted by students, as well as the ways in which students adhered to or fell short of their school's ideal. JIS's ethos centred around providing students with skills and behaviours that would serve them in the international (largely Japanese) workplace, as demands for global talents grow and the need to work with colleagues from different cultures increases. In contrast at GCS, the IB served to develop students with attitudes and world views that would serve them in their lives, not just as professionals in transnational careers. But what, if anything, did cosmopolitanism

mean to students? From their consumption practices, to their travelling aspirations, aesthetic tastes, and hobbies, there was no one way of being cosmopolitan at the schools, however, there were challenges and issues that united many students along their educational journey.

Being 'International'?

It comes as no surprise that given the global drive for English language acquisition, especially in East Asia (Bae 2013; Kubota 2011; Shin 2016; Wee 2008), education systems around the world have institutionalised cosmopolitanism as cultural capital. This can be seen clearly in the agendas and engagement of international schools around the world which value and promote cosmopolitan ideals of engaging with the 'other' (Igarashi and Saito 2014). Anthropologist Danau Tanu's work problematises the way that international education values particular kinds of cosmopolitan cultural capital whilst delegitimising others. She exposes the cultural hierarchies that exist in the international school where she completed her fieldwork in Indonesia, where the 'other' was constructed as deviance from the ideal westernised international student. Tanu contends that being international might better be understood as "a form of cosmopolitanism that privileges those who have a certain set of cultural capital, such as being 'westernized' and/or being able to speak English fluently." (2018:22). Referred to as TIS, Tanu argues that the school lauded students who were who acted 'white' (e.g. westernised behaviours, mannerisms, native English proficiency) as truly international. Students that did not embody this ideal were labelled 'Asian', 'Korean' or 'Indonesian' and considered less international despite the implicit necessity of engaging across difference every day at school. Tanu argues that to be 'international'

in the context of TIS was to practise or embody a Eurocentric form of cosmopolitanism steeped in colonial conceptions of race and culture. Whilst this was not the international ideal valued in either JIS nor GCS, who themselves had conflicting notions of what it meant to be 'international' and its utility and desirability, it is an exceptionally important contribution to the critique of how international schools champion particular ways of being international over others. It is also critical to illustrating that the space of the international school is never a neutral one, free from cultural hierarchies.

Unlike at TIS, where the dominant culture in the school was decidedly western and Eurocentric, at JIS many school activities were centred around reinforcing the already prevalent Japanese cultural nationalism. It was clear that being international should not come at the expense of students' cultural heritage or Japaneseness. JIS, therefore, and the nature of their location, controlled and mediated students' ability to interact casually or frequently with anyone from outside of the school. The school did not allow students outside of the boarding grounds on weekdays unless it was for the once weekly trip to the local Tesco where they could buy their snacks for the week, or for 'work experience', which was the occasional charity shop volunteering. On the weekends, students could pay to take taxis to the local train station where they could travel to London for the day to sightsee. Mei would spend most weekends frequenting London's extensive and expensive range of Japanese cuisine restaurants with her friends in the year below. During the week she would do her research on Instagram, finding new places to try, reaching across the unappealing trays of food at lunchtime to show me their sleek pictures, asking if I had heard of her new discoveries. This narrow range of activities exasperated the teachers Robert and Marin who chided them for not being more adventurous in their tastes. Mei defended

her interest in Japanese food as comforting, something which the food at the school was not, and Mei missed dishes that were familiar to her. Students who had not lived outside of the school in the UK prior to joining, were afforded curated and mediated exposure to British culture as they did not regularly encounter local people or venture into the local area apart from through structured interactions. Students engaged with, what could be argued, the stereotypical activities associated with Britishness and these were instituted in the school as 'cultural' trips, of which afternoon tea was the most popular and surprisingly periodic, ironically run by Marin, other trips included Stonehenge and the London Eye. Students' only regular contact with non-native Japanese speakers was the English department, who spoke to students in English at all times. All English department faculty and cultural studies staff were referred to by their first names, like Marin and Robert. Though Marin was originally from Japan and Robert was fluent in Japanese having lived and worked there for eight years. Even boarding house staff, to be considered for the position, had to be native speakers. As will become clear, these examples of distancing from the 'global' in specific ways cultivated a sense that there were right and wrong ways to be international for JIS students.

The school's rules and attitudes towards immersion in foreign culture created notable issues when students who were unable to return home for the full summer or winter holidays, which was a surprisingly high number given how small the student body was, were sent to homestays in Brighton and Oxford. One of the first school assemblies I ever attended on a cold, dull morning in January, following the students return from winter break, was convened to air such grievances.

Homestays

The students filed slowly into the chilly main lecture hall, shuffling up the stairs into the tiered rows of off-white leather padded pull-down chairs. Some, having returned from Japan only a day or two before the assembly, were noticeably jet-lagged and sagged in their seats, crossing their arms on the aged dark wooden desks in front of them and leaning in to rest their eyes, leading swiftly to their unconsciousness. Elbows from their neighbours or stern words from watchful teachers tried to focus students on the upcoming address. Falling asleep in class seemed generally tolerated, but in assembly it was rude. At any rate at this early hour, the room was not lively, and the students presented a fatigued sea of navy-blue jumpers and blazers and inattentive faces cast in fluorescent light. On the board behind the lectern hung a Japanese flag and the union jack, and in the middle of them, the JIS school emblem and latin motto "*Discendo Cresce"* roughly translating as "learning to grow". As instructed, I sat at the front of the theatre with the teaching staff facing the students, such that I would be able to present myself and the purpose of my presence in their lessons when introduced. Robert addressed the sheepish students from the front of the room, casting a discerning eye over the crowd, his height dwarfing the lectern. A few students shifted uncomfortably as if expecting his coming castigation. His ire was regarding the multitude of problems and complaints he had received from the families who had taken students in over the holiday just past. Visibly agitated, he stiffly reprimanded students for their poor behaviour, in some cases not leaving the house at all and isolating themselves, for missing their flights back to Japan, and in many instances refusing to interact or speak to their homestay family. Their

behaviour was deemed disrespectful and unacceptable, such that the programme would have to be terminated if they did not reform their conduct.
"If you want to continue to have the opportunity to do homestays, you will need to do better. No more ignoring your hosts, no more sleeping all day! You must stay in contact when you decide to leave the house, not just when you feel like it."
Students stared guiltily at their shoes or at the suddenly fascinating lint on their school jumpers, anywhere but the front of the room.

After the assembly, as we walked back across the school grounds to the staff room, Robert complained about how little responsibility students took for themselves.
"They [host families] contacted me constantly. Some [students] didn't speak to them at all, they just stayed in their rooms. I had to arrange a chaperone and book new flights to Japan for a few, one because they *overslept*. Ridiculous." He shook his head grimly as he sat down at his desk. "It was not much of a break for me. I'm not sure why I bother."

At lunch the following week I was waved over to sit with the KO1 girls. We chatted about their winter breaks - Japanese New Year celebrations and shrine visits. For Christmas, Hina had KFC, as was traditional, and Tamane lamented that she had spent all her New Year's gift money (*otoshidama)* already. Shopping with friends was another popular activity over the holiday period, and in Tokyo, where Tamane lived, it was easy to spend it all on clothes, as she had. And a new cute phone case, which she held up with a toothy grin, eyebrows disappearing into the thick bangs above her round face. When she arrived back in Tokyo however, her parents were less than pleased with her.

“I missed my flight, my Dad was very mad” she cringed, embarrassed at her admission. “I was confused on the time, and I slept too much. Robert bought me new flights, but they were so expensive!” She covered the sides of her face with her hands recalling the stress of it. “That’s why my parents were angry. More than £1000 for my ticket to go home.”

Tamane and Hina had enjoyed their homestays on the whole as their host families were friendly and had kids their age, and whilst Tamane slept a bit too much, Hina had made the most of her time in Oxford sightseeing with friends who were also staying there.

“Meko didn’t like it very much,” Hina said, gesturing to Meko who was leaning on her arms on the table and turned to us with a small smile when her name was mentioned. Meko shook her head in agreement. The family were nice enough, she just didn’t talk to them much and preferred to spend time alone in her room, which upset her hosts, and she often forgot to tell them when she did go out to meet friends who were staying with families close by.

Tamane and Hina’s experiences of homestays were atypical, it seemed, among the other students who had participated. Meko’s propensity to keep to herself and unwillingness to engage with her host family could have been for many reasons not least because she was a teenager, staying with a family she did not know that well, whose language was not her first. However, despite personality differences and the teenage capacity for anti-socialness, these considerations do not fully explain the widespread attitudes of students within the homestay programme, nor their ambivalence and occasionally, hostility, towards engaging with homestay families or leaving the house to engage in tourism. It is pertinent here to remember that one of the foundational purposes of JIS as an educational institution is to improve students’

English language, as reflected in their EFL heavy curriculum and positioning in the UK. Despite this, efforts by Robert were often thwarted when students were presented with their only opportunity to learn through immersion that the school offered: homestays. I suggest these issues represented only a few of the many manifestations of wide-spread school attitudes towards acculturation in the most minor ways, where student behaviour became reflective of (and sustained) the school's seemingly contradictory messages of developing international mindedness whilst maintaining a safe distance from the foreign. However, to understand this complex and delicate navigation on the part of students, it is necessary to situate attitudes towards schooling historically and politically, as well as shifts in policy and national government agendas.

Considering Colonial Legacies in Schooling: Ethno-nationalism, Bilingualism, and Race

The ongoing legacy of European colonialism on education and schooling is undeniable. It has been normalised to the point that only in recent years has it received the attention and interrogation that it warrants within the academy. This is evident when we look at the recent surge in efforts to decolonise school and university curricula, particularly in the UK, following the heavily publicised student campaign to remove the statue of Cecil Rhodes from Oriel College Oxford (see: Moghil and Kadiwal 2021). It is therefore crucial to contextualise my research at JIS and GCS within this history, as international schooling has been left out of much of this new scholarship (Emenike & Plowright 2017). Imperialism was not just an economic and political ideology but a pedagogical project which later sought to

refashion colonised peoples into loyal citizens through the suppression of indigenous languages, suppression of religion and cultural practices, and the establishment of colonial schools. As such, colonial powers like Britain contributed significantly to the de-valuation, de-centreing and decimation of local knowledge whilst institutionalising superiority of Western thought and knowledge.

What it means to be international, how one becomes international, and the value of obtaining international status or capital is therefore something that is invariably important to consider when examining students' experiences in international schools.

> Whether motivated by economic interests, altruism, self-development, civic duty, or some combination thereof, the desire to gain the knowledge and skills to become marketable employees and engaged citizens tends to be rooted in philosophical and political economic traditions that presume the universal value of Western knowledge and values, re-centre the individual, and place both the capitalist market and nation-state above critique. (Stein et al. 2016:4)

Stein et al. (2016), provide ample criticism of the ways in which colleges and universities contribute to the presumption of Western epistemic superiority. Likewise, in their study of indigenous Nigerian student identities in international schools in Abuja, Nigeria, Emenike and Plowright (2017) argue that the pursuit of western education by local elites in post-colonial societies like Nigeria, serves to reinforce class inequalities, as well as reproducing a transnational capitalist class. They suggest that whilst local elites in post-colonial contexts have used western education as a “means of achieving advantage over the less privileged in postcolonial

countries; arguably this can be seen to be a new form of colonialism" (Emenike & Plowright 2017:6).

As discussed in Chapter 1, this was also evident in my own fieldsites. The GCS curriculum was steeped in Eurocentrism, promoting international ideals associated with liberal progressivism, where becoming a global citizen meant having a particular moral orientation to the world, as well as an ideological and practical one. The location of the international school is just as important as the clientele it attracts, as it provides the cultural context students engage with outside of school. In the case of the Nigerian international schools, Emenike and Plowright (2017) explored the ways that students distanced themselves from their local culture, suggesting that they associated Nigerian culture with backwards practices and a lack of modernity. If the local provides the springboard from which students imagine the global, then colonial discourses on otherness and modernity are readily accessible tropes for students to draw on. At GCS, even though the general medium of engagement across difference was indeed English, a prerequisite for entry onto the IB, the few students whose first language was English and who were born in the UK, often joked and were embarrassed by being monolingual compared to their peers who were often bi- or trilingual, and some of whom spoke up to five languages. In both examples, students can be seen to draw on ideas of proximity and distance to the 'other' as a way to conceptualise their own claims to an international or global identity. Even at JIS, Britishness was synonymous with 'the global', and studying English was presented by the school as a way to become 'international' and as a necessity to participate in a globalising world. However, Japan's colonial history, which had its own educational colonial projects in Korea and Taiwan, and position as a global economic power, complicates our understanding of educational projects within JIS.

The cultural nationalism that was present within the school must be situated within an understanding of a particular socio-economic landscape and history of globalisation, one in which Japan is in fact dominant. This complexified students' relationships with becoming 'international' in the context of the UK.

Global Human Resources, Bilingualism, and Ethno-nationalism

Over the last 20 years, Japan's policy transition from former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's focus on embedding nationalist sentiment back into the curriculum, to embracing internationalism as a strategic priority to foster global human resources, is a complicated one, highlighting the tensions between globalisation and cultural and national identity in Japan. In her article on global English and discourses on Japaneseness, Kobayashi argues that "the sense of national identity as *the* homogeneous Japanese is sustained, or rather fortified, within the twenty-first century's apparently intensified tension between globalisation and nationhood, in which English has a crucial role to play" (2011:2). Despite Japan's political commitments to internationalise and diversify its workforce through the hiring of skilled and university educated foreigners, not least because of their ageing population and growing labour shortages (Song 2020), those that are hired face great uncertainty and instability due to employers inflexible expectations, and policies which prevent them from gaining residency and permanent employment contracts (Hof & Tseng 2020).

The national push for ‘global human resources’ advocated by the Japanese Government and MEXT has led to employers taking up this call in theory but the reality is far more complicated. As Hof & Tseng point out, whilst employers strive “to enhance workplace diversity by hiring non-Japanese workers with multilingual proficiency and global perspectives, Japanese companies actually value foreigners’ ‘local literacy’” (2020:514) far more. Employers' expectations of foreign workers' immediate assimilation into Japanese corporate culture and the importance of possessing the ‘soft skills’ crucial for networking, makes thriving in Japanese workplaces particularly challenging, even for foreign graduates from Japanese universities who may otherwise seem well positioned to take up employment at competitive firms. In spite of the calls for higher education’s cultivation of global human resources and the recruitment of global talent by Japanese companies, workplace diversity has been stifled by inflexible workplace culture and resistance to multiculturalism. I would argue that these efforts can be considered performative internationalism as they are used to “project a socially ideal image of Japan’s ‘global’ business world, not necessarily because companies are in urgent need of such resources and intend on using them to replace docile non-globalized Japanese students” (Kobayashi 2020:242) but because it paints a favourable picture of Japan on the international stage.

The unmistakable shift towards cosmopolitan credentialism has been felt particularly strongly in countries such as Japan which have focused on pushing policies in favour of globalising their companies and workforces in a move to refashion the national image as globally oriented. This is despite many corporations' lack of interest in acquiring global human resources where they can instead recruit from reputable home universities. As such, graduates with cultural fluency are preferred, native

speakers who can understand and seamlessly integrate into Japanese culture. In this case, the performance of cosmopolitanism is interestingly less preferable to 'proof' in the form of qualifications gained abroad or attendance of international schooling which Japanese employers can use to increase competition amongst applicants. These contradictions create new and complex pressures on students to study abroad and for parents to pay to send them as an economic investment in their future stability and prosperity. Where once children followed parents in their international migrations for work, now there is increasing pressure on parents to send their children away without them so that they may obtain international qualifications from international schools sometimes far away from their homes and in completely unfamiliar contexts.

The tension Kobayashi refers to was exemplified by students such as Fumika, who during EFL lessons struggled to strike a balance that, on the one hand demonstrated their substantial language abilities, but at the same time did not diminish their Japaneseness in the eyes of their peers. Fumika and Mei, having both lived and studied outside of Japan in English-speaking countries for over six years each, breezed through EFL classes and often furtively completed their homework in lessons, scribbling in pencil, while Robert was talking. Mei's father relocated the family for his job in the US where they stayed for a number of years, during which time she attended an American school and learnt English with a distinctive American accent. Whilst not close friends, Fumika and Mei shared their English fluency in common and were in the same higher level EFL class. However, unlike Mei, Fumika's written Japanese and ability to understand kanji had been severely hampered during her time at a local school in the UK, leading her to struggle in advanced Japanese lessons compared to many of her peers, something she was embarrassed by and

brought up more than once when we were discussing her university application preparation. Where Mei would excel when picked on by Robert in an EFL class, Fumika chose instead to downplay her language abilities, never volunteering to answer questions and even answering in deliberately broken English, frequently with the wrong answer. Fumika revived her Japanese accent when speaking in EFL lessons even though she had a distinctly regional British accent, one that she had picked up from attending school for the past five years in Swindon, where her family still lived. I call attention to Fumika and Mei's behaviour in lessons when called upon to demonstrate their language abilities to address the ways that Japaneseness was constructed and performed at JIS. Proficiency in English, or to be considered more proficient in English than Japanese was something that students such as Fumika went to great lengths to avoid displaying. It could be argued she did this to fit in with her classmates, but that would go some way to obscure the fact that many of her classmates, like Mei, also spoke English quite fluently and strived to do so. It was Fumika's fluency in English, over that of her written Japanese and limited vocabulary, which seemed, to her, something which needed to be hidden during lessons. Fumika's performance did not, however, follow her outside of the classroom where she would chat to me in English without hesitation, strong regional accent intact, nearby her friends. It could be argued that Fumika's cultural identity as Japanese was strongly linked to proficiency in Japanese and that a superior proficiency in English, including her British accent, was challenging, not in the way it made her stand out from some of her peers, but stemming from her insecurity about her Japaneseness.

The reality of a racially understood, language-based, cultural and national identity can be problematised on many fronts. It not only complicated students' attitudes

towards acquiring the skills JIS described as desirable on the international market, but leaves multi-lingual, bicultural, or 'third culture ' young people with a liminal identity: outsiders who do not possess the 'right' or sufficient cultural capital or looks to be 'authentically' Japanese (MacKenzie 2009; Kobayashi 2011). The concealment of ability or strategic behavioural alterations in response to hegemonic social pressures in school settings is nothing new (see: Fordham & Ogbu 1986; Pascoe 2007). Though there has been much debate and misunderstanding surrounding her work, Signithia Fordham's (1986, 2008) observations that African American children were academically underachieving due to fear of being accused of 'acting white' by their peers, still resonates. At Capital High in Washington DC where Fordham undertook her research in the early 1980s, Black students had come to view academic achievement, and the path to academic success, as paved by attitudes and behaviours that were deemed 'white'. Black students who pursued or desired to do well academically, struggled with the negative effects on their relationships with their peers and attempts to juggle the "demands of peers for conformity to group-sanctioned attitude and behaviours that validate black identity" (1986:186), with their own academic aspirations and the expectations of the school. The tension experienced by students at Capital High becomes clear in the ways that they tried to avoid behaving in a manner that was associated with being white, whilst the burden of 'acting white' became heavier still when academically capable Black students faced "both pressures from blacks peers to conform, and doubts from whites about their ability" (ibid:201).

Things at JIS were a little murkier and less *black and white*. Was Japaneseness policed in the everyday? I would argue yes, but with greater subtlety. Japaneseness was not only peer enforced and internalised, but institutionally rewarded through

teachers, and the very structure of the education system itself which made alternative routes challenging to say the least. Policing came in the form of encouragement of pride in cultural practices and histories, displays of cultural competency and knowledge to 'others', and a curated approach to engagement with British culture. However, it would be remiss not to acknowledge the significant external barriers that also ushered students towards routes leading to university in Japan. Returning to Fumika's story offers us potentially greater insight into the everyday ways that students policed their own Japaneseness. Whilst code-switching is a common phenomenon amongst children of colour and bilingual children, Fumika used this switch to strengthen her relationships with her peers through concealment, to deliberately obscure fundamental aspects of her experience and upbringing as they identified her in ways she did not want to be associated with - namely too proficient in English in comparison to her mother tongue, and perhaps, perceived as less Japanese.

Kikokushijo and Gendered Expectations

One of the most notable and well researched phenomena regarding studying abroad, concerns *kikokushijo* or returnee children, often those who moved with their families when their parents were relocated for work and attended foreign schools for a time before moving back to Japan. *Kikokushijo* caught the public imagination in Japan as early as the 1960s and 70s when the Ministry for Education began to recognise the need for supporting students through reintegration (Ida 2018). Perceived issues of cultural ambiguity and loss of Japanese identity were remedied by the setting up of special programmes and schools to improve native language proficiency and the

teaching of Japanese mannerisms. A number of Japanese Saturday schools now exist across the globe to support the cultural development and language proficiency of Japanese children living outside of Japan. Universities also responded to this problem by creating specific exams for returnees who would now be able to enter through this alternative admissions route where their time outside of the school system could be better accounted for.

Roger Goodman (1990) highlighted the implications of the special treatment *kikokushijo* received upon their repatriation to Japan, something which their often corporate elite parents had fought for due to their belief that their children were at a disadvantage when re-entering the Japanese educational system. Goodman's work presents the media's response to the 'kikokushijo problem', and their perceived challenges to reintegration into the mainstream as sensationalised, suggesting instead that this group represented a new class of school children, primed to be a social elite in Japanese society - someone who is racially Japanese and therefore not foreign, but also able to use the cultural capital of international experiences to their benefit for university admissions. Unlike other minority groups in Japan, such as ethnic minorities, who experienced significant structural oppression and social ostracisation due to their foreign names, appearance, and cultural differences (Demelius 2020), this new more international class would be able to benefit from their international experiences and English proficiency without fear of discrimination.

Attitudes towards *kikokushijo* have clearly evolved, particularly from the perspective of educational policy and schooling and higher education management, perhaps precisely because of the positive associations between students who have studied abroad, their proximity to the international, and the ways that these students are

seen to confer internationality to institutions through their attendance. According to the MEXT by 2004, 59.4% of universities in Japan offered the special entry criteria for *kikokushijo* as a way to account for academic disadvantage and difficulties with languages, and quickly became a way for universities to promote themselves as international (Fry 2007:134). Returnees serve as a tangible way to showcase political commitment to ideologies of internationalisation.

As to whether cultural attitudes have shifted as enthusiastically, remains to be seen. Goodman's work is now over 30 years old and the new class of Japanese social elite he spoke of has yet to manifest in Japan. Perhaps limited only to a select few through professional opportunities or large wealth in previous decades, foreign study is now more commonplace for students from middle class Japanese families, and relocation overseas for work is not unusual for employees of multinational corporations. Despite the increased availability of opportunities to gain international experiences and qualifications at both secondary and tertiary levels of education, the number of Japanese university students studying abroad has remained markedly low compared to other OECD nations, numbers which the government has tried to bolster in recent years by incentivising study abroad programmes to little avail.

Goodman potentially overlooked the social reality of children, particularly those who experience social isolation, bullying and alienation from their peers for their differences (Kanno 2003) in favour of his argument. But another quite critical aspect that is missing from Goodman's analysis of returnees is a consideration of gender and how this shapes and alters the respective opportunities of *kikokushijo* once they enter the labour market. Women's struggles for equal working rights and status, and systematic exclusion from leadership positions in Japan have been pointed out for many years (Kelsky 1996; Yamaguchi 2019), and according to the most recent data,

Japan has the 3rd highest gender pay gap of all OECD nations at 22.1% (OECD 2021).

In response to my questionnaire about their time studying at JIS, KO3 students were definitive in their belief that learning English would be beneficial for their futures, albeit to varying degrees. This ranged from a desire to work in international relations, to ordering in a restaurant abroad using English as the lingua franca. KO3 students in particular, even the ones that did not believe that they would need to put their language skills into practice outside of school, associated the need to learn English with the concept of internationalisation. English language proficiency was for students, synonymous with the process of becoming 'global', it was a tool which would help them navigate the seemingly inevitable tide of globalisation that was referred to in almost every response to my survey questions.

Beyond having some knowledge of English, 'global mindedness' was only mentioned by JIS students as something useful if they were to work overseas in non-Japanese companies or for international businesses. Very few students shared Fumika, Kasumi, and Mihiro's sentiment that if Japanese students were armed with the skills to communicate interculturally, they would be assets to home companies' international growth and status. Fumika's views went even further as she viewed these skills as important for acting as a cultural ambassador for Japan in multicultural environments. For female students at JIS who had aspirations to work internationally, acquiring English language proficiency, 'flexible' ways of thinking, and intercultural communication, were important skills that were raised frequently when ruminating about the future, yet they viewed the possibilities for their futures in radically different ways compared to students at GCS, despite their experiences of internationally oriented education. Due to the gendered expectations of work as well

as the bias against international students and those educated abroad, Japanese women educated abroad often face great difficulties and suspicion upon their return to their home country to look for work, as their cosmopolitanism may be construed as a lack of Japaneseness, as opposed to global cultural capital (Kobayashi 2020; Yoshida et al 2009). It is no surprise then that being 'international' was always framed by female JIS students as cultural capital outside of Japan, largely symbolic capital within Japan, as its value, as mentioned in the previous chapter, was radically undermined at home by company proclivity for hiring monolingual (male) graduates who had gained their degrees from Japanese universities. In Chapter 6, I expand on these issues of gender by considering gendered expectations of the future from the perspectives of JIS students, and the wider context of women's relationship to education in Japan. The notion of cosmopolitanism as undesirable and unbeneficial to securing job opportunities in Japan can be linked, perhaps, to the persistence of the view that Japanese identity is premised on cultural and ethno-nationalism, thereby one's Japaneseness would inevitably be eroded by too much time spent abroad outside of Japan, making it difficult to reintegrate when moving back (Kobayashi 2007).

While it is debatable whether this view was prevailing at JIS, there were noticeable behavioural adaptations by students like Fumika and by the school itself that would suggest a degree of importance placed on maintaining a safe distance from the 'other'. Therefore, understanding how the value of cosmopolitanism as cultural capital was sold to students at JIS was particularly complicated, as it was presented as both desirable and undesirable, attainable and unattainable, and distinctly non-Japanese.

In both educational settings, and the Japanese job market, students who study abroad still face unique challenges once they return, depending on how long they spend outside of Japan. For most students applying from KO3 at JIS, returning home for university was the most obvious choice, not least because of the favourable admissions process that they could access through the school's parent university group, and the desire to be close to family and friends back home, but also in part due to pressures from their parents and the wider climate of hiring practices by Japanese companies.

It is also important to acknowledge the demographic makeup of JIS where the majority of students were ethnically Japanese, with the exception of a few students who were Japanese-Korean, Japanese-Chinese and Japanese-Malaysian, and one who was Japanese-Spanish. Robert informed me that apart from the Japanese-Spanish student who could not, the other *haafu* (a term used to describe multiracial children in Japan) students chose to 'pass' as ethnically Japanese. When I asked who they were, identifying them was not something he was willing to do as it was not common knowledge that they were not full Japanese by heritage. Students and their families had even changed their names to Japanese ones in an effort to not stand out. The students that I discuss in most detail and I had the closest relationships with are all self-identified as Japanese, as both their ethnicity and nationality. In the following discussion I use the racial category of Japanese to interrogate the dilemmas posed by ethno-nationalist conceptions of citizenship and belonging and 'Japaneseness', something which is complicated through processes of globalisation encountered by students and their families.

Children of mixed families provide a critical window into understanding the significance and implications of racial politics in Japanese society and wider attitudes towards 'foreigness'. I first became aware of the nuances of everyday negotiations of multiracial identity in Japan through a friend, who shared with me the complexities that mixed identities created for young people. As a young Japanese-French woman, she now split her time between Tokyo and Paris when she was not studying at university in London. I knew Nina through our university athletics club and bonded over our time spent sweating and in pain during HIIT sessions. On a visit to Tokyo that fatefully coincided with a trip to see her family, we arranged to meet up for lunch so I could try a curry house and she could show me some of her favourite spots in the city. I hadn't realised she had graduated from a French-Japanese international school, spending summers in France where her mother was from. The international school provided a safe space for her and other children from similar backgrounds offering instruction in French, English and Japanese. Her experiences growing up had been challenging. As we sat in the little wooden booth recovering from the huge portions of food, she shared that even now when she walked into shops in her home city, the sales assistants would try to speak to her in English, assuming because of her multiracial background that she must be a foreigner, and acted surprised when she declined assistance in perfect Japanese. A week later I went to an Izakaya for dinner with another PhD student I had met on my course a few years above me, and had been invited to meet another friend who was a researcher in Tokyo. The elderly lady cooking for us listened with great interest as Noa ordered for the three of us, complimenting him on his language skills and asking where he had learned. Noa laughed and explained that his father was Japanese and he was from Tokyo, and his mother was Indian and an entrepreneur. These small assumptions, whilst often taken in good humour, could be both alienating and

frustrating, a continual reminder of difference. Whilst anecdotal, they provide a clear insight into the way Japanese/foreigner identities have been dichotomised along racial and ethnic lines in both public and political discourse (Osanami Törngren & Sato 2021:803). Not only are differences racialised but Japanese citizenship and cultural identity conflated to the point of being synonymous.

In Tanu's (2019) discussion of the *haafu* experience, she draws on mutiracial students' experiences to explore the challenges that these young people face when navigating transnational spaces. She notes that Japanese-white children, tended to draw on their foreignness, leveraging their western cultural capital such as speaking English to gain higher status. In contrast young people who were Indonesian-Japanese, Filipino-Japanese or Thai-Japanese living in Japan, tended to downplay their mixedness often choosing to 'pass' for ethnic Japanese if they were able. Others of mixed Asian descent embraced their multi-ethnic heritage but often not until adulthood, and even when raised by their non-Japanese parents found it disadvantageous to identify only with their non-Japanese heritage. The bullying and rejection of haafu, particularly in school environments (Matsunaga 2007; MacKenzie 2009; Tanu 2019) , demonstrates the importance of understanding the ways that students chose to align themselves with particular ethnic and racial identities in efforts to be seen as authentically 'Japanese', and why masking of non-Japanese ethnicities at JIS was preferred.

The Limits of International Education as a Transformative Pedagogy: Racism and Homophobia

As an educational body, GCS practised a very different approach to JIS. They encouraged students to embrace their cultural differences and experiences, and to showcase these as what made them international, this was writ large in school-wide events such as those mentioned in Chapter 2. These events and celebrations were intended to raise awareness and normalise socio-cultural and religious differences and promote inclusivity and global mindedness. However, this did not extend to all 'cultural' differences. GCS had strict and non-negotiable codes of conduct when it came to issues of bullying, homophobia, racism and sexism, issues which they had to deal with on a semi-regular basis. The head of pastoral care, Mrs Y had ongoing grievances with certain younger students lower down the school, well-known to staff, who would be in her office all too often for their misconduct.

MYP4: "The devil children" at GCS

On Thursdays I was assigned to the courtyard as the supervising 'staff member' along with the history teacher Mr D, a very knowledgeable, socially awkward, and kind natured man, in his mid-to-late-thirties. The lunchtimes I oversaw were for the MYP students who ate their lunch slightly earlier than the older DP students to stagger the number of people using the canteen and outside spaces at any one time. More often than not the same group of energetic and vociferous MYP students would be hanging out there. The stone courtyard was surrounded on all sides by school buildings and offices, much to the people working in those offices disdain, especially when this particular group decided it was entertaining to throw things at their windows, at

which point they would stick their heads out, blustering a telling off. But, mostly they could be found playing table tennis or chatting and eating their lunch on the long wooden picnic benches if the weather was sunny. They would steal each other's belongings and pass them around the group, teasing the item's owner in, mostly, good humour as they scrambled to get it back in fits of laughter punctuated by yelps of frustration and annoyance. When they were not throwing ping pong balls at each other, or taunting their friends with their missing things, they would be telling stories, conversing noisily and obnoxiously over one another in a bid to be the centre of attention. A discordant crescendo of 14 year olds. Jemimah and Marcella, upon finding out I had been put on lunchtime duty, grimaced and told me to watch out for "MYP 4, the devil children", in reference to a group of students, only two years below them, notorious for their less than angelic behaviour and bullying of teachers.

These sentiments and intense dislike of the MYP 4 students was reiterated to me many times by other DP students including Jason, Francesca, Rosa and João on a variety of occasions.

"They're terrible… They have no respect for anyone." Jemimah warned as Marcella and Francesca hummed along in agreement during a free period in the common room.

"The devil children?" One eyebrow raised in interest, Rosa leaned across the table where she was doing translation homework, taking an earbud out to join the conversation.

"Yeah, they bully Mr D so much, I feel so sorry for him. He shouldn't have to teach them, they make his life hell and he can't control them, they don't care because they're little shits!" Rosa added. The room agreed and went back to their respective conversations or Spotify playlists.

The MYP 4 group in question just so happened to be the same one who chose to spend their lunchtimes in the courtyard while Mr D and I were on duty together on Thursdays. As such, witnessing their behaviour towards him firsthand was unfortunately straightforward. Mr D would futilely warn the MYP 4s to stop throwing other people's items around in case they broke something. Cautioning time and time again to stop yelling so loudly as people were working, to not throw balls at their peers, pull their clothes or physically fight with each other. The students simply ignored him and on occasion almost knocked him over while play-fighting for the very items he had tried, unsuccessfully, to confiscate. It was during his history lessons, I was told, that the real trouble with MYP 4s started as Mr D could not keep control of the class and they would insult him or talk over him while he was trying to teach. On one such eventful lunchtime, Ms B had just joined me on the bench from which I was supervising and we both jumped at a sudden bang. Mrs Y, flinging the wooden door wide, stepped forcefully into the courtyard and yelled, "Alex, my office. Right now. You're first."

Forgetting our conversation about Brexit, we looked over to see Alex, a short, white, blonde-haired boy who always wore chinos, scuttling reluctantly after Mrs Y as his friends snickered and looked on.

Miss M raised her eyebrows to me knowingly. I pondered to her that Mrs Y seemed uncharacteristically angry, as I had come to know her as a readily laughing Kiwi. "Well, he's in real trouble. She's taking them out over an incident of racism." She leaned back on the bench and thinned her lips. At my incredulous look Miss M smiled wryly and added "it's not surprising, we've had some disgusting homophobic

behaviour from students in the past, especially from Russian students." Miss M wrinkled her nose and sighed.

I remembered then, that one of the very first classes I attended at GCS was on International Women's day with MYP 3 students, who were meant to be planning a presentation for an assembly on the importance of women's contributions throughout history. Instead, much of the lesson was spent by Miss M, and a few students, trying to convince other girls in the class why IWD was in fact, important. It seemed very plausible, and actually quite likely upon reflection, that not all students would share values that the school took for granted as tenets of what it meant to be 'international' and would instead come into perpetual conflict with school sensibilities and rules regarding intolerance.

Instances of racism, homophobia, bullying and religious intolerance, whilst unfortunately somewhat commonplace in most schools, international or not, were particularly embarrassing for GCS, as the image they proudly advertised to parents was one of harmonious transcultural cooperation. Of course, this image and the school's commitment to cultivating global citizens was met with resistance when students were not raised with values that the school deemed fundamental and essential to being cosmopolitan, thriving in transnational spaces, or even behaving ethically. Unlike at TIS, where Tanu noted teacher's singling out students as 'Korean' or 'Indonesian' for their seeming inability to perform their cosmopolitanism in the westernised form the school championed, teachers at GCS might refer to groups of students as 'Russian' when students failed to demonstrate fundamental school values by expressing homophobia or racism. The school did not view racism, homophobia or derogatory behaviour as something to be interpreted in culturally relativistic

terms, instead it was entirely incongruent with the school's code of conduct and antithetical to becoming a citizen of the world. Singling students out as 'Russian' suggests criticism based on students performing and embodying undesirable values associated with their national identity, in place of building ones that would contribute to their cosmopolitan cultural capital, thereby making them problematic to the school and in need of reform. English language proficiency and acting 'white' at GCS did not mark the gold standard of cosmopolitanism. (Although there is a selection bias here in that English was a necessary asset to even gain admittance). Instead students were expected to simultaneously be proud of their cultural differences but to reform unacceptable views to conform to the schools ideal of what a global citizen should embody. The assumption made by GCS that its students were global citizens, who practised, valued and performed global mindedness and tolerance was interesting, especially as the school struggled in some cases to make these values relevant to students. Cosmopolitan identity at GCS could then be understood "as having a performative dimension, it must be brought into social frames by actors, or indeed actants, that mobilise particular ways of seeing, which elevate and promote openness as a relevant operational schema or discourse" (Woodward & Skrbiš 2018:138), a discourse which GCS sometimes took for granted.

Talking about Relationships at JIS

It was November and some of the boys from KO2 were comically sitting at their desks with earmuffs and gloves on, despite the overheated classroom. Marin arrived in her usual exuberant fashion and declared that this afternoon's Cultural Studies

lesson was going to be about relationships. The class erupted in giggles and Tamane asked why they had to talk about this topic, it was so embarrassing.

Marin clarified that they didn't have to talk about their own relationships and wrote a question on the board for students to consider.

'How have relationships changed in Japan?'

Underneath she drew a large timeline and put 'boy and girl meet' at one end, and 'boy and girl get married' at the other.

"Now, you need to walk around the room and ask someone how they would fill in this timeline."

Excited by the prospect of getting out from behind their desks, students buzzed around the room. Seijin was the only one of the boys taking the activity seriously as his friends couldn't stop laughing long enough to finish their questions to one another. He instead went over to Hina who was already finished asking three of her classmates. Hina responded like most of the students, with a rapid timeline of dating which I found amusing.

"I think they would become friends first, if they like each other they move in together."

The class somewhat devolved into asking random questions about relationships as students lost interest in the task at hand. Marin tried to regain their focus and pointed to the question on the board. Amongst the students the question slowly morphed into 'who would you marry?' The group of KO2 boys started loudly declaring their answers from their huddle at the back of the room.

"They have to speak Japanese"

" If they speak English and Japanese that's okay."

"No I wouldn't marry someone who didn't speak my language"

" I wouldn't marry someone from Africa"

“Or a Muslim”

The other students ignored, or didn’t hear the comments, and the class continued.

The heteronormativity of the lesson, which was surprising but not unexpected given the absence of discussion around sexuality at JIS, was telling of the school’s lack of engagement on the subject. Most students in fact held quite conventional views on marriage as I found out from interviews, something which they viewed as unquestionably in their futures. The racism and Islamophobia, however, were more striking. The incident, among others, was never mentioned by teachers, and despite the school’s claims to be creating “globally minded” students with intercultural communication skills, the lack of problematisation of these behaviours and their occurrence was troubling.

Creating Transformative Environments

As explored in Chapter 3, the enforcement of rules and work ethic at both schools, and teachers’ ability to elicit complicity from students, was varied and often troubled, with some teachers attempting more frequently than others. It seemed teachers’ enforcement of progressive values and acceptable behaviours also radically differed at each school. At GCS, ultimately teachers faced the dilemma - how to renegotiate the relationship of service provider and consumer and the new power dynamic that this had created. It could be argued that at fee-paying schools this particular dynamic has a long history, however, this transactional relationship really came to the fore with students' attitudes and demands on teachers. At GCS, it was also evident from

the students' instrumental view of schooling, which I discuss in the next chapter. However, at JIS this issue was more complicated.

At GCS, teachers ability to shape their ideal cosmopolitan subjects was challenged by their limited power to regulate student behaviour and their capacity to successfully reform students' views on contentious issues due, not only to their financial reliance on students to remain at the school, but students awareness of their economic status and power as consumers to hold teachers accountable and make demands of them. The marketisation of education meant that parents, and by extension their children, were consumers who could choose to leave the school for another and take their business elsewhere. This left teachers in a problematic position when families held personal views incompatible with the school's, views which they saw no reason to denounce in their children or support school intervention to do so. This was also true to an extent at JIS, where the emphasis on the shaping of 'cosmopolitan' values was less pronounced over a more pragmatic approach to ensuring students simply graduated with a clear path laid out ahead to university. However, as discussed previously, teachers stressed to me that JIS was not a "normal" Japanese school, to explain what they viewed as the lack of discipline, and to possibly excuse their glossing over of sleeping students and unsubmitted homework. Since JIS was also a very small school with fewer than 60 students over the three year groups, their reliance on students attendance and parents willingness to pay their high fees contributed to relaxed teacher-student dynamics and the loose enforcement of codes of conduct. Students' economic privilege, at both GCS and JIS, and student and teacher awareness of this and the schools' reliance on their enrolment, created complex power dynamics and relationships in the schools. The marketisation of education, as witnessed at GCS and JIS, profoundly exposed the limits of

international education to provide transformation through the development of cosmopolitan cultural capital, as well as challenging the very notion that in order to acquire this form of cultural capital students must re-fashion themselves and their views.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have drawn attention to the ways that international schools inculcate particular ideas of cosmopolitanism, the 'global', and the value of English proficiency, and how this is also informed by wider socio-political and economic factors, structural inequalities, and lived experiences of race and gender. These factors shape particular global subjects who inhabit and experience their cosmopolitanism in radically different ways, as both cultural capital and as potentially alienating otherness. Whilst the schools themselves may have had a clear line on the kinds of global students they wanted to create, the reality was that students did not inhabit a monolithic universally recognisable cosmopolitan identity premised on cross-cultural understanding, tolerance, and global mindedness. It was instead, for most students, a messy work in progress as students' identities, aspirations and experiences sometimes chafed against school values or ran parallel to them entirely. I would like to suggest that students' ability to embody cosmopolitanism, far from simply a mindset geared towards embracing other cultures or openness to the foreign 'other', is better understood as a reflection of students' structural advantage. However, cosmopolitanism was only experienced as privilege by those with the ability to transverse national borders and move easily in transnational spaces that actually valued cosmopolitanism as cultural capital,

providing new forms of social mobility whilst also intersecting with existing barriers to generate even more complex negotiations for those living at different intersections of identity and privilege. This was often not the case for students at JIS, where the notion of cosmopolitanism as a disposition towards embracing the 'other' and ability to adapt and engage cross-culturally was somewhat accepted, yet cosmopolitanism as a set of learnt (arguably Western) behaviours that could transform the self, might undermine their Japaneseness or sense cultural identity as Japanese. This is not to say cosmopolitanism was antithetical to being Japanese, but in many senses, students were faced with contradictory narratives, where cosmopolitan behaviours would not necessarily benefit them if they were to move back to Japan, but these were essential to studying abroad and to the project of reproducing and sustaining their global middle class status.

This chapter has also discussed cosmopolitanism as problematic or as contested cultural capital where students such as Fumika become *too* proficient in English, potentially jeopardising their ability to reintegrate if they were to move back to Japan and masking their true abilities beyond employing bicultural capital in transnational contexts. I have also contended that this was an incredibly gendered issue, where female JIS students faced the problem of navigating being both locally Japanese and globally cosmopolitan at the same time, where one was seen to inherently impinge on one's ability to embody the other to varying degrees. And yet, ironically, opportunities for women in Japan are not in the least equal with those of their male counterparts, as discussed in chapter 3, and therefore by returning with English language skills, their job prospects might in fact shrink (Yoshida et al. 2009) - the glass ceiling for Japanese women proving to be very thick.

The economic and cultural hierarchies that implicitly and explicitly structure and support cosmopolitan identity were evident in GCS's championing of 'global' values, ones that were seen to transcend culture and nation but ultimately came into conflict with 'problem' students who did not enact the school's ideal of how a 'global citizen' should behave. Whilst eurocentric in nature, I have argued that the gold standard of cosmopolitanism was not English language proficiency or acting 'white' at GCS, and that instead students willingness and ability to practise and embody school ideals of tolerance, openness and cultural sensitivity is what made students truly 'international' in the eyes of teachers, and in the eyes of students, experiences of transnational migration and 'worldliness'. Ultimately, being cosmopolitan presented a predicament for students at both JIS and GCS, where its assumed unequivocal value was called into question as it came into conflict with their cultural and national identities or upbringing. As such, developing cosmopolitan cultural capital was not universally desirable, nor easily acquired, for many students. JIS was deeply involved in processes of socialisation (as discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to place and boundary drawing), ensuring that students kept a safe distance from the global and therefore could easily reintegrate into the Japanese education system and workplaces if they were to return to Japan for further education. However, at GCS students were ostensibly expected to already inhibit a global identity, one not premised on race or nationality but on shared values of openness, acceptance and 'global citizenship', values that nevertheless were in fact structured by these acutely political factors.

Part II

Over the course of the next two chapters (5 & 6) I explore the constraints, dilemmas, and personal journeys of students in school. In previous chapters, I sought to show the ways in which place, achievement ideologies, and cosmopolitanism, shape student orientations towards the future. Here, I spotlight students at JIS and GCS respectively, who I came to identify as exemplars of 'ideal' and 'problem' students within each institution. Those whose aspirations aligned with conventional ideas of success or followed paths which were more alternative and contentious. Whatever their paths, in all cases these students had complicated and sometimes anomalous aspirational journeys. I choose to focus on these students, their hopes, anxieties, and choices as they are indicative of more than their own dilemmas, offering insight into the unspoken assumptions, motivations, and narratives of aspiration that operated within the two international schools. In everyday school life, students and their teachers revealed the model behaviours, undesirable decisions, and problem futures, which generated contradictions and challenges for many young people's self-realisation.

However, evolving decisions regarding where it would be best to apply to university or what to study were rarely, if ever, centred solely on issues of money. As such the cost of university was not discussed as something that would necessarily impede their attendance, nonetheless, I argue that many students' preoccupation, and in some cases resignation, with choosing universities and degrees that would provide financial stability, speaks to a concern for making their parents' investment in their education worthwhile, as well as emergence of new relationships of care through

affective debt. The crucial issue for many parents, according to students, was not concerning the cost of education itself, although this was not insubstantial, but the future security and stability their decisions would yield by helping their children to avoid 'risky choices'. For some JIS students, their parents' involvement in future decision-making, and even the choice to send them to JIS over international schools in Japan, spoke to concerns beyond just the economic, and to anxieties over their Japaneseness as they became globally 'competent'.

A Closer Look at University Decisions: Choice as Agency

Here I introduce the UK higher education landscape as an important context for understanding the inherent challenges associated with understanding student educational decision-making, particularly at GCS, though these also shaped the routes of engagement available to JIS students.

Higher education institutions have seen multiple seismic shifts in the UK over the last two decades, though some have managed to go quietly unnoticed for many working outside of the education sector. Two of the major changes that have garnered attention have come about in the last ten years including the privatisation of university debts, and the uncapping of courses, which resulted in an unprecedented surge in the number of new university places being created under the 2015 coalition government (Brown 2015). These changes can both be traced back to the 2011 UK government cuts to higher education which reduced spending on university budgets by £940 million (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills 2011), leaving universities reeling to plug the gaps for the cost of teaching, with many

struggling to make it work with an unprecedented in-year budget slash. Some of the more subtly problematic shifts have come in the shape of increased 'transparency' of university rankings and student outcomes after leaving university (including salary and degree comparisons), the doubling down on marketing strategies targeting international students, and the growth of online degree programmes. Under increasing pressure to survive in the wake of this swathe of cuts to funding that they relied heavily on, UK universities were left with little choice but to further embrace their marketisation and as such have found creative ways to overcome barriers to accumulation in domestic markets. Namely, through their expansion abroad into new markets (Kelibert 2021:326), through their prospecting of new revenue streams (Ball 2012) including online and remote courses, and the expansion of Executive Master's programmes, attracting students from all over the world.

Higher education in the UK has been increasingly marketised by successive governments. Educational anthropologist Susan Wright argues the Conservative-Liberal coalition, which ushered in a new era of austerity in 2010, "found that it did not need legislation to open up universities to the for-profit sector, and the contractual and statutory arrangements for student loans mean interest rates can be increased at will and the loan book can be sold without the students' consent" (2015:15). Despite a spectacular public U-turn on the privatisation of student loans in 2014, in 2017 the UK government made the first sale of the student loan book, privatising student loans and shifting the cost of education to students in an attempt to rake back money into the Treasury, thus reducing public sector debt. This represented an unceremonious and unscrupulous dumping of debt onto students, transferring responsibility away from the government to support their education. The privatisation of student debt leaves students vulnerable to high interest rates and

follows neatly in the steps of other policies supporting the marketisation of education, creating further pressures on students to pursue profitable degrees. The responsibilisation of students for their educational success and future job security does not only affect home students, and is perhaps even more acutely felt by international students who are burdened with paying for their education upfront through the overseas fee structure. International students, and particularly those from emerging economies face a common, yet uniquely challenging set of circumstances compared to those from high-income countries, as most have no access to student loans, grants, or scholarships (Eldegwy et al. 2022:2). Parents and family members must instead pay large sums of money upfront to put their child through university abroad, often as a private financial investment in their child's, as well as their own, future. However, this burden extends beyond parents of children from emerging economies, to all those without recourse to student debt, as these parents have unprecedented control over their child's decisions for the future as they have little alternative for funding university attendance abroad. As we will see, students such as Risa, Mei and Fumika, though not necessarily aligned with their parent's perspectives, were reliant on their parents' support to attend university. This led to negotiation on the part of Risa so that she could stay in the UK to study, and to accepting their parental influence for Mei and Fumika.

Alongside the dramatic changes to the economic stability of UK universities, and the intensifying burdens on students, the international education sector has grown significantly. Capitalising on their promise to provide an education which will ensure students are competitive for university entry, international schools have proliferated around the world, particularly in Asian markets (Bunnell 2019). In this climate, universities and international schools the world over must now have a competitive

edge if they are to survive within a global market, making the sad backslide from public good to private investment and prioritising internationalisation over reducing barriers to access. It is within this political and economic context that universities and researchers alike have developed an interest in the decision-making practices and logics of students and their families in order to understand what attracts their varied consumer bases. There is currently a growing literature surrounding university degree choice which is interested in understanding the impact of marketing practices used by higher education institutions on students, their effectiveness for student recruitment, as well as investigating what students prioritise when deciding where to go. This body of research offers a starting point for a deeper discussion of the challenges and fears that JIS and GCS students and their families contended with when discussing their degree choice, drawing attention to the ways that ideas of risk, financial and social precarity, expectations and obligations, and personal and structural barriers were experienced and negotiated by different students.

A large proportion of research on degree choice is concerned with providing an economistic analysis of students' choices, focusing on the ways that students make decisions based on the riskiness of particular degrees within the labour market. De Paola & Gioia (2012) provide one such insight on student decision-making in their study of students attending an Italian public university, looking at the calculated risk avoidance of students choosing their degrees. Their research found that risk averse students were more likely to pick any other field other than social sciences. Wealthier students were likelier to choose subjects associated with riskier income, and students from poorer backgrounds were likely to be more risk averse in their decisions. The authors argue that students weighed up degree programmes depending on their

academic abilities, where high ability, risk averse students opted to enrol on degrees with the lowest risk in the labour market such as engineering, and where risk averse, lower ability students were more concerned with picking degrees which reduced chances of academic failure, such as humanities (2012:S195). This study attempts to provide an individualistic approach to study of risk aversion, yet demonstrates a lack of consideration of the multitude of social and structural factors that also shape the ways students interact with the labour market, the opportunities afforded to them, or how their personal histories shape this engagement. It offers a simplistic and quantitative understanding of decision-making. There is a superficial consideration of gender, with no examination of personal goals or attitudes towards specific professions. Nor do the researchers consider the impact of the local economy, labour market demands, or the intersection of race and class. What is considered a safe or lucrative profession, and for who, can and has changed, therefore students' decisions must be appreciated with more nuance than can be provided through statistical analysis alone. It is important to note that this statistical analysis of risk and preference supports the UK government's already economistic outlook, where the value of education is tied to graduate outcomes measured by salary and employment data, including rates of progression to professional jobs, and to further study. The controversial plans unveiled by British Prime Minister Rishi Suak to cap 'low-value' degrees, thus limiting the number of students who can enrol on them, is an apt example of the power and reliance of this type of data in policy. 'Low-value' degrees as defined by the criteria set out above, encompasses many critical professions such as teaching and social work, and other public sector roles whose low salaries are ironically set by the UK government (Adams & Allegretti 2023). As well as potentially decimating creative degree programmes, this approach offers a very narrow view of success, ignoring the reality that students might prioritise or value other factors

when choosing what to study. This move by the UK government additionally fails to account for the social and economic barriers many students face to even attend university in the first place, let alone enrol on 'high value' degrees, or the forms of social, cultural and psychological capital needed to land prestigious jobs. As will become clear, artistic degrees were devalued within both JIS and GCS as students' sought to materialise and maintain particular paths and relationships.

Moving beyond this overly simplistic argument, others have taken a more in-depth, if still economistic approach (Brynin 2012; Callender & Jackson 2008; Robson et al. 2017). These studies situate their research within the context of neoliberal education policies in the UK and the increasing commodification of higher education, where the cost of university is being increasingly transferred to the individual. They argue that over-qualification is not being recognised as an indicator of market failure (Brynin 2012:287), whilst class differences encourage students from lower-income backgrounds to view university as a potential debt, where wealthier students view it as an investment in their future (Callender & Jackson 2008). Students have also been considered vulnerable consumers with little financial literacy (O'Sullivan et al. 2018), and others still have acknowledged the impact on degree choice by students adopting a consumerist view of education, undermining academic rigour (Marshall et al. 2015). These works fit within broader conversations regarding the individualisation of risk in education, while others approach the question from a psychosocial perspective offering analyses of individual and class psychology (Reay et al. 2001), as well as personality traits and geographic mobility to the discussion (Weisser 2023).

More recently, research on university and degree choice has adopted a marketing perspective, looking at the strategies employed by universities to successfully recruit students in internationally competitive education markets. This work explores the factors students valued in their search, including the importance of place, cultural accessibility and familiarity, the lure of the university brand, quality of education, as well as historical and post-colonial power relations which have shaped desires to study abroad (Singh et al. 2014; Mahmoud et al. 2020; Winter & Thompson-Whiteside 2017; Foster 2014). In contrast to these previous approaches, Eldegwy et al. (2022, 2023) take the family as the starting point for their analysis, situating student's choices within their family histories, accounting for parents' involvement in their children's decisions within the context of different market pressures. Whilst much of this latter literature does consider how students engage in decision-making at various intersections of disadvantage (e.g. family income, class status, ethnicity, school performance) to some extent, more research is necessary to understand how unequal access to higher education shapes the decisions of minoritised groups in specific cultural and economic contexts which may transcend national borders. These have informed my own approach to analysing the university aspirations of JIS and GCS students as I looked to the nuances of their lives within particular educational systems, as well as their relationships with others and their positionalities to inform my understanding.

The study of student 'choice' may also be misleading as it suggests students are agents responsible for the ultimate decision-making about their education, where many are excluded from the outset, or have little option but to consider alternative routes due to cost, family expectations, language barriers, qualifications, or lack of recourse to student debt. This is an issue that many of the authors (De Paola & Gioia

2012; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka 2015; Callender & Jackson 2008) fail to account for in their individualistic approach to the study of student choice, where little consideration of the significant interpersonal factors that can play a part in the process of decision-making and the experiences that led students there. Moreover, the majority of research on student choice relies on survey data or second hand statistical data provided elsewhere, favoured over interview or ethnographic research to support it. Reay et al. (2001) offers the closest insight into student's predicaments through their interviews with university applicants who attended schools in or near London. Reay et al. found that there were powerful emotional constraints at play which contributed to student's "psychological self-exclusion" (2001:863) from high status universities (in this case UCL, King's, LSE) to whom students believed they were undesirable applicants. To build on this I consider the role of self-potentiality to interrogate student choices, particularly as a concept which can shape dispositions to the future through embodied experiences of decision-making.

The shortcomings of these studies impress the importance of incorporating more in-depth approaches to understanding student choice. Ethnography offers views of the mundane and anomalous, and shows us that probing the process of students' decision-making is as important as looking to the outcomes of such decisions. For many students the outcomes are ultimately the same - the 'safer' degrees, the traditional routes, but the journeys that led students to make these choices are pluralistic, and not always coherent. As such ethnography offers a critical contribution to the study of aspiration, revealing the messy everyday reality of how students come to imagine their futures, whilst acknowledging the broader institutional and socio-political fields which they navigate. It also reveals that rather

than operating with an economistic logic, students are also driven by sentiment, obligation, precarity, and affective debt.

Building on these studies, my research contributes to this dialogue by emphasising the interconnectedness of these previous approaches, and the significance of layered analyses to develop a clearer picture of the personal, national, and global pressures which inevitably converge in the everyday transnational contexts in which students make their choices. By foregrounding students own perspectives, these chapters highlight the fact that university decisions, whilst personal and intimate, are wrapped up in much larger process which involve a myriad of other structures, institutions, and interpersonal relationships whose influence and 'push and pull' has increased exponentially over the last few years (Chapter 2). Family, friends, teachers, advertisements, marketing campaigns, league tables, finances, rebellious behaviours, fears, hopes, romantic relationships. These are but a few of the many things that could be the decisive factor in tipping the scales towards a particular path for students. Providing a more complex picture of student choice is important if we are to understand what students, and by extension their parents, believe would be achieved through their decisions, as well as recognising the role of the personal in their journeys towards higher education or work. As I will show through the stories of GCS and JIS students, developing a more complex conception of student decision-making can aid us in interrogating the concept of 'choice' as we currently understand it in relation to educational contexts, how it is being used to shape educational policy and student recruitment, and most importantly disrupting 'choice' as synonymous with student agency.

Chapter 5

Imagining Student Futures at GCS: “Elevate or stay constant”

Introduction

In this chapter I offer a closer examination of GCS students' journeys towards the future within school, as well as their expectations and desires for finding stability within their choices. There were causal and unquestioned expectations that they would attend a good university, which would lead to their future financial security and social mobility, as well as their ability to one day ‘give back’, a value embedded into the IB itself as “caring” and one of the 10 attributes of their learner profile (see Chapter 3). Though students’ expectations were also the cause of many frustrations for teachers, not least because they did not put in the “hard work”. I explore students' increasing obsession with their grades, and the tensions created from the discrepancies between student and teachers’ views on the purpose of schooling. Students’ instrumental view of education, bolstered by their high self-potentiality, also generated conflicts between students and staff members.

Drawing on a variety of ethnographic vignettes, I demonstrate how ‘risky’ subjects were abandoned in the process of speculating on the future, highlighting the process by which degrees in artistic disciplines are devalued by the global middle class in the pursuit of desirable futures, something that was also prevalent JIS (Chapter 6). I also

consider the impact of students' family relationships and entanglements, and the role of perceived precarity in generating negative aspiration. As discussed above in Part II, developing a more complex conception of student choice can help us to interrogate this concept as we currently understand it in relation to educational contexts.

Students Limited

To understand this chapter, it is important to remind the reader of the particularities of the educational systems that the students I worked with were navigating. The International Baccalaureate (IB) has four programmes: the Primary Years Programme (PYP) for students ages three to twelve years, the Middle Years Programme (MYP) for students aged eleven to sixteen years, and finally the Diploma Programme (DP) and the Career-related Programme (CP) which are for students aged sixteen to nineteen years. Many of the students in DP1 had attended the school from some point in the MYP, all the way through to the IBDP and as such had known each other for around six years. A fact which they revelled in when it led to showing me school photos of fellow classmates when they were younger in order to embarrass them.

In the IBDP, students can choose from six subject groups: Studies in Language and Literature, Language acquisition, Individuals & Societies, Sciences, Mathematics, and the Arts. Three subjects from these groups would be taken at Higher Level (HL) and the remaining subjects at Standard Level (SL). If students wanted to choose to study more than one science-subject they would have to do so in lieu of a subject

from the arts. This was also true of other subjects as students could opt to study an additional Individuals & Societies course, or a language from the Language acquisition group, instead of a course in the arts. IBDP Students could not, for example, take biology, chemistry and film studies as a combination. Other components of the IBDP which were compulsory for all students to take included Theory of Knowledge (TOK) and Creativity, Activity, Service (CAS), which involved completing a project related to those three concepts, and the extended essay, which was a 4,000 word research paper on a topic of their choice. IB subjects are marked on a scale of 1-7, where 7 is the highest grade attainable.

A brief look at the International Baccalaureate website will assure you that "the aim of all IB programmes is to develop internationally minded people who, recognizing their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world" (IB website 2023). As discussed in Chapters 2 & 3, this goal is crystallised in the form of the IB learner profile and came in poster form, which was displayed in all the classrooms at GCS, along with other core values of the IB. Becoming "internationally minded" was enshrined in the educational programme itself at GCS, however, the actual process of realising this through securing university places, albeit significantly simpler than for JIS students, came with other challenges. The majority of DP1 students would be applying to UK universities as their first choices. A few held EU passports like Rosa and Mathis (and even fewer British passports), but most would be subject to the overseas fee structure if accepted. Though expensive and a significant investment, cost was rarely the most pressing issue and students seemed confident their parents would support their choices to attend university both in the UK, as well as abroad. Critical decisions it seemed were, not centred on where, but what to study.

The Instrumentality of Grades

Whilst grades have been noted to have the ability to define student's emotional states (Demerath 2009:91), at GCS students remained mostly undeterred by their results, confident that it would all work out (see Chapter 3). Though the IB does foster a degree of competitiveness (students are ranked globally across all IB schools in their performances), at GCS it seemed students did not necessarily strive for academic achievement to support a particular sense of self, valorisation of intellect, or achievement to gain the esteem of others. Instead their attitudes were oriented towards what their grades or talents could do for them, namely securing affective and material futures in the form of university places, job offers and proud parents. But also because their high self-potentiality filled them with confidence that the path they chose, was one they could materialise. This is not to say that students at GCS did not have a degree of attachment to individual success, or experience doubt, students such as Francesca strove for academic excellence and often took on extracurricular activities to gain extra credit, but their belief in attaining these safer futures was steadfast.

Nevertheless, Francesca and Jemimah would often discuss their grades in terms of what they needed rather than what they wanted, "I just need a 6 in my IA", or "I low-key need a 7 for Biology to do medicine", or "I need at least a 6 for LSE Law". The attainment of certain grades or passing exams was viewed as a requirement to obtain a certain outcome, rather than something that students desired in order to support their own personal sense of self as a student who achieves. This is not to

downplay or ignore the affective qualities of the achievement of these grades and the jubilance that accompanied a student who had received a good mark on a test, but I would like to draw attention to the subtle ways that students detached themselves from their academic aspirations and grades through employing them instrumentally.

Teachers at GCS frequently expressed annoyance that students only wanted to know what to do to obtain a 6 or a 7, rather than working their hardest and expressing interest in the gaining of knowledge itself. This frustration also manifested when students chose not to engage with classes or preparation for exams by revising over holidays. They would interrupt the lesson to pester the teacher about when they might get their marks back and could the teacher possibly give them a rough mark, so they had an idea. Grades seemed to be perpetually on the minds of students as they approached the end of the academic year. DP1s wanted to secure the necessary predicted grades from their teachers to apply to university, and DP2s wanted reassurance that they would receive the grades they needed to secure their university offers. Teachers wanted students to enjoy learning through an appreciation of the process, which led to a disjuncture in what teachers thought students should be concerned with and value from their education. As we will see, students also frequently explained to me that they decided to pursue what they thought to be 'safer' routes of study, ones that would secure jobs that were not only well-paid but not in precarious industries.

Every week I would sit with the DP1s in the common room during their free periods. The common room was small, with enough seats for no more than ten people. The chairs were bright blue and covered in dubious marks. Someone had drawn Bart Simpson's hair on top of the only light switch in the room, which never failed to

amuse me each time I futilely turned on the light in the dingy room. In this teacher-free space, I would talk to the DP1s while they were eating, messing around and occasionally, actually doing some work. On such an occasion, the conversation had turned to discussing medicine applications as Jemimah was complaining about how competitive it was to get a place on a medicine degree in London, as she was desperate to stay and study at UCL. Naturally, the topic moved to the predicted grades the students needed to apply to universities, which for many of their chosen degrees, was very high. Jemimah and Francesca were worried that their teachers would not embellish their predicted grades, giving them the benefit of the doubt, so that they could apply to their top choice universities. Jemimah explained that "it's easier to get into a uni if you just miss your grade than if you were never predicted it, then you would high-key be rejected!"

Jemimah was somewhat jokingly concerned that she would have to abandon medicine as her career of choice. For DP1 students their predicted grades were the only obstacle between them and their chosen universities, and as such they were viewed as instrumental to the securing of a particular future students had envisioned for themselves. However, their fantasies of university were also laid bare as they hypothesised that they would be able to access competitive courses such as medicine or law through clearing[5] if they missed their grades, despite this being a near impossibility given their oversubscription. Failure seemed not to be an option they had seriously considered.

Predicted grades were also the source of many disputes between students and teachers and apparently between teachers and parents at parents' evening, so I was

[5] The University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) is the system students use to apply to universities in the UK. If a student's grades do not meet their offer, they are automatically entered into clearing through UCAS. This system provides students with an opportunity to apply for places which have not yet been filled, outside of the normal application window.

told. A conversation during a DP2 French lesson between Ms B and David, a Nigerian student, was testament to this clash of attitudes towards schooling. David was as softly spoken and relaxed as he was cheeky. Ms B actually confided in me that she got along with David quite well outside of the DP2 French lessons, but in class he frequently and deliberately got on her nerves.

Ms B cast me a withering look when it became clear students had not been as studious over the spring break as they had promised to be and decided to help jog their memories by recapping irregular verbs for the exam.

It was during this recap that David said to Ms B, quite matter-of-factly from his seat,"I have beef with you Miss."

A hushed silence descended over me and other two students in the room. To my knowledge, Ms B was not the kind of teacher you said you "had beef" with, without serious repercussions.

"Beef with me? Excuse me, but what are you talking about David?" Ms B was not one to indulge and she clearly did not want to waste time on the remark.

"My beef is that you said in my report that I was too grade-focused and not interested enough in French. That's not true and it's unfair." David claimed.

"David this is ridiculous, you're wasting everyone else's revision time. You have every opportunity to speak to me after the lesson, so I don't know why you've decided now is an appropriate time to raise this issue!" Ms B was extremely irritated at the interruption to the lesson but brushed off David's comments and turned back to the board to continue writing. Not five minutes had passed in the quiet room when David unashamedly asked when he would get his grade back for his speaking exam. The class including Ms B, though exasperated, laughed at his contradictory behaviour.

This encounter was indicative of a wider concern that students would only work as hard as they needed to secure the grades they wanted, leading teachers to fear that a culture of complacency was being created around learning. Teachers at GCS commented on how students were “sheltered” and “clueless”, unaware of how the world of employment really worked and its challenges, largely due to their upbringing, relative wealth, and the protective environment the school provided. The unpredictability and precarity of life seemed to dominate my conversations with staff at GCS, as teachers worried about students’ preparedness for their future outside of the comfort of the school, emphasising the need to apply themselves. This was interesting, as of course students were aware of these risks, albeit to different extents, they simply did not imagine failing to secure a place at university as a reality.

Teachers felt it was their obligation to continuously manage expectations on students’ behalf, and their desire to warn students of the potential disappointments that might await them was perhaps part cautionary tale to scare them, part genuine concern. It could also be interpreted as the conflicting perspectives on the world and its possibilities that children and adults hold based on their lived experience of setbacks, failure or the disappointment of unrealised aspirations. However, teachers' preoccupation with students' deficit in work ethic, which they saw as impeding students' ability to realise their aspirations, only fuelled students' preoccupation with grades. This heightened awareness of students’ perceived precarity and therefore went some way to undermine the support teachers showed for success outside of academic achievement and the value of learning. During DP2 art lessons these attitudes manifested repeatedly.

Artistic careers were generally shunned by most students in pursuit of stability. Though teachers were supportive of students' endeavours outside traditional academic routes, as discussed above, students often chose to forgo artistic degrees in favour of degrees such as business or management. Artistic degrees were not envisioned as dependable. Ironically, in art lessons, students frequently expressed their perception of artistic degrees as insecure, something which was not generative of employability and financial security. An artist herself, their teacher Ms P lamented their decisions not to pursue their talents further.

The art room was small and painted off-white. A rectangular space, often quite bright during the early afternoon, filled with half-finished, wholly imaginative pieces. Mixed-media boards of PVA glue sand and crumbling plaster of paris, sculptures of wire, paper and ostentatious acrylic paint. The works lined the worse-for-wear grey tables along one length of the classroom. The whole room was being prepared for the exhibition of DP2 portfolio pieces at the end of March, and because of this there was a corner crammed with canvases and bags full of picture frames, ready to be assembled hastily by stressed students at the last minute. Hallways all across the school were adorned with artworks for their exhibition.

Mostly I spent my time observing, chatting, or giving students feedback on their writing. Students were still stressed and highly-strung, frantically trying to write reports and artist studies, always missing and extending their deadlines much to the teacher’s chagrin. And yet, for most students, art was a subject they looked forward to, even when they turned up to class knowing they would be called out on their lack

of submitted work. Students would tell me sheepishly that they really needed to finish an assignment as we walked from registration to the art rooms. I knew from Ms P they had already spent an inordinate amount of time on each project, which was a testament to their dedication but posed an issue for remaining on schedule to finish pieces as well as revising for their other subjects. Art lessons offered the opportunity to engage with movements, mediums and ideas in a way that encouraged students to explore their interests, whatever the topic. And so, students enjoyed it.

Lucia was a white Italian student who initially wanted to pursue interior design at university, and Ms P supported her decision as she believed Lucia had a true talent. On a pale March morning, we were in the art room and the students were working on their exam pieces. Lucia was fixing what looked like the collapsed wall of a model room, sticking one of the white plastic walls back into place and securing orange and pink transparent plastic sheets across blob-shaped holes. The miniature room was evocative of the 80s with its bright colours and lava-lamp-esque windows. I asked her what had inspired the design and she showed me her art book which contained studies of fabrics, textures, and furniture, as well as experiments with colour and abstract shapes. She explained that she had settled on interior design too late, and after attending a workshop at Central Saint Martins[6], had decided that her portfolio would not be good enough for her to be accepted. She said she would probably pursue interior design as a post-graduate, and we chatted about the possibilities of transitioning later in her educational life. What Lucia had actually applied to university to study was business and marketing, something which I later discovered the teacher believed was due to parental influence.

[6] Central Saint Martins is a prestigious arts university in the University of the Arts London group

“Why business and marketing exactly? It seems quite different to your original choice?”

Lucia smiled and shrugged noncommittally. “It’s easier to get a job after I graduate, I think. It’s a safe choice.”

As the students packed up and left Ms P expressed to me disappointment that Lucia would not be pursuing her interests, it was “such a shame” but it was quite common for students to apply for business-oriented courses. This was to be a recurrent theme when discussing the future plans with teachers and students.

A week later, in the same room, the art class were preparing their work for display. I was enlisted to help set up giant boards that would act as fake walls, and help students to write their curatorial rationales. The individual exhibitions were being marked on the students’ ability to create the narrative they wanted their audience to follow during the show, something which caused a lot of stress. I was admiring Leah’s newly hung portraits of her family and friends, life-like and drawn in pencil, when she came over to talk. We spoke about her project and she excitedly produced two newly finished pieces from a very large designer shopping bag. One was a painting of Winnie the Pooh characters behind prison bars and the other was a pop-art graffiti piece of Mickey Mouse. Leah was an assertive and affable student from Libya. Much of her work was representative of experiences from her childhood there, combining her love of Winnie the Pooh and the normality of war and imprisonment which became part of everyday life for her family. She explained that cartoons had become a way to show the political conflict which surrounded her as she grew up. Other students would later show me their work with the caveat that it was not as good as Leah’s obviously, commenting on how she had a natural talent for drawing. Art was the only subject Leah believed she would obtain a good mark in, she

emphasised how much she wanted a 7, and the amount of time she had spent on her project. Leah needed the mark to secure her place at university to study law which was already precarious because of her grades in French. Her father owned a company and Leah said she would probably just work for him after she graduated. She reiterated to me, while we sat at the table affixing double-sided tape to her canvases, that law was a good choice as it was vocational, unlike art which was difficult to pursue and there were “no jobs in it” anyway.

On a shockingly hot morning in late April, I was helping Eva to clear away the immense amount of sand that had been required to fill both of her green turtle-shaped children’s sandpits. Eva was the only student to actually turn up to the lesson, the teacher had anticipated this as students were achingly close to going on study leave which meant they were already prioritising revision over attending classes, especially ones which involved clearing up after themselves or studying they could do in the common room. Eva was a friendly, and perpetually nervous, white British student who always wore her long hair in a ponytail. The teacher told me she was a perfectionist, she put a lot of pressure on herself in art and did not deal very well with stress. As we scooped sand into thick plastic bin liners with child-sized buckets and spades, Eva explained her sandpits were to represent the positive and negative aspects of childhood. We spent at least half an hour filling bags with sand, shovelling amicably. After the sand fiasco, as we were taking down parts of Eva’s installation we spoke about her project and her plans after finishing the IB. Eva had chosen to go to Michigan State University in the US.

“To study art?” I queried. Mainly because she was very invested in the subject and had mentioned putting her other subjects on hold to dedicate her time to finishing her exhibition.

“Sadly, no. But I will probably change major to art or design when I’m there.” She hesitated, but continued.
“My major will be Hotel Management; my father is a hotelier. And he owns a hotel group. My whole family went to Michigan State, my parents, my grandparents too. It’s like a legacy. My parents met at university there, my mum is from Michigan.”
I nodded in understanding, but did not press any further, she seemed a little deflated from my probing. So we shifted topic to her moving to America and the fact she was excited to be closer to her grandparents.

It seemed as though the majority of teachers and parents (aside from Ms P) projected uncertainty onto students. Whether this was grounded in their own experiences and knowledge of precarious employment, migrant uncertainty and disappointment, it was in an effort to prepare them for the “real world”. These concerns interacted in unexpected ways with the schools' ideologies and curricula, which themselves were supposedly designed to protect students from these realities, causing complex dilemmas. To some extent it could be argued that students at GCS were undertaking the work of speculation, where “speculation here is understood to be the making present and materializing of uncertain futures. It is an engagement with uncertainty for profit as well as for survival” (Bear et al 2015:387). Even students' attendance of international school, over British institutions, could be considered another form of speculation on the part of their families, and as an investment in pursuit of global distinction through attainment of cosmopolitan cultural capital and credentials. I draw attention to these stories as I would like to suggest here that for students, alongside the risks of unemployment, the risk of affective disruption was one that weighed heavily and sometimes silently in our conversations. Placing strain on their

relationships with their parents and families often outweighed the risk of pushing to pursue paths that were attractive but considered uncertain.

Where Lucia, Leah and Eva expressed conflicted feelings towards their plans for the future, they also justified their choices with rationales that would support and prioritise their familial relationships. The ambivalence that students experienced at GCS was not unique to the school, as will be explored in Chapter 6, and may in fact be seen as a response and resignation to a lack of control over their educational choices. Nevertheless, students were also able to reclaim narratives on the future by presenting their decisions as the logical choice, or posed a short term rational deviation from their long term goals. Rather than their familial connections or wealth providing an emotional comfort, though wealth of course provides tangible security, students at GCS often experienced a pressure to shore up their prospects by avoiding risky futures, which ironically their advantageous economic positions would in fact be able to support. Students' reflections on their future highlight the affective dimensions of aspiration, drawing attention to the complicated and sometimes conflicting feelings contemplating the future brought forth. Students' self-potentiality was formed within these feelings of responsibility to make 'good choices', generating ambivalence, acceptance and sometimes frustration. As such, it is critical to draw attention to the relational qualities to aspiration, where their choices were often shaped with others in mind and within the particular aspirational global imaginaries of their families and the realities of the global education and labour markets, as will be explored further in the following chapters.

Not all art students at GCS had such a dedicated approach to work. While some tended to take deadlines seriously, others would lag behind and then clash with the teacher. One such art student was Mathis, an entertaining if confrontational student in DP1.

“Miss, I have other subjects, y’know.” He quipped when he was asked politely by Ms P why he still had not submitted his artist study. This led to a slightly heated exchange where Ms P berated him for having not submitted work he had already received an extension on, after weeks of constant reminders. I was taken aback because the teacher was normally very relaxed, but clearly she was reaching the end of her generous rope as the end of the year approached and Mathis’ attitude still had not changed. I was surprised to see Mathis in the class as I knew how behind he was in his other subjects.

“Other subjects are not an excuse for not doing the work Mathis!” The disagreement continued until Mathis conceded and stomped off to collect the piece he was working on, stuck his Airpods in, and continued his drawing. The music coming from the Airpods was so loud that you could hear the French rap blaring from across the room. I glanced towards Francesca and Rosa who raised their eyebrows and gave me knowing looks and suppressed smiles, before going back to their own paintings. Mathis wanted to be a professional boxer, which may have explained his apathy towards his studies. He did not want to go to university and spent the majority of his time training outside of school, apparently instead of doing his homework. The DP1 students told me he was very good at it though, and he would mention his dedication to the sport proudly in lessons, with little prompting. It was during this art lesson, which started rather tensely that Rosa received some life changing news.

Rosa squealed loudly and started jumping around ecstatically, smiling from ear to ear waving her phone around exclaiming “Oh my god! I did it! Holy shit!” Then quickly covered her mouth embarrassed by her own swearing in front of the teacher. Rosana, or Rosa as she was referred to by most, had received a conditional offer from UAL for a place on their foundation course. The email was in regard to the fact that she would not have to complete the remainder of the IBDP by the time the foundation year started. Rosa had raised this issue to UAL and they had decided to give her a conditional offer, the criteria for meeting the offer was the completion of an essay on an artist of her choice. Francesca and I congratulated her on the incredible news. Rosa was from Portugal and Francesca Brazil; they had bonded over shared language and good-natured disagreements about whether Brazilian music was better than Portuguese. For Rosa this was an opportunity of a lifetime, she described art as her passion and main career goal. She told me she had not expected to be accepted, as it was unusual to get a place on the course without IBDP grades, something which UAL had originally asked for.

Stories of Rosa were shared with me by boasting teachers before I got to know her. Ms P presented me with some of Rosa’s sketches as she was photocopying them in the staffroom when I was eating my lunch one day. “Aren’t they incredible? She’s so talented.” Ms P crooned proudly. Ms P was of course over the moon at Rosa’s offer for UAL and they set to work immediately to prepare.

Rosa was a wonderful anomaly among students, in so much as she was universally liked by staff even though she did not have what they described as “academic aspirations”. Teachers often praised students who were “hard-working” or “capable”,

or as “high-achievers” with “high aspirations”, all traits which students that were well liked possessed and qualities that teachers respected. Rosa was well liked because she was actively engaged in all her lessons, and teachers thought she was very kind and polite. A few teachers even expressed a genuine fondness for her parents as they were “open-minded, supportive and wonderful people”. Rosa was well-known as a promising artist throughout the school and her artistic talent freed her from the normal framework of success that teachers used frequently to discuss other students. This is not to imply that Rosa was not hard working or capable, because she was, but her grades were never mentioned to me in the same breath as her talent. Not by Rosa, her peers or teachers. A highly unusual occurrence when grades were the talking point of countless conversations between staff and students that I observed, between myself and staff, as well as the source of contention for many students.

Mathis was also recognised by his peers and teachers for his talent as a boxer, but this talent and preoccupation with the pursuit of non-educational aspirations led to an apathy towards his time in school. Mathis, therefore, felt no need to push himself to complete his IBDP work as he had already made his mind up about what he wanted to do. Ms B commented to me that Mathis just did not care about schoolwork and his bad attitude riled teachers up throughout the school. Ms B reflected that “to him working hard at school might be seen as a wasted effort”.

Where Rosa and Mathis’ talents led them to find other paths for their futures outside the traditional structure of the IBDP, Rosa’s ability to continue to complete work (even when she commented to me that doing so was pointless), meant that teachers respected Rosa and her choices. Mathis’ apparent lack of work ethic, or at least work ethic directed towards his studies, conversely caused strained relationships with

teachers. Nevertheless, Mathis planned to finish the IBDP course and graduate with his diploma, whilst Rosa was dropping out of school. Ultimately, and maybe paradoxically, Mathis' plan to gain an internationally recognised credential could be considered the 'safer' route as if his boxing career did not materialise, he would still have other options open to him such as applying for university. Rosa's decision to drop out of school had inherent risks as she did not have an unconditional offer, and without a diploma she would find it hard to apply for other less accommodating foundation degrees. Securing academic success in the form of good IBDP grades or being a 'smart kid' was seemingly irrelevant to the futures that Rosa and Mathis envisioned for themselves and as such neither strove to be the best, nor did they have an attachment to personal success within the IB framework. They instead situated the value of their personal success in their talents, demonstrating the limited extent to which certain students may internalise institutional achievement narratives, but the achievement ideologies of teachers left little room for negotiation.

Talent, which seemingly granted students a degree of freedom from the academic framework of the IB, was simultaneously penalised when it caused disengagement and disinterest in the following of alternative paths. The seeking of spectacular fortunes through the pursuit of sports to overcome the uncertainties of livelihoods represents a legitimate strategy of mobility (Besnier et al. 2018). Despite knowledge that success is rare, these strategies are a desirable way out of poverty for many. For global middle class families there seemed to be little value in seeking out alternative paths to success through reliance on talent, instead families turned to imaginaries of secure professions, and as in the cases of Leah and Eva, occupational dynasties to secure their status (Eldegwy et al. 2023).

Giving Back

A Free Period Debate

On Thursdays at GCS, DP1 students congregated in the basement common room. The conversation was already in full swing when I arrived in the stuffy room. Francesca, Rosa, and Jemimah were deep in discussion about their ideal places to live in the future. Francesca's dream was to have an apartment in New York, somewhere she had always wanted to live.

"Babe, you know New York is super expensive right? And there are some really dodgy parts, seriously. It's not the dream experience you're imagining. New York is not what it looks like in the movies!" Jemimah pointed out.

"Nah, you don't know anything, bruh. My family have a penthouse in Manhattan and it's always safe. New York is the best, I've *never* experienced any crime. You just don't know what you're talking about." Jason had taken an earbud out to defend the city, rocking back and forth on the back legs of his chair, gesticulating with his Airpod in a dismissive wave.

" What?! Of course you haven't experienced any crime, you live in an expensive area which is probably way more secure and has less crime anyway!" João chimed in, laughing at his best friend and now distracted from work.

"Sure, it's not likely you go walking around the dodgier areas, I've been to New York." Jemimah reasoned.

The debate ended for Jason as he put his earbuds back in angrily, muttering "You guys don't know what you're talking about" and staring off out of the window.

"People are always telling me Brazil is unsafe, I disagree but I'm like, okay if you say so. I guess if you live in a country you're familiar with the way things work, you know

where not to go, and what not to do to make yourself a target" added Francesca, and that tourists were the real easy targets in Brazil.

Jemimah countered this with her experiences growing up in South Africa.

"The number of times I've been mugged in SA is more than I can count, it's so many I can't remember, at least six times when I was older. It's so common." Everyone was listening to the story now, and Jemimah continued.

"When I was like quite young my dad was coming to visit us in SA, and of course we were so excited. My uncle said to me to come with him to collect my dad from the airport because he knew how excited I was. Anyway, the flight was delayed until later that day and so my uncle asked again if I wanted to go because it was late. I changed my mind and decided not to go because I was so tired."

She paused in the story, "this was for sure an act of God, you know I low-key believe in God and he intervened here honestly. So on the way back from picking up my dad from the airport my uncle spotted a car following them. The window opened and the people started shooting at my uncle and my dad. The bullets grazed the car as warning shots, so my uncle pulled over and then they both made a run for it. And my dad is large, like really overweight so running was not easy and when they reached a fence they had to climb over. My uncle helped my dad over the fence and pushed him to safety because you know, he was the breadwinner and had children and my uncle didn't. But my uncle escaped too but he was shot in the leg escaping." Jemimah nodded to the shocked sounds of her classmates and shrugged.

"It was a miracle I wasn't there because as a kid I would not have kept up running after two men!"

We nodded in agreement that it was indeed a miracle.

Jemimah then recalled another incident from her childhood when her grandparents house was being broken into. Her grandparents called outside for help but no one wanted to get involved.

“Yeah so my dad comes running to get me and my sister, we were playing with these new umbrellas we were just given, in like this alley down the side of my grandparents house. He came running out yelling that we needed to leave, we had to throw the umbrellas away because they got stuck in the alley! It wasn’t even raining,” She laughed at the memory.

“We were just so happy with them, we kept walking around with them open.”

There are many aspects of the above debate and subsequent story that I would like to draw out, however, I will focus on a few to frame the following discussion, namely how students personal experiences were reflected in their conceptualising of potential paths after leaving school, their unspoken expectations of their futures, as well as how students own wealth and privilege was re-contextualised by their friends or actual encounters with the precarity of others. Students’ stories revealed the sheer diversity of their experiences, yet united as members of the global middle class by their desire for international mobility and for specific educational experiences and futures.

In their research Westendorp et al., (2020) consider how the economic, sociocultural and political aspirations of young people come into being. They acknowledge that aspirations are not only individual but deeply embedded in social norms and expectations and shaped by commonly held hopes and desires (2020:5). As Westendorp et al. argue, there is significant correlation between the expectations of students and the environments they grew up in, from family support and role

models, to the privileged educational environments they moved and socialised in. However, I argue that at GCS, students' belief in their capacities and agency to achieve their goals, as well as their motivations, were not informed solely by positive experiences of reinforcement, rather they could be forged in adverse reaction to encounters with, or exposure to, undesirable futures.

In the following section I examine the ways Francesca and Jemimah narrated their aspirations for the future, and contextualised them in relation to their own experiences, reiterating their desire to give back. As such, I argue that students' motivations were complexly situated between their personal experiences of economic security and mobility, and their knowledge of the fragility of success and life more generally. I argue that whilst the term aspiration is normally associated with positive ideals that look towards future goals, hopes, desires, and ambitions, at GCS the avoidance of 'bad choices' and reflections on what constituted an undesirable life and circumstances, were equally important frames of reference.

Balancing Commitments

Jemimah came to exemplify many students' concerns for their future success as financially stable and, critically, employable, graduates. Jemimah also shared many students' desire to contribute to the development of their home country in ways that they believed would be beneficial, often to bring skills, knowledge, resources, or voluntary capacity to support those with less opportunity and access than they had been afforded. Francesca and Jemimah were concerned with the impact of 'brain drain' or human capital flight on developing economies, creating shortages of skilled

workers at home, as trained professionals leave to work abroad for larger salaries and greater employment opportunities. Both students felt strongly about contributing to broader changes at home across social justice and women's healthcare.

Francesca wanted to be a lawyer in the UK, and whilst in an ideal world she would practise law in Brazil, realised the limitations of this reality. Her concern with her position as a woman and the political climate in Brazil made the prospect of going back complicated:

> *Cause I want to give back to the place I was born, because I had the opportunity to come here and be educated. And even though I was pretty privileged in Brazil, the people I know, that went to the same school, I don't feel like they had the same opportunities as me because I moved to London. So I just want to improve what Brazil is right now. And every time I hear like, there's always a different scandal. And now we have like a sexist president, and he's almost a dictator, and everyone believes what he says and everyone supports him. And those that don't are labelled feminists. And feminism is a bad word in Portuguese, like in Brazilian Portuguese, it's a bad word. Like you can't be a feminist….Like you can't say the word feminism. Saying you're a feminist is almost like saying you're a criminal. Because it goes against what everyone thinks.* (Francesca, GCS interview, 2019)

Investing in education has long been a strategy of middle-class Brazilians in order to secure their class identity (O'Dougherty 2002). Recognising the opportunities migrating six years ago had provided, Francesca was torn over returning to Brazil in the future, acknowledging that if it was safer she might be more inclined to work

there. Francesca's feminism was a core part of her identity and attending GCS she was free to express this. Giving back was therefore framed and relativised by her concern for the circumstances in her home country, and the experiences she believed her former classmates had missed out on despite their similar background.
Here the potential of missed opportunity for migration and social mobility highlights Francesca's association of transnational mobility with the productivity of becoming 'international' as part of the global middle class. Aspirations to one day give back and "improve what Brazil is" were forged with the knowledge that there are those that get left behind.

Similarly, Jemimah framed her motivations in relation to her experiences and knowledge of her own privilege, something which had shaped her desire to eventually give back to communities that were less fortunate. Her parents background in Angola and her experiences growing up in South Africa made her acutely aware of how things could have been different for her, and she frequently mentioned the levels of corruption in Angola when it came up in conversations:

> *Coming from a lower-economically developed country, Angola, I know how just from what I've seen, how the system is corrupt, even in hospitals in terms of healthcare. In a country that's democratic you know, their basic needs should be met. So yeah, I definitely want to work in those places and help. Even if it's not necessarily for like money and stuff like that. Because when you do get into medicine, it's not really about the money. If you're doing it for the money, that passion, it can only drive you for so long.*
> (Jemimah, GCS interview, 2019)

Angola, as Jemimah reminded me, was struggling. Money was not the driving force behind her entrepreneurial spirit, and she needed to ensure she was in a strong financial position to facilitate her volunteering. Jemimah also referred to her faith as a guiding force in her life, stressing its importance to her:

> *Even if it weren't for me to do medicine, I've always been a person about charities and stuff like that, just to give back because I thank God, I'm a Christian, and so I thank God every night that I'm so privileged to be in the position that I'm in.* (Jemimah, JIS Interview 2019)

Jemimah felt a deep gratitude towards her family and her life, despite the many challenges she had lived through. She did not shy away from admitting that she wanted to maintain the lifestyle she had currently through her desired career and opening up a healthcare business. Nevertheless, giving back to communities through charity was important to her, as medical care in South Africa and Angola was very lacking for people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Medicine offered a route into a stable profession which also supported her sensibilities as a Christian, and allowed her to realise commitments aiding communities in need.

Jemimah and Francesca had unusually detailed plans for their futures, showcasing a deep reflection on their potential paths, where these might take them, and why they were meaningful. Below I discuss Jason and Jemimah to explore how their relationships with their families impacted their decision-making.

Family Entanglements

The centrality of relationships with families was echoed in conversations with many students. Acknowledging their parents' influence on their decision making, here I focus on two students in particular who became representative of the various ways that family relationships informed and animated their hopes for the future. I focus on their stories not only because they came from complex families and histories, but because they articulated well the general struggles and challenges experienced by many of the students - making family proud, finding stability in their choices, respect for parents' contributions towards their futures, and shared experiences of migration for the benefit of the family. Students emphasised their feelings of gratitude whilst maintaining that they made their choices independent of their parents views, something which was common amongst GCS students. Despite this, students still justified their choices to me in relation to a perceived precarity of alternative careers, foregrounding the sensibility of their decisions in line with their parents' views.

Jason

I only discovered near the end of my time at GCS that Jason was adopted. Originally born in Tokyo, Jason had been adopted by his white American parents when he was only two years old, and felt a deep respect and love for them. Applying to both UK and US universities he planned to study psychology and film media.

Jason's dad was a military man from a distinguished military family with a long history of service. Jason faced a serious dilemma when he realised he did not want to join the US Army despite attending military school out of respect to his father before he arrived at GCS:

> *I think I always felt that I would let somebody down if I never went into the military […] I was like okay, four years of my life whatever, I'll do that real quick then get out and do my thing*. (Jason, GCS Interview 2019)

Jason had assumed his father expected him to continue the tradition of military service by graduating from military school and enlisting. However, his father assured him that there was no obligation to continue the family tradition and that Jason was free to pursue his own interests with his parents' support. Despite Jason's relative freedom, he had developed a very specific timeline of his life:

> *So if I go to the US I'll be 22 when I graduate and I plan to do some work at any facility that helps me pursue my career path. Hopefully by the time I'm 25 I have a pretty steady sort of job. Not my permanent job but something that will put a lot of things on my CV that will give me good experience. And then hopefully by the time I'm 30 I would have directed my first film. And I sort of decided that between like 35 and 37, if I feel like I'm being pretty complacent in the film industry, to own my psychology practice and work with troubled teens and troubled youth and stuff.* (Jason, GCS Interview 2019)

The steady building of Jason's imagined career towards a psychology practice was due to the impact his grandparents had in his life. One of whom was a psychotherapist and the other an actress. Another consideration were his troubled experiences in Florida:

> *Like I think I've had a lot of experiences and know a lot people who I guess go through… like a troubled childhood and y'know, maybe aren't as*

> *fortunate as I am to be in a position where I can go on vacations with my family and all that type of stuff. And y'know I've put myself in those positions before where I've done stuff, I really wasn't supposed to do at all. And I sort of had this eye-opening thing where I went to this programme and I sort of realised where my life was going if I decided to pursue this particular route. And I didn't really like it. And then sort of through meeting people while I was doing those things, I sort of realised that a lot of them have put on this persona of really being tough and feeling that they know everything. But behind those walls there are a lot of family issues or just things that they just weren't talking about: hurt. And they just put that into anger and put it into the wrong places. I kind of realised that about myself as well. So I think if my film doesn't work out y'know, sort of cringey but I think my purpose in life is to have some impact on the world and help people.* (Jason, GCS Interview 2019)

Students self-realisation seemed intricately tied to their families influences, as well as their knowledge of how their lives could have gone. Despite the inherited safety net that Jason had from his family, he still felt a strong desire to make it on his own and his side hustle as a trader of designer sneakers, as mentioned in Chapter 3, was one of many entrepreneurial ventures he committed himself to. Though an extremely charismatic, confident and outgoing person, Jason's desire to make his parents proud was strong enough that he attended military academy knowing he had no interest in pursuing a career in the military. The persona of " being tough and feeling that they know everything" that he recognised in other young people and in himself goes some way to demonstrate how Jason performed his confidence, particularly in school, to overcome feelings of uncertainty and worry. Jason's reflections on his

family and personal growth highlight the emotional burdens that all students face, regardless of their social or economic background, when trying to figure out what they could and should become.

Jemimah

A businessman, Jemimah's father and her mother had left Angola to make a better life in South Africa before she was born, due to the level of corruption in the country. Jemimah held a deep respect for her father and his commitment to family and hard work. The awareness of her privilege seemed to reinforce Jemimah's sense of independence, the ability to take her future into her own hands and make decisions. Though she acknowledged they happened to coincide with her father's hopes for his children. Jemimah's belief in her freedom to pursue her interests and her sense of responsibility towards helping others was evident in the way she spoke about her family and their support for each other. Having grown up away from her father for many years, under the care of her older sibling in London, Jemimah had seen all of her siblings go off to university and pursue careers in their chosen fields.

Jemimah's frankness about her desire for continued upward mobility, or the ability to maintain her socio-economic position, was unusual. Most students at GCS alluded to this issue in more indirect ways through the idiom of aiming for "secure" employment, as opposed to what they considered precarious jobs. This was in reference almost unanimously to the 'white-collar' and 'gold-collar' (knowledge worker) professions they hoped to graduate into. Reiterating her commitment to becoming a doctor, she emphasised that it was *her* choice. Jemimah's mother died

when she was young, whilst also studying to be a doctor, which she nevertheless mentioned as a possible factor:

> *But other than that [her mother passing] I think it was just a choice of mine. I mean my people, my dad, wanted a child to do medicine but I always told my dad I'll do what I wanna do y'know?* (Jemimah, GCS interview 2019)

She vacillated between recognising her family's influence and asserting her independence. Though her father was incredibly supportive of her decision to study medicine, she presented herself as making decisions independent of her family, but appreciated that exposure to their particular career paths may have contributed to her aspiration for a lucrative career:

> *Because I have come from a family that is majority business-based actually. Like my dad: business; a lot of my siblings: accounting, finance, events management, hotel management, y'know. All surrounded by really business-based, like we don't have no anthropologists y'know!* (Jemimah, GCS interview 2019)

Jemimah described her father as open minded to his children's choices, and she felt she would be able to pursue most paths she could imagine for herself, even as an artist, as long as she had a back-up plan:

> *Because obviously these types of jobs are not always the most secure and not always the most promising, it doesn't work out for everyone. […] But for me I do have, not necessarily high aspirations, I don't think money represents*

> *your wealth in terms of my purpose in this world, but I do think that having a sustained life is very important. Especially given the foundation that I have, I'm really privileged to come from a privileged background and to come to a private school, so I definitely don't want to down-grade from that, so y'know? It's just one of those things. Elevate or stay constant basically!* (Jemimah, GCS, Interview 2019)

The potential to "elevate" herself through her desired career specialising in gynaecology and obstetrics, achieving upward social mobility was critical. It created room for acknowledging the strong foundations her family had provided, despite the adverse circumstances in which she grew up, which were focal to Jemimah's framing of her aspirations. It seemed that realising a 'stable' future for herself, would in turn honour the sacrifices of her family and those that contributed to Jemimah's success.

I suggest that university therefore represented a hybrid moment of self-authoring for some students, one which had the potential to connect students even more strongly to family through financial dependence – but also as a communal achievement. Here independence can be seen as relational, where students engaged with choices to pursue specific paths, as students like Jemimah, Jason, and Francesca also built their capacity to give back. Perceived precarity not only generated negative aspiration, but stronger beliefs in students who had more adverse experiences to 'give back', no doubt fuelled by the ideologies of the IB, and into 'safer' careers.

Negative Aspiration

Negative aspiration, where students formulated and expressed their hopes for the future in relation to what they explicitly did not want, or hoped to avoid. Provided an unexpected accompanying explanation in my conversations with students, particularly when justifying their elite careers of choice. Experiences of witnessing others' precarity were largely narrated as formative and influential by students at GCS, who themselves hailed from the Global South, or, like Jason, though insulated in many ways, still encountered poverty and lack of opportunity through his social circles and illicit activities. We can also see concerns for a safe and productive future from students like Lucia, and Leah who viewed art as a 'risky' choice. Perceived precarity is here seen as a critical characteristic of global middle class aspirations.

What animated students' goals and imaginations of the future? How do their personal experiences become reflected in these narratives? How can we understand problematic and negative experiences as forces that are re-appropriated into these narratives in productive ways? These are the questions that interrogating negative aspiration can answer.

Precarity is nothing new or novelty for those from the Global South, though these discussions might have centred around issues of insecure employment, marginality and social exclusion in research (Millar 2014). If precarity amongst well educated and relatively privileged students can be considered a form of elite disappointment, a more recent phenomenon steeped in nostalgia for past days of secure employment and aspirational opportunities, then this begs the question - how should we understand precarity as described by students from the global middle class, who are in many senses privileged consumers of international education?

During my time at GCS students invoked the bad things that could happen if you did not make the right or 'smart' decisions in life. Keddie's research with primary school children in England presents an eerily apt comparison where "performative neoliberalism" is seen to permeate children's conversations regarding "education as a vehicle to job success and economic security" (2016:113). Rather than the responsibilisation of students' behaviour at GCS, there was a responsibilisation of choice. GCS students did not seek out top-marks, or prioritise "work on the self" (Keddie 2016:119) to reaffirm their identities as those who achieve, instead they tried to make their grades work for them, viewing them as something to be deployed instrumentally in pursuit of particular futures. Students' stories demonstrate the limits of theories of neoliberal responsibilisation to adequately explain students behaviours, choices and aspirations.

Despite their comfortable backgrounds, GCS students framed their aspirations around a perceived precarity, potentially due to their increased exposure to others' downward mobility, emphasising their desire for stable and secure careers. I argue that the concept of precarity remains salient for considering not just those in what we might consider immediately precarious positions e.g experiencing poverty or labour insecurity, but those in economically privileged positions. As Millar summarises Thorkelson's (2016) argument, based on research with academics in France, that "the political category of precarity is a form of 'elite disappointment'.... That is, critiques of precarity are wrapped up with expectations, aspirations, and a sense of entitlement among the already privileged (in this case, doctoral students and PhDs) who fear losing their status and secure place in the world" (Millar, 2017:5).

Here perceived precarity can help shed light on the ways that students, as members of the global middle class, imagined potential instability and uncertainty in their futures. I use perceived, not as a judgement on whether students' precarity was 'real' or not, but instead as a commentary on the ways that uncertainty can shape our outlook, hopes for the future, and the decisions we feel we can make. Thereby acknowledging that continual feelings of insecurity have real and tangible affective effects on young people. If we understand the global middle class as a continuum of socio-economic privilege, it is not hard to imagine how students from the lower end of this class status are experiencing the effects of perceived precarity most acutely, as their ability to acquire cosmopolitan cultural capital and the international qualifications necessary, shrinks with rising educational costs, rampant inflation, and a hyper competitive global labour market, where the number of university graduates is at an all time high. Students' ability to differentiate themselves through attending international schools is in itself precarious. Students' concern with their perceived precarity and fear of downward mobility, or what we might call vertigo, led to the prevalence of negative aspiration, whereby students recounted and justified their aspirations in relation to what they wanted to avoid - undesirable jobs, financial insecurity, and premature curtailing of opportunities.

The grip of marketisation on student futures, and the commodification of education, has far reaching consequences particularly for students from developing economies and countries whose national qualifications are not recognised in the UK, generating anxieties and new pressures linked to educational inflation and the rising costs of remaining competitive. At GCS not all students expressed sentiments of perceived precarity related to their exposure to undesirable lives, but as in the case of Lucia, Leah and Eva their perceived precarity may be linked to their histories of migration,

conflicting expectations of kin, and shrinking opportunities in the global labour market.

In some ways the negative aspiration prevalent at GCS is resonant of Davidson's (2011a:101) suggestion that the Latino youth she worked with at Morton High School internalised the narratives in the school which labelled them as "at-risk" youth, which in turn shaped their patterns of aspiration and desire to give back. At GCS whilst students were not at risk, they had internalised narratives of precarity that circulated in their lives at home and at school, informed as well by global and national political and economic climates. However, the management of aspirations seemed to be something undertaken by teachers rather than by students, who instead turned to speculation (Bear et al. 2015).

Beyond everyday conversations concerning the collection of limited edition designer bags and bribing front of house staff to secure reservations at restaurants with a no booking policy, there were causal and unquestioned expectations regarding their attendance of a good university, their future economic stability and success, and their ability to one day 'give back'. GCS students would commonly discuss money in relation to acquiring material goods such as clothes, shoes and accessories, or in terms of entrepreneurship and investment, when it came to Jason and João. However, money was rarely discussed in relation to university attendance with the sole exceptions of Rosa and Francesca.

Conclusion

From these stories I would like to draw together a few threads, namely the ways in which students viewed the instrumentality of grades and exams in securing

particular affective futures, and the idea of natural talent in the making of student aspiration. I have proposed that 'negative' aspiration is a critical characteristic of global middle class aspirations. I emphasise the layered intersections at which students engage in decision making processes, emphasising the relational nature of student 'choice' in the context of the school. Respected traits such as being "hard-working" or "capable", or being a "high-achiever" with "high aspirations", were used by teachers at GCS to describe students who showed engagement and interest, met their deadlines, and clearly envisioned their path to their chosen university degree. Talent, however, did not seem to fit into this framework in quite the same way. Students such as Rosa were elevated in the esteem of teachers because of their natural talent. The contradiction of teachers' veneration of natural talent and dismissal of students' preoccupation with grades was an issue I found deeply striking, not least because realising some students' futures did in fact rely on them securing particular grades. A preoccupation with grades seemed symptomatic of the IBDP itself, and a more systemic problem derived from the pressure to meet the requirements for higher education.

Students navigated the demands of the IB system and the pressures of gaining their required grades by viewing their education in an instrumental way, school would provide grades and these would hopefully lead to good universities and good relationships with parents. Upon the completion of their degree they would gain some semblance of independence. In this chapter I have tried to suggest that these tensions between staff and students over the purpose of schooling, were indicative of disagreements over how students should position themselves in the world to best anticipate desirable futures. I argue that GCS students tended to internalise parental narratives regarding what constituted 'risky' educational choices. Negative aspiration

seemed founded on setting aside other potential goals by branding them unsustainable.

Decisions were ultimately based on the element of perceived risk in students' choices, risk that they would not be in a secure position at the end of a degree, risk that they would not be able to follow a path that their parents deemed prognostic of successful employment, and risk that they would create antagonistic relationships with their parents. Students were not concerned with managing their aspirations in the face of immediate challenges, nor were they always aware of the limitations of their own capabilities. Instead students actively avoided risk of instability by drawing on imaginaries of stable employment. By projecting the well-established and parentally reinforced imaginary of security in corporate professions, students were able to justify their choices to others and employ their grades and achievements instrumentally to maintain important relationships. Ethnography here has demonstrated a more complex vision of student choice, one which is not guided purely by economistic logic, but by their relationships with others.

Chapter 6

Imagining Student Futures at JIS: Family Entanglements and University Dreams

Introduction

In previous chapters I have explored how educational institutions and their atmospheres create different measures of success, hold different achievement ideologies, encourage different modes of behaviour, facilitate different approaches to and visions of participating in the 'global', and offer different degrees of access to particular futures. This chapter will build on these arguments by focusing on the multitude of competing obligations, pressures and expectations, both personal and structural, that complicated decisions surrounding university for JIS students, sometimes forcing students to rearticulate their aspirations in new ways and envision new paths for themselves. As students' 'global' skills and appetites grew, so too did parental anxieties over their child's Japaneseness, something which was seen to facilitate a smooth transition back home. To support this discussion, I provide an overview of the practical constraints that students face to realise their educational aspirations, including national educational policy, and global labour market demands placed on Japanese students. I contextualise fears over risky or unstable careers within parental anxieties of economic uncertainty in post-crash Japan, fears which led to discord with families for some students. As such, I explore students' decisions within the framework of affective debt towards their parents, as well as

their experiences of resignation, suggesting that self-potentiality might be understood as an embodied experience that can produce feelings of uncertainty, doubt, resignation, or acceptance. In this chapter I will also be using the interpretive frame of ambivalence to explore the complicated affective dimensions of aspiration, illuminating the complex ways that a student's development of self-potentiality is linked to experiences of choice, and feelings of uncertainty for the future.

In the introduction to Part II, I examined the recent literature on student university choices to illustrate how a reliance on economistic analyses of these decisions alone, is reductive, convenient, and inadequate to explain the dilemmas of the students with whom I worked. In the latter section of this chapter, I draw on this critique to explore students' school lives ethnographically, providing a fresh look at tensions from the student perspective, the decisions that they had to live with, the relationships they navigated, as well as their anxieties and struggles to realise their visions of the future in the context of the schools, their family relationships, and their self-potentialities.

Insecure Engagements with the Global

It is crucial to understand students' attendance of JIS within the context of the pressures created by Japanese globalisation and the anxieties generated over the stability of the Japanese national economy. The specificity of JIS families' anxiety sits within the post-crash era after the collapse of the Japanese bubble in the 1990s (Kariya 2016), an event which led to prolonged economic stagnation, a widening income gap, increasing job insecurity and fears of downward mobility for the Japanese middle-class. Issues of inequality, in what had previously been considered

a relatively affluent and undifferentiated or 'middle-class' society, became prevalent and the fear and anxiety over declining job opportunities proliferated, particularly for young people. Where expectations of children attending university were previously unquestioned, higher education in Japan has become increasingly competitive. Families' strategies of social reproduction have thus been challenged by the internationalisation of education. These complex pressures are one of the many that encourage Japanese families to strategise and engage with globalisation in new ways to secure their futures.

Alongside these shifts, Japan's educational policies have developed to emphasise a concern for developing global human resources, career development, and equipping young people with skills for surviving in a changing labour market (Ogawa 2015). Within these policy shifts, English has been rebranded as a global human resource that young people are encouraged to develop, however, as discussed in Chapter 4, this can be a potentially contentious source of differentiation and distinction for transnational students. Akihiro Ogawa (2015) offers an analysis of how the concept of 'lifelong learning', which has been adopted by the Japanese government to deal with risk as a neoliberal state, is shaping educational policies. *Shōgai gakushū* or 'lifelong learning' was added to Japan's educational charter in 2006 (Ogawa 2015:18), amidst a push towards self-regulation. These changes have also foregrounded the importance of acknowledging gendered precarity, as insecure employment and limited career development for women are rife. According to the World Economic Forum's 2020 Global Gender Gap Index "Japan's gender gap is by far the largest among all advanced economies and has widened over the past year. The country ranks 121st out of 153 countries… down 1 percentage point and 11 positions from 2018" (Global Gender Gap Report 2020).

However the drive to internationalise is also prompted by necessity, as an ageing population and workforce proves perilous to Japan's economy. The national birth-rates hit a record low in 2023 (Yamaguchi 2023), though it has been declining for decades, a trend which other Asian countries, like Korea, are now following. Women's increasing participation in the labour market continues to generate upheaval for gender roles in Japan, as businesswomen and those pursuing full-time careers increase (Aronsson 2015).

For female students at JIS, engaging with international education could potentially provide a clearer path to financial independence and stability as "historically, female Japanese graduates have comparatively low earnings compared to male graduates once they get married or have children" and whilst this is changing, "Japanese cultural and economic factors mean it is likely to be a feature of the graduate labor market for the foreseeable future" (Armstrong et al. 2019).

Student Constraints

Studying abroad often means engaging with multiple educational systems, as well as meeting country and institutionally specific criteria to make this a reality. JIS students were subject to a myriad of constraints on their freedom to choose where they studied. Here, I outline the educational systems they were broadly navigating, as well as the constraints these systems enforced. Whilst their main focus was on English and sports provision, JIS followed a version of the MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) approved curriculum, meaning

that when students graduated they would receive the *Kōtō Gakkō Sotsugyō Shōmei Sho,* also known as the Japanese Upper Secondary School Leaving Certificate. This leaving certificate, however, is not accepted by UK universities, and represents one of the most major barriers Japanese students face.

As discussed, JIS students were faced with a uniquely challenging set of circumstances, not insurmountable, but laborious to study outside of Japanese institutions. The lack of ready-made structures for international student financing and the overseas fee structure in the UK, made it expensive to choose the UK, and students relied on upfront financing from their families. By attending JIS, students had the option of attending universities that were part of the same group and this generally meant passing an interview as it was considered relatively easy to meet the low entry criteria. There were, however, additional requirements for specific courses such as science or medicine that students had to pass tests to join. As discussed in Chapter 2 & 4, many students chose to attend JIS specifically for this favourable route into the university group. JIS students were also allowed to simultaneously hold their places at JIS group universities while taking entrance examinations for other, often, more prestigious Japanese universities, so that if they did not pass their exams they would not be left without a course. By the time of their graduation in March 2019, a few students had confirmed places to Japanese universities such as Keio, Sofia and Tokyo University, others, mostly the boys had chosen from the JIS group. Nevertheless, one student (Risa) was starting at art school in the UK, and some including Kasumi were waiting for confirmations from UK foundation courses which started later in the year.

The Japanese Upper Secondary School Leaving Certificate is recognised by many institutions in the US, Canada and Australia, which are also the top three

destinations for Japanese students studying abroad, but usually in conjunction with additional tests such as the SAT. The fact that the US, Canada and Australia do accept this qualification does not guarantee entry to students, since another key entry requirement for admission is English proficiency. The IELTS (The International English Language Testing System) scores needed for these countries, including the UK, are very high. Something which proves to be the hurdle at which many Japanese students fall down; as Fumika and Kasumi reminded me regularly, English was taught badly even at high school in Japan and therefore catching up was difficult. The largest hurdle for students wanting to study in the UK was of course that their leaving certificate was not recognised as a legitimate qualification for admission onto undergraduate programmes by UK higher education institutions. This left students like Kasumi and Risa (and Kasumi's recently graduated boyfriend) with no choice but to complete foundation degrees or equivalent training programmes in the UK, and then apply again for undergraduate courses. Studying in the UK thus became more expensive, time consuming, and stressful to apply to, despite the positioning of JIS in the UK. In previous years students had gained foundation programme offers from King's College London (KCL) and this had been a popular choice for those considering studying abroad, yet students still lacked the practical support and knowledge of how to apply, as has also been considered in Chapter 4. Considering the difficulty in preparing the not insubstantial number of students who considered study abroad, I wondered why JIS did not offer a different educational programme. I raised my confusion to Robert one day as we were walking from the staff room to his morning EFL class. He shrugged curtly and exhaled a loaded sigh.

"I have no idea".

To my knowledge no students at JIS in KO3 or KO2 held dual-citizenship, as this is not permitted under Japanese law, and certainly not with the UK, EU or US. There is a requirement to renounce Japanese citizenship when naturalising in another country or vice-versa, unless someone is born with multiple citizenships, at which point one citizenship would still have to be renounced before the age of twenty-two (although this is rarely enforced). This meant that nearly all students were subject to the expensive overseas fee structure if they were to study in the UK. These constraints, in turn, complicated university decision-making processes, influencing and re-shaping potential paths and sometimes causing stress and conflict with parents over what constituted 'good', worthwhile, or secure and sustainable university and degree choices.

Since my fieldwork at JIS, discussions surrounding the constraints placed on students wanting to pursue higher education outside of Japan evidently came to the fore. In 2021, JIS announced they were engaged in the process of becoming an IB World School, which would enable them to offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) and its Diploma Programme (DP) to students in KO2 and KO3, giving them the opportunity to obtain internationally recognised qualifications and the ability to transition directly onto undergraduate degree programmes in the UK. In 2022 the International Baccalaureate approved JIS's application to become an accredited IB World School, enabling them to offer the Diploma Programme to students from an as yet undetermined date in 2023. In the following sections I examine the impact of these constraints and the intricacies of educational choices as they unfolded in the lives of pupils.

Seijin

Seijin was a breath of fresh air, relentlessly upbeat, quick to laugh, and immensely sociable. His toothy smile took up more than half his face, seeming to almost reach his carefully styled and highlighted side swept fringe. He looked young for his year (KO2) but his short frame was always dressed impeccably, one of the few students who tied their tie properly and whose blazer seemed uncreasable. Seijn also happened to be one of the very few boys happy to talk to me with little prompting, a testament to his charisma and open and friendly demeanour which garnered him popularity amongst the other boys. He was regularly the centre of a loud group of boys, messing around or piling onto friends who were sitting at their desks. Four or five of them would often be falling over cackling as a friend tried to escape the pile of flailing limbs.

Seijin chose to study at JIS because it offered better opportunities for improving his English than in Japan, and he praised the different approach to teaching which he saw as a blended approach between Japanese and British. Amongst students there was a pervasive view that the style of teaching in the UK was more engaged than the Japanese method, which tended to focus on dictating from the front of the classroom with little engagement from students. At JIS students parroted this opinion with little hesitation, always citing critical thinking and group discussion as the primary difference. Seijin had studied in the UK for 2 years so far and planned to complete all 3 at the school, before returning to Japan for university.

Originally hoping to study in the UK, this had to be abandoned when he realised the expense of making this dream come true. Instead Seijin speculated he would study English or Economics in Japan. He was also pursuing roles as an actor in Japan. He wanted to star in films and stage productions internationally. Modest about his achievements, I later discovered he had been a child actor for stage and TV, enjoying success in a popular Japanese TV series. Seijin described himself as a negative person, unable to feel confident about the future, as he felt his English was not making the progress he wanted and this was upsetting as he believed it was important for his career development:

> *When I was in Les Miserable as Gavroche, lots of UK staff came to direct it. To communicate with them we had some translators in the company. I thought that if I could speak English, then we don't need a translator to talk to directors and I can be more emotional, talking about my acting deeply. So I wanted to be an English speaker*. (Seijin, JIS Survey 2019)

Seijin knew acting was a risky career path so he stated he would probably take economics alongside English and Film as a strategic choice, even though he has had relative success already in his chosen profession. Seijin was concerned with balancing his dream of pursuing the arts and developing his employability. Seijin's lack of confidence in the future seemed to stem from his desire to further his career through English skills, though he was hindered by barriers to studying in the UK. He believed in the importance of English for participation in the global workplace and feared being left behind.

While students' personal situations differed greatly, Seijin, among the other students I focus on in this chapter, represent fragments of the global middle class, and share a similar set of characteristics in the ways that students and their families constructed aspirations for education, careers and a vision of their future. At JIS, the 'future' was around, but it was not urgently present in the form of grades, instead it was a low hum of tension. Thinking about the future could be a quieter than usual lunchtime, days off school, glum faces, school jumper sleeves gripped tightly, and nervous laughs when I asked how things were going. Some students completed mock tests for the Japanese national entrance exam, and in lessons teachers sometimes set related practice questions, but the minutiae of where and what to study, writing personal statements and working on applications was rarely embedded in the lessons themselves. The only exception being preparation classes run by Robert for the IELTS exams for those who required it. The future was something to be organised discreetly, and without much fanfare. It was something individually pursued and discussed after school with teachers, tutors, or myself, one-on-one in the library or staff room. There was a private quality about the process of applying to university. Whether it was to avoid unseemly bragging, minimise competition with other students, or due to self-doubt and indecision, I could not be certain. But the lack of open discussion in the school was a noticeable absence. Instead, students' efforts to seek me out independently for guidance and support was both flattering and challenging.

One theory that might explain students' behaviour is offered by Benjamin Hill, in which he suggests that competitive behaviour in schools is mitigated by Japan's

notoriously challenging national exam system which “helps to preserve notably low levels of competition among Japanese schoolmates by maintaining the major locus of competition *outside* the schools themselves” (1996:96). Contrary to De Vos’ (1973) account of Japanese children as socialised to fear not realising their own high standards, Hill’s work with school children emphasised that grades are not viewed as the ultimate measure of achievement by students and parents (Hill 1996:98).
Gail Benjamin (1997) goes further to state the lack of competitiveness amongst children is due to the egalitarian approach to education emphasised from a young age. And whilst teachers and students emphasised how differently JIS operated compared to schools in Japan in reference to student behaviour, it had clearly become the norm to work on university applications discreetly. As a boarding facility for most students, there was no *outside school*.

Over my final few months at JIS an atmosphere of worry and ambivalence permeated the school. Whilst preparing for university was an expectedly stressful time in many students' lives, there was an undeniably existential feel to the worries of students. The challenge of navigating two radically different education systems, and for some taking entrance exams as returnees, and making big life decisions and changes, accounted for some of this atmosphere. But the anxieties students talked about centred around larger uncertainty in their lives and choices. Some students were of course concerned with being admitted to university. Others were ambivalent as they chose the simpler path to affiliated universities, and were content that they would be going somewhere with certainty. But the threads of anxiety drawing students together were the making of decisions that would align with what their parents envisioned for them, reconciliation of what they wanted for themselves, their long term dreams and happiness, and their ability to keep up with what they saw as an

ever internationalising world. As discussed in Chapter 4, students' responses to surveys highlighted globalisation as a major reason for them attending JIS and developing their English. Likewise, Hina's stress over her poor IELTS score, which began this thesis, exemplifies the difficulties in participating in the 'global'.

Whilst there may not have been the ever-present stress of obtaining specific grades throughout high school (though some had to prepare for entrance exams and IELTS), in reality there was a lot at stake for JIS students, who without international qualifications such as the IB could not easily access universities or labour markets outside of Japan, or easily at home if they studied abroad for too many years and became classified as returnees, as was the case for Fumika. Even failure of the *Common Test for University Admissions* in Japan, the national test for all Japanese students hoping to enter university, meant waiting another year to retake. Despite their economic privilege, and the pursuit of English language as international students to secure a more promising future, failing to find a guaranteed path for their future would have real and far-reaching consequences for JIS students, their fears extending well beyond the fear of failure itself.

(No) Great Expectations

I was told by a staff member at JIS, during my preliminary meeting about the possibility of conducting research at the school in the winter of 2017, that the students at JIS didn't have high aspirations. Indeed, the general consensus was that the school was not regarded as academically strong, and as discussed in Chapter 2, its unique selling point instead being that it focused on developing language skills

and independent thinking, teaching English to give Japanese students an edge or upper hand when applying for jobs or universities in Japan or abroad. The school stated its focus on English was to prepare students to be "globally minded" and able to take advantage of international opportunities. Though as discussed in Chapter 3, I found the dismissal of students at JIS as "not particularly academic" odd, not because of any innate value in excelling in academic work but because of the atmosphere and effect that this attitude created in the school and in students. And as it transpired, it was also untrue. By the end of my time at JIS. KO3 students like Kasumi, Fumika, Mei, Risa, and Kazuo all successfully secured places at reputable universities in both Japan and the UK.

And yet, I was assured by a number of different teachers at various points during my fieldwork at JIS, that the school was not a normal Japanese school, and that working in high schools in Japan was a very different experience. This was often in response to events where students were misbehaving: running around the school and being noisy, forgetting their homework, or falling asleep in lessons. These comments seemed to draw attention to what teachers saw as a lack of formality or a transgression of the unspoken rules of a Japanese school where students were apparently better behaved and showed greater respect towards educators. The view that the school was not academically high-achieving created a lack of expectation in students and a general fear that they were not good enough to apply to the university courses that they wanted to do. At JIS the disjuncture of teacher and student perspectives on how to prepare for the future led to the resignation of teachers (in both senses). As such, outward disciplinary measures were rare and there were no serious repercussions for not completing homework on time, falling asleep in class or a general lack of interest and apathy towards lessons. The pervasive view of students

at JIS as sheltered, was not only a critique of the students themselves, but of their attitudes towards their future in the world and some students' apparent disinterest in preparing for it by not taking themselves seriously in the lessons.

Robert considered students at the school to be quite immature and that their behaviour and attitude towards education was not serious enough for their age. However, teachers' frustration with students, whilst seemingly harsh, seemed to stem from their genuine investment in their education and challenges to engage them as an educator. Many students did in fact take school seriously, but were also dealing with a variety of issues, including homesickness, missing friends and family, adjusting to life as a boarder, making new friends, and what I consider to be an unrecognised number of mental health problems. Student malaise was perhaps ignored on occasion because of these mitigating factors, with teachers willing to turn a blind eye to some of their behaviour, however, teachers never discussed this with me, and I was left to piece together students' wellbeing from our casual conversations. KO3's, and my own, final graduation ceremony proved to be such a time, where emotions were high and conversation was uncharacteristically open.

A Tearful Farewell

After the 2019 graduation ceremony ended, the photos of students throwing their mortar boards in the air triumphantly had been taken, it was time for the lunch buffet. This special occasion called for a radical change to the typically unpopular cafeteria food that was served. Kasumi and Mihiro had recovered from crying and now relaxed in the informality of lunch, but Fumika still had tears streaming down her face for which I offered tissues and conversation. She had only attended the

school for two years compared to most of her friends who had lived at JIS for the full three, yet she was the most upset at their parting of ways.

“Where’s Risa? I feel like I haven’t seen her in a long time? Was she at graduation?”

Fumika sniffed “Risa? She’s here, she was with her parents, maybe. She had to go back to Japan for a bit.” Fumika didn’t offer any further explanation and so I turned to Kasumi who had been listening in.

“Hmm Risa, she had some difficulties about where to go to university and her parents made her come home.”

“I thought she was certain about going to Central Saint Martin’s? She wanted to live in London.”

“Her parents didn’t want her to go there.” Kasumi looked over her shoulder and motioned. Risa and her parents were standing and talking to some of the teachers. “That’s her dad, he’s a famous fashion designer. She’s going to art school in JIS now. So she will be here where it’s familiar and her parents know.” JIS shared their grounds with an unrelated international art school, associated with the University of the Arts London (UAL). The art school also housed boarders and was open to students from all over the world. JIS didn’t have much overlap with them apart from corridors and the canteen, which both schools used for all meals at staggered times. The art college was for pre-university preparation, much like other foundation courses offered at UK universities. The art students provided an interesting contrast to the navy blue uniformity of JIS goers, with their hair dyed all colours of the rainbow, Doc Martens and creepers, stylishly holey or patterned clothing, and paint splattered hands.

Risa had not been at school very much for the past couple of months, but no one had spoken about it. When asked they shrugged and said she was not well and then later that she was with her parents in Japan. Risa had broken up with her boyfriend in the same year, before the winter break, so I had attributed some of her quiet sullenness to the break-up. Now it seemed there was a lot of tension behind the scenes that had been adding to her increasingly stressed and unhappy demeanour, leading up to her total absence from school. With a different art teacher every couple of months and some only staying for a few weeks, Risa had turned to me for help in proofreading her art applications. Determined to study in London, she needed help navigating information on university websites in English about the foundation courses offered since the UK higher education system was completely new to her. Together during summer lunchtimes we composed emails to university administrations for details on open days, trawled through course content and compared curricula. After struggling to gain parental support for study in London she floated the idea of taking a gap year to travel and work, applying to the UAL foundation course the following year. In the months she was away from school these plans had clearly been radically overhauled. The intervention of Risa's parents' and their decision to send her to the adjoining art college was a blow, her disappointment was palpable as she became more sullen and withdrawn during classes. According to Kasumi she was still hopeful to apply to university in London after art college and had reconciled with attending art college. Due to Risa's prolonged absence from JIS I was not able to find out much more about her predicament. Whilst her mental health, or anyone's mental health for that matter, was not considered an appropriate topic for causal discussion, and was something discussed with me only a handful of times, it seemed likely that this contributed to her lengthy absence from school. This case study goes some way to highlight not only the stress and fraught relations that could result from students and

their parents clashing over their futures, but also how deeply involved most parents were in the decision-making process at JIS.

Nevertheless, it is important not to overlook the impact of potential indebtedness and reliance on parental wealth to fund students' higher education, as well as current education. Students forged their aspirations balancing their family's wishes and advice, as well as senses of obligation and patriotism in the context of the international school. Throughout this chapter I hope to open avenues to understanding how these constraints affected students' self-potentiality, where students encountered their economic privilege not as a proliferation of opportunity, but instead prognostic of their parents' deep involvement in their future decisions and finances. Feelings of anxiety and resignation were more common among students at JIS who experienced aspects of their economic privilege this way.

Whilst one or two students in previous years had been able to move straight to undergraduate degrees from JIS, the overwhelming majority of students who wanted to study abroad in the UK had to enrol on foundation courses, as they did not meet the entry requirements for undergraduate programmes. As mentioned, the Japanese High School leaving certificate is not considered adequate for entry onto UK undergraduate degrees due to the significant difference between the two educational systems, with most universities requiring either three A-levels or an IB diploma, in addition to their Japanese qualifications and good IELTS scores. This created significant barriers for JIS students wanting to study abroad as their parents would need to commit to an extra year of tuition and living expenses on top of the three year undergraduate degree, and as Kasumi huffed to me one afternoon during our

applications session, squashing her face into her resting hand, “London is just *so* expensive!”.

It struck me that gap years were unpopular, and apart from Risa, no one had mentioned it as a consideration, not even to save money to help with university expenses. A couple of weeks after my application session with Kasumi, Mei confirmed my suspicions about the undesirability of gap years over lunch. Mei seemed in equal parts conflicted and ambivalent whenever I asked how her university things were going. If she was not sure what she wanted to do, why not take some time out to decide and work, I countered. She explained that Japanese students would almost always go straight to university from high school.

“Even though I don’t know what I want to study, I’m not going to take a year out. It’s too expensive for Japanese students to take a gap year, and it looks bad.”

The exceptions tended to be students who took unplanned gap years after they had failed to pass university entrance exams or gain entry to their preferred choice, and therefore needed to reapply or reassess their situation the year after. There is even a colloquial name for these students who are referred to as *rōnin*, meaning masterless samurai, alluding to the student wandering without university affiliation or hope. As such, the idea of a gap year holds negative connotations, wrapped up as it is in students' imagination with ideas of academic failure and lack of direction. Japan has the youngest average age of new entrants to undergraduate programmes across all OECD nations at 18.5 years old, a statistic which is indicative of the unpopularity of leaving gaps between school and university. For Mei, she did know what she wanted to study but as explored later, she experienced significant resistance from her parents.

The Future at What Cost?

Student debt is a complex phenomenon, the rapid growth of which is profoundly shaping student perceptions of the future. Recent work in this area has shown how the implication of student debt far transcends the purely financial burden to encompass its psychological and social impact from the perspectives of students themselves. Feige & Yen's (2021) research into the psychological experiences of indebtedness by students in Canada foregrounds the importance of exploring financial subjectivation. Students that took part in the study experienced student debt as something which limited their freedoms, generated worry and emotional distress, and alienation from others, creating what students described as a "life on hold" (ibid 2021:625). Debt rendered the future fragile, yet students hoped that becoming indebted to pursue university would eventually become an investment through good employment and increased income. Economic uncertainty and the rise in insecure employment, rising cost of living and university, going into debt to access university, were similarly identified as barriers in their transition to adulthood by young Chilean professionals, though some of whom were in stable employment, were failing to fulfil their student debt repayment commitments (Pérez-Roa & Ayala 2020). The professionals surveyed by Pérez-Roa & Ayala, ranged between the ages of 25 and 35 and held a tertiary education degree, and though constituting an elite slice of Chilean society, they remain burdened by their debts, fragile and overlooked by public policy (2020:646). The contemporary moment is defined by young people in both studies as tumultuous and the future bleaker than for generations before.

Families

Parents of JIS students tended to view themselves as good judges of their children's career paths, according to their children, and this ultimately meant attendance at university. In Japan the number of students moving from secondary to tertiary education is consistently very high. Japanese families have long factored the cost of sending children to university, however university fees have increased while wages have stagnated creating new reliance on student loans for those who can't afford to pay upfront. Japan has one of the largest dependencies on private education at primary, secondary, and tertiary level. JIS students' families were in a strong financial position to support their children through university.

The capital required to attend university abroad in the UK or USA as an international student is steep, requiring parents to pay fees outright without recourse to student loans or grants such as those available in the UK to home and EU students. Whilst debt in the literal sense can mean 'money being owed', debt can also be a tool of social power in intimate relationships such as those between parent and child. At JIS it was apparent that the majority of the students' families would not qualify for financial aid or loans, if they were available, for their children's university. Students at JIS were aware of the financial burden they could be placing on their parents, though this was not generally identified as a barrier to attending university, for some it influenced decisions about where to attend. As with any investment, students in fee-paying schools carry the expectations of their parents, and students at JIS often conceded that their parents made the final decisions about their future. The dependence of students on their parents for the funding of higher education did not come without expectation, as will be made evident.

JIS, as a fee-paying school, already required parents to pay substantial amounts for their child's education over the course of the three years of high school, and then onto university. Though the financial burdens and pressures relating to university were not commonly spoken about, these concerns were mentioned to me and mostly in passing by a couple of students, Kasumi and Seijin when weighing up their options for the future. University was a logical step for many, even those with no real direction or sense of what they wanted to study, attending university was a goal, an unquestionable end in itself, regardless of the cost. Indebtedness, however, comes in many forms. Though their families were able to more easily absorb the cost of rising university fees for international students, this reliance left JIS students open to harsher scrutiny from their parents on the sustainability of their choices. Even without student loans, JIS students might be indebted to their parents to pursue safer degrees and careers. For students like Mei and Fumika this debt manifested in affective ways through their interpersonal relationships, in this case their parents, and both felt they needed to pursue particular aspirational pathways that their parents approved and would be proud of, often citing their parents' worry for their future financial security. It seems a small stretch to argue that the responsibilisation of debt can be seen here as operating through the parent-child relationship, mimicking that of student debt.

Whilst the financial costs of sending children abroad to study and on to university represented a significant investment in their children's futures, the personal cost of attending JIS was equally high for many students and their families. As Risa's experience illustrates, planning for the future was complicated, bringing up not only considerations of risk and the perceived precarity of certain professions, but disagreements, tense relationships, mental health issues, and family pressures. So

how did students navigate their futures when their parents' aspirations for them did not align with their own? I explore these themes through the stories of Mei and Fumika, two students I came to know well, and both of whom struggled in different ways to reconcile their visions of their futures with the intersecting expectations, desires and constraints that pulled at the threads of their hopes for the future. I argue that for students, acting in 'responsible' ways becomes a form of care in and of itself towards their families, ones that is tied up in logics of risk aversion and the responsibilisation of debt.

Mei

Reserved and softly spoken, Mei could be described as an introverted 17 year old. In reality she did not waste words. Conversation was rewarded when she was interested in sharing, but she remained a contrast to her more chatty peers, particularly the girls in her year. Mei drifted on the fringes of the friendship group of KO3 girls, the five of whom (Kasumi, Fuka, Mihiro, Risa and Mei) tended to hangout together during the school day, apart from when Risa and Kasumi sat apart at lunch with their respective boyfriends, or walked around the school grounds secretly holding hands avoiding the eyes of teachers. This slight distance might have been because Mei was somewhat of a latecomer to JIS, joining at the end of KO2, where other KO3 girls like Kasumi, Risa and Mihiro were enrolled for all three years, developing a close friendship. Whatever the cause, it was clear Mei was not entirely in the group.

Tall, and sporting a wolf cut with a fringe side-swept by colourful hair clips, Mei had her own distinctive style. Her cynical, sometimes sullen demeanour juxtaposed her colourful and cute fashion style, belying her somewhat serious personality. She adorned the cute backpacks she used for school (of which there were many) with

colourful charms, chibi plushies and fluffy bobbles. Her phone accessories were merch from her favourite Japanese TV shows and cute cartoonish animals. It was the demeanour of Wednesday Addams[7] meets the 'kawaii'[8] aesthetic popular in the contemporary Shōjo[9] genre. In fact, Mei loved anime and towards the end of her final year spent most of her time hanging out with students in the year below who shared her obsession with the same shows and video games. This group represented one of the few that socialised across gender, chatting in the corridors before lunch, visiting each other's classrooms during break times, and organising trips to London together to try out new restaurants.

Towards the end of my first month at JIS in January 2018, Mihiro and I were chatting about the winter break and the weird Christmas food we ate in the UK. Though sitting in the row with us, Mei was mostly engrossed in filling in the workbook, quickly jotting answers in her characteristically neat and unjoined handwriting, pink mechanical pencil topped with a bear flashing across the page. Mihiro leaned over to draw Mei into the conversation.

"What's your favourite British food?"

She stopped writing and turned to us without missing a beat.

"Italian."

Mei's sense of humour and candour, though endlessly entertaining for myself, could sometimes set her at odds with teachers, who over the following months I realised

[7] Wednesday is a fictional character from the satirical Addams Family franchise, a sombre, sarcastic, reserved, and highly intelligent girl who only wears black and is fascinated with the macabre.
[8] Kawaii is a Japanese term used to describe the aesthetic phenomenon of 'cute' or 'adorable'.
[9] Shōjo refers to the popular genre of Japanese manga (comics) and anime which is primarily targeted at teenage girls and young women. Though not associated with one aesthetic style, the genre typically includes female characters with large detailed glittering eyes, cute and feminine clothes, flowers, and exaggerated ideal beauty.

came to expect her critiques. She saved much of her classroom commentary for witty remarks and calm but pointed challenges to teachers, complaining quietly about the need for homework assignments (which she always completed with ease, often during the lesson it was due), class tasks, and her own tiredness, head resting on the desk. Mei did not have to try very hard in school, she was an incredibly capable student, but it seemed she was both bored and melancholic most of the time with the exception of art lessons where she channelled most of her energy with little prompting from the teacher. Having lived in the US for five years, Mei was no stranger to change, she had integrated into an American school and made friends there, spoke English with an American accent, and now in the UK she was eager to study in London on her dream course in fashion design. Her interest and passion for art and design was constant until my final few months of fieldwork, where Mei began to express uncertainty about pursuing this as a profession. A lot of students' career aspirations changed and evolved over the course of the school year, however, this new hesitation was surprising and it was only in our interview that it finally emerged that everything had changed for her due to her parents' insistence that she needed a degree which would ensure stability for the future.

> *My parents, yeah I had a lot of influence from my parents, I actually wanted to go to an art university like St Martins, I was thinking about that for like years but my parents said like art is a hard path for the future you might not get to work and be paid, so I decided to not go to art university.* (Mei, JIS interview 2019)

Though evidently struggling with her parents' assessment of a 'safe' career path, she did not begrudge their reasoning, owning the decision to leave her dream behind and pursue a degree with more favourable employability in her parents eyes.

Mental health issues were not openly discussed with me, though students sometimes alluded to their peers struggling with homesickness or depression, as seen in Risa's story. Quieter and more withdrawn than usual, Mei's resignation and ambivalence towards her university course only grew as it became more apparent she would have to shift direction, and by the time of our interview she seemed resolved but unhappy.

Mei's situation was not dissimilar to Risa's, however, her parents had steered her to another university course altogether. Mei's inability to attend university without her parents financial support, and their concerned insistence that she move her sights away from the arts for university, profoundly changed the way she felt about her future. She expressed uncertainty and trepidation about her future on a programme she did not choose for herself as she was now considering a career as a chartered accountant. When asked about how she felt about the future she described her negative thoughts dominating.

> *Like when you can't see anything in the future. What will go on, and I get depressed and yeah, I think about it all the time right now.* (Mei, JIS interview 2019)

Though glad she was accepted to her chosen university in Tokyo, Mei was now uncertain of what she wanted to do. Students regularly had to navigate and negotiate parental expectations with their own when decision-making for the future. These subsequently structured students' interactions with the 'possible', leading them to sometimes reconsider their interests and desires of their family as well as readjust their perspectives on the future by renegotiating their aspirations and self-potentialities to match this new reality. This is not to say many students did not agree with their parents, some like Kasumi were well supported and found much

common ground, but to suggest that decisions about higher education necessarily meant the involvement of their parents in their future decisions and finances, whether they agreed with and supported their dreams or not.

Fumika

It was mid-morning break in early February 2019, I stood with Fumika and her friends holding tiny plastic cups of hot chocolate from the hot drinks machine in the canteen. I had not had a chance to catch up with her since the winter break as she had recently returned from a two-month stay in Japan. As tradition dictated, students would pour into the canteen to have biscuits and hot drinks after their morning lessons. We stood in the canteen facing the windows onto the drizzly English countryside and complained about how cold and wet the weather was. Fumika's trip was more stressful than she'd hoped, taking multiple university entrance examinations, attending interviews, and visiting relatives. I asked if she had managed to find time for some fun and when she would find out about her university places. She smiled at me sheepishly and said she had actually accepted a place at Sofia University in Japan to study a course along the lines of Modern Languages in the English faculty (she actually couldn't remember the exact name of her chosen degree which I found alarming). I had spent hours after lessons supporting her with the personal statement for the application and was pleased that she had been successful after the stress caused by the entrance process. I congratulated her on the offer but Fumika seemed unfazed by the good news and shrugged it off with a small smile. She had realised whilst she was applying that she had no interest in studying languages and instead wanted to be a sports coach. I asked her if there would be time to pursue sports as an extracurricular activity.

“Not really. Sofia has terrible sports facilities.” She laughed.

I was at a loss for words and felt quite awkward, confronted by such a conundrum. Did I comfort her or congratulate her again? There had been expectations from her parents and teachers that she would study English because she excelled at it. I asked, despite the fact that the course was not her first choice, if she was looking forward to living in Japan again and to the university experience.
“It seems like a lot of effort”, she groaned.
Fumika was surprisingly indifferent about her university course and she believed it would be a lot of work which she wasn’t sure she wanted. As we finished our hot chocolates to head back to class she explained that she had applied to Sofia because it was a prestigious institution in Japan, and that it was not *all* bad as she had made her parents happy with the acceptance, and that it would be easier to get a good job once she graduated.

Studies of achievement, and the recent turn to studies on the experience of achievement, are incredibly insightful and important in raising issues with the anthropological focus on motivation rather than the embodied experience of achievement itself and its implications for understanding of the self and our relation to others (Long and Moore 2013). Here, I argue that Fumika’s embodied experience of achievement bred self-doubt and worry, and ultimately ambivalence towards her university path. Fumika’s decisions regarding which university and course she should pursue were heavily influenced by her parents and teachers as they sought to give her the best advice and play to her strengths in English. However, she questioned her commitment to her course as she had been guided there by her

family's understanding of her best interests, despite her desire to become a sports coach. Undoubtedly, Fumika was academically strong enough to keep up with her peers at Sofia University, but nonetheless her career options had radically changed direction which in turn impacted upon her confidence in her abilities. Her self-potentiality was arguably lowered further when she began to imagine how she would compare to the peers she expected would be taking the same course.

> *What I'm excited about is that because the university that I'm going to is like quite famous [laughs] in Japan, so like everyone that's going there's like have multi ways of thinking, and like so I think they'll be like, really flexible, as in thinking. So, I think it will be fun to connect with them. But like, what I'm worried about is that the people who are going to the same faculty, I think they have more courage to learn, where as me, it's just I'm going there mainly because my parents and my teachers told me. So, it's …I might think that I might…I'm not sure I'll be able to keep up with them.* (Fumika, JIS interview 2019)

The association Fumika made between bravery and commitment to her studies spoke to her beliefs about how and why students attended university, but also to the qualities that were necessary for success. Possessing the "courage to learn" was necessary as university was meant to push you academically as well as outside of your comfort zone, something which Fumika thought was a defining part of the university experience, though one she admitted she was nervous and a little afraid of. Fumika's admission that she might lack the courage to learn spoke of self-doubt but also of her low self-potentiality. Her vision of the future was heavy with doubt instead of "wide" with newly realised opportunity. I started to consider how Fumika's low self-potentiality might then be linked to her experience of choice, and to her

feelings of uncertainty for the future as an embodied experience. I argue then that self-potentiality as an embodied concept has the potential to reconfigure student relationships with their experiences as successes or failures, reshaping the framing of student futures.

Fumika knew that her parents were proud of her achievement, it was their approval of Sofia as an option that fuelled her to apply seriously in the first place. But it was their insistence that she attend university in Japan that was important. Fumika's parents were worried that if she did not return now for university that she would have spent too long in the UK system and would find it hard to reconnect to Japan. She already struggled with the expectations of her friends when she returned to Japan after living abroad for a few years and was keen to return on a more permanent basis, though she believed learning English had provided her greater opportunities, despite the difficulties.

> *Before I came here, I thought I will only be speaking Japanese and like have a job in a local area. Because I'm going to learn more English and have useful knowledge, I think I don't know what I want to be, but I have more wide vision for my future.* (Fumika, JIS Interview 2019)

English had changed Fumika's perspective on her possible futures, however, her family had resided in the UK so long that her brother's Japanese was actually dwindling, much to her parents' dismay. Going back to Japan was therefore incredibly important to her family, as time seemed to slowly erode the children's language skills.

Students' self-potentiality, engagements with risk and affective debt, reconfigured their relationships with everyday experiences as successes or failures, reshaping the framing of student futures. What was uncertain in students' futures would be their relationships with their parents and families if they chose to ignore their wisdom and advice about more stable, reputable and profitable career and university choices. By investing in the futures that their parents, teachers, and sometimes the students themselves felt would foreshadow the most secure and respectable employment, students sought to make their parents happy, proud and supportive, even if what was at stake was sometimes a genuine interest in their chosen degrees and a career they had long wanted to pursue.

Trnka & Trundle argue that responsibilisation as a concept should be understood as operating alongside relations of care, where neoliberal responsible subjects "exist within a matrix of dependencies, reciprocities, and obligations" (2014:150). I contend that for JIS students like Fumika and Mei, relations of care arise specifically through techniques of responsibilisation. Becoming indebted to parents therefore might be understood as an act of care by students. The responsibilisation of student debt is then producing new forms of care which centre interpersonal debt, as well as new potential futures. However, the responsibilisation of affective debt can be dangerously reformulated and marketed as a logical "choice" for students, illustrating the consequences of indebtedness in all its iterations, and how this is interwoven and inseparable from students' interpersonal and affective relationships.

Responsibility has been transferred to students to secure their own futures, as well as for collective familial benefit. Whilst any exact moments of self-authoring may be

hard to pin point in the jumble of student's competing obligations, advice, relationships, and dreams, what is apparent is that all roads for JIS students led to university, attendance of which was now tied more acute, and new forms of indebtedness to their families.

Conclusion

Negotiating the future for students like Risa, Mei and Fuka was trepidatious, and their worries tended towards the long term, around the germaneness of their dreams in light of their parents' preferred paths for them, and the struggle to envision their own thriving futures. Kasumi was an outlier amongst her friends as she had the full support of her mother behind her as she embarked upon her university journey, however, her decision to study in the UK in some ways could be interpreted as ingratiating herself with her mother, as she would now commit herself to English language study for the foreseeable future as she remained in London, something which her mother advocated and supported. The ambivalence at JIS, particularly expressed by students of all genders, seemed to be borne out of limited agency to pursue particular paths, rather than a sense of lackadaisical contented comfort or ability to rely of familial wealth as a safety net, though students such as Kasumi did take advantage of this as well. These alternative paths, ones which might cause strain on important interpersonal relationships, were rationalised through avoidance of risk and affective debt towards parents.

Risa and Mei were conscious that their careers had been affected by their negotiations with their parents, and both expressed some ambivalence towards their new paths. Their feelings may perhaps be compounded by the the idea of training and staying in one profession, rather than a varied career which is common in labour markets outside of Japan, which has only recently moved away from the model of lifetime employment. However, the global job market has been encouraging flexible and varied professional development for younger generations signalling a change in the relationship with the labour market long term. Whilst different educational systems may produce different orientations to the future in school, so do different labour markets, and students were therefore less concerned with finding *a* job than with finding *the* career. Students had unquestioned expectations of employment, but struggled to envision a future where they could easily transition to a path which led to a more desirable career. This speaks to the high stakes for students following their parents' wishes. And whilst liberal arts programmes offer a degree of choice, ultimately the imagining of flexible careers was limited on the part of students.

The current moment represents a difficult and uncertain time for the Japanese global middle class and those aspiring for social mobility within its ranks, and where pressures to remain relevant in a globalising economy are heightened. With increasing job insecurity and rapidly changing economy, students and their families were concerned with making sure they were afforded the opportunity to attend university, something which has historically been an expectation. It seemed that JIS students walked a difficult and increasingly unclear line, where students struggled to find their place in the new aspirational imaginary of ‘global middle class Japanese’. Students like Mei and Fumika were negotiating their emergent identities in the

context of the internationalisation of education, their family designs for their future, rising educational costs, and threats to their Japaneseness and cultural identity.

Where once the Japanese economy provided stability for young people regardless of ability or interest in differentiation, standing out and stability is now something to be reclaimed through new strategies of social reproduction and alignment with cosmopolitanism and the development of 'global human resources'. As identified by Kasumi, Mihiro, Seijin, Mei and Fumika, globalisation was echoed by JIS students as the reason they needed to learn english and - referring to language acquisition as adapting to a changing world, sometimes in the footsteps of their parents, and the solution to keeping pace with globalisation in Japan. Ultimately students' self potentialities are affected by their experiences of choice in a globalised and corportatised education market. I have also argued that new relations of care are emerging from relationships of affective debt, which centres interpersonal debt, as well as new potential futures for students.

The challenges students faced could be understood as intersecting obstructions to students' capacity to act or to view university admission as a self-authoring moment, an idea which is complicated when we consider education not as an individual realisation, but as a collective pursuit and common good for the family where narrative of success does not need to exclude the reality of family interdependence. University as a self-authoring moment for young people may well be a western fantasy, that said many of the JIS students and their families wanted more than the traditional routes available to them, hence their decision to attend JIS in the first place. Students and their families sought a different path, some by gaining other skills and experiences i.e. learning english, the opportunity to attend JIS group

universities, a safety net to apply elsewhere, even though many of these choices made them further dependent on their parents. Self-authoring moments came at more subtle times, and were not always great fanfare moments on the brink of huge decisions or transitions, they happened continuously, in moments of negotiation and in small compromises.

Chapter 7

Conclusion: The Horizon's Limits and Student Futures

What does an analysis of the ways international school students engage with the future reveal? Through my ethnography I have offered a more complex account of global middle class aspiration, drawing attention to the contradictions, challenges, and imaginaries that shaped the context of everyday school life. The questions I set out to explore through this thesis included understanding the character of the global middle class, their aspirations, as well as their strategies of social mobility and reproduction. These are multifaceted questions which I engaged with through an examination of the school lives of students attending JIS and GCS. I took part in the everyday motions of learning, attending class, sitting through assemblies, drinking tea with teachers in the staff room, eating lunch and gossipping. I shared in the daily successes, disappointments and frustrations, with both students and educators. Though students undoubtedly navigated privileged educational spaces, my research has revealed the complexity and fragility of global middle class aspirations, where family expectations, individual goals, conflicts of language and identity, and trends towards the marketisation of education create multiple pressure points on student futures. Whilst I have drawn on a wide range of conversations across disciplinary borders, I situate the contribution of this thesis within the fields of the anthropology of education and aspiration.

By embedding myself in school environments, I was able to follow students as their aspirational journeys unfolded within the everyday interactions of school, as well as encounter the educational atmospheres and achievement ideologies to which students were exposed. Where both JIS and GCS touted transformative 'global' environments for students in pursuit of international opportunities and experiences, many students experienced frustration, resignation and disappointment as they struggled to realise their self-potentiality. These struggles exposed the contexts and relationships within which students 'choose' their futures, highlighting that choice is not always an agentive process, but is also informed by the experiences of others, and within feelings of doubt, perceived precarity, and affective debt. This ethnography also exposed the limits of the schools' ability to provide students with access to the global (fulfilling their stated aims) and create transformative learning environments, problematising the desirability of cosmopolitanism for all students. UK international schools therefore present a unique site of global middle class reproduction, marketing to students through their proximity to Britishness (as synonymous with globality) in the case of JIS, or cosmopolitan London for GCS. My research reveals some of the fault lines on which their promises to students rest.

Implications for Anthropology

There is a paucity of anthropological research on international schooling, particularly based in the UK, yet there is much to be gained from examining how and why this mode of education has become a desirable alternative over national private and state provision in 'cosmopolitan' contexts such as the UK. As my research with JIS and GCS has shown, this included cultural anxieties over alienation and acculturation,

desirability of international spaces and qualifications, and the generational tensions regarding pursuit of safe and stable degrees and professions in students' home economies. As such, this thesis has examined students' experiences of aspiring within international education not as a project of neoliberal subjectivation or process of 'global citizenship' formation, but as a relational project with which students and their families engage to varying extents and success. The reality of students' circumstances revealed a multiplicity of reasons for their choices. The consumer models used by global education institutions and universities, offering an economistic analysis of student choice, are not enough to understand student aspiration and decision-making, as I have discussed. However, ethnography offers us a new perspective on these issues. Anthropological approaches to international education challenge us to look beyond the experiences of students as subjects or projects of local, national and global political economies. These approaches compel us to situate students' experiences as equally embedded in interpersonal relationships, experiences of marginalisation and privilege, and the ideologies of the educational spaces through which they traverse. As such my research demanded an analysis which seeks reconciliation with the intersecting and overlapping demands placed on international school students, recognising the interconnectedness and affectivity of aspirations (Froerer et al. 2022).

This thesis therefore contributes to the small but growing body of anthropological and ethnographic research that explores the intersections of international education and aspiration in schools. I position this thesis' contributions within research on: belonging and identity (Tanu 2018); the construction and commodification of global imaginaries and 'globality' in schools (Meyer 2021); inequality and the racialisation of aspiration (Davidson 2011b); educational inequalities within cultures of personal

advancement (Demerath 2009); and cosmopolitanism and gender (Gilbertson 2016, 2018). As we see a sharp rise in the popularity of international education worldwide, we need a more dynamic way of conceptualising and accounting for student aspiration that does not rely on discourses of economistic decision-making, or meeting the demands of the market, though these are of course considerations. The theorisation of self-potentiality offers routes to interrogating students' experiences of aspiring within these complex circumstances. I achieve this by recognising the importance of these intersecting experiences and demands on the shaping of students orientations towards the future. At schools like JIS and GCS, students were not engaging with one labour market or with one project of citizenship. They were in fact caught somewhere in the inbetween, where these layers coalesce. In the following sections I discuss the scope that self-potentiality provides as a way to theorise the development of aspirational subjectivities in educational spaces.

A "sustained life"

By their very attendance of JIS students became caught in the contradiction of the school's mission to provide transformative experiences to develop globally minded 'global citizens', with the realities of the school's ability to facilitate this whilst balancing commitments to maintaining a safe distance from the global, preparing students to return to Japan for further study. These contradictions provoked challenges along gendered lines, where the KO3 girls Mei, Risa, Fumika and Kasumi expressed trepidation, resignation and doubt over their future educational transitions and careers. Girls at JIS were more likely to clash with their parents over their choice of degree and whether to attend university in Japan or the UK, bringing

into relief the generational legacy of anxiety over social and class mobility following the economic downturn or bubble-bursting in Japan in the early 1990s (Ishida and Slater 2010). For Fumika, developing further cosmopolitan cultural capital represented both a proliferation of opportunity outside of Japan as well as a potentially alienating otherness that she found difficult to reconcile. Women occupy a precarious position in the Japanese labour market, and parental concerns with their children's pursuit of financial independence and stability spoke to this worry strongly.

JIS boys on the other hand, tended to show ambivalence towards pursuing higher education abroad or international job opportunities. Most, apart from Seijin, were content to return home to Japan secure in the knowledge that they would have a place at a reputable university. Lessons were taken less seriously and boys disengaged with activities focused on developing or practising "global skills", indicative of their advantageous positioning vis a vis the Japanese labour market, favouring male graduates of Japanese universities. On paper students espoused that studying at JIS was a uniquely important strategy for keeping up with what they viewed as the inevitability of globalisation in Japan (Chapter 4). A shift for which they needed to acquire certain skills, particularly in the form of developing their English, critical thinking abilities, and exposure to other cultures and "multi-ways of thinking" as Fumika aptly described it. English was framed by students and the school as a necessity for creating and participating in a global environment, though it was female students who disproportionately pursued this in practice. Globalisation itself was spoken about as something happening mainly outside of or to Japan, rather than from within. However, students' interactions with fantasies of the global

in the anglosphere complicated their understanding of what was possible, particularly for emergent 'global Japanese' identities.

At GCS, students faced a very different set of challenges as they struggled to meet the demands of the IB and the reality of their ability to achieve their goals within it. Whilst teachers supported students, particularly those they viewed as 'talented', to realise their self-potentiality, students' achievement ideology generated frustration as they struggled to achieve their desired grades and self-realisation. Ultimately the schools emphasis on broadening opportunities, their parents emphasis on non-risky professions, and the structure of the IBDP, unintentionally fostered an instrumental view of education in students. Their concern was singularly on gaining acceptance to the universities or careers of their choice, rather than the value of learning in of itself. The speculation on futures and sustainability of choices were major themes that ran through nearly all students' concerns for their futures, or their future capacity to live a "sustained life" as Jemimah put it.

At GCS avoiding uncertain futures meant making "safe choices" and often forgoing artistic careers and degrees (like Lucia and Leah), in favour of more 'practical' degrees such as business or Law. I argue that students' concern with their perceived precarity and fear of downward mobility, or vertigo, led to the prevalence of negative aspiration at GCS, whereby students recounted and justified their aspirations in relation to what they wanted to avoid - undesirable jobs, financial insecurity, and the premature curtailing of opportunities. This was particularly true for students like Jemimah and Jason who, inspired by their own experiences, narrated their desired career trajectories against alternative potentially precarious possibilities. Combined, the IB as a pedagogical project which aims to provide global and transformative

experiences, and GCS's promise of creating "future leaders", ignored the barriers to accessing these futures. Instead they contributed to an instrumental view of education, and what Munro refers to as the 'violence of inflated possibilities' where GCS failed to acknowledge the "conditions that make personal, social, and political transformation a highly improbable outcome of schooling" (2013:28) among its own students.

A Summary of the Thesis

In Chapter 2, I analysed the practices of boundary drawing that both schools engaged in in order to align themselves strategically with the global, and the ways this generated their legitimacy as institutions that could provide students with desirable skills and dispositions towards the global. I explored how the local, national, and global became material in the schools to create transformative educational atmospheres, and how at JIS, British culture was represented as the culture of internationalism, authenticated by its location in the UK. On the other hand, GCS drew on its own diverse student body to construct the global within the school. In both instances proximity to the local (UK and London) played a crucial role in the construction of the global both within the schools themselves, as well as in their branding and marketing strategies.

In Chapter 3, I explored student behaviours in school, as well as their interactions with peers, staff and myself to understand how achievement ideologies were underpinned by assumptions and experiences of gender, race and privilege. I argued that whilst students' views and expectations of educational success and failure were

shaped by these experiences, they were in fact also closely tied with the on-the-ground ideology of the schools themselves. The expectations of teachers, pedagogical practices, and school values all contributed to students' development of self-potentiality. At GCS these intersected with student achievement ideologies to create senses of authority and a legitimisation of their goals, producing a high sense of self-potentiality, despite the disparity between requisite effort and outcome identified by teachers. For JIS students, this intersection generated self-doubt, anxiety and low self-potentialites. At JIS, students struggled to find alternative ways to succeed in school when teachers positioned students within broader narratives of academic achievement in Japan, despite the school's purpose to facilitate the development of other 'global' skill sets and credentials.

In Chapter 4, I examined the contradictions, ambivalences, and burdens of navigating cosmopolitanism for students at JIS and GCS, providing a more complex picture of educational privilege. I explored the limits of the schools' ability to provide students with access to the global, what it meant to be 'international', and the schools' reliance on the desirability and proximity to Britishness and discourses on global English. I argued that by problematising the desirability of cosmopolitan cultural capital, particularly for JIS students, we see how students' race and gender generated even more complex negotiations for those living at these intersections. Ultimately, this chapter revealed the reality of creating aspirational globally minded citizens not to be as linear nor as predictable as the schools' missions suggested, drawing attention to the problem of the 'national' and 'racial' in educational decision-making.

In chapter 5, I focused on GCS students' experiences of aspiring within the IB Diploma Programme, narratives on student talent, and relationships with teachers and their families. I explore student narratives of the future and their perceived precarity, to demonstrate how students engaged in complex negotiations with themselves, their personal circumstances, and their families designs on their futures. I argued that the concept of precarity, or perceived precarity, remains salient for considering not just those in what we might consider to occupy immediately precarious positions, but those in economically privileged positions whose precarity is existentially/structurally felt. GCS students tended to internalise parental narratives around 'risky' educational choices, thus the avoidance of 'bad choices' and reflections on what constituted an undesirable life and circumstances, were equally important frames of reference. I have asserted we understand this 'negative' aspiration, where students formulated and expressed their hopes for the future in relation to what they explicitly did not want, or hoped to avoid as a critical characteristic of global middle class aspirations.

Finally, Chapter 6 considered the school lives of JIS students and the multitude of competing constraints, pressures and expectations that complicated decisions surrounding university. I sought to understand student experiences of choice, and affective debt. I also considered how JIS students' low self-potentiality may be linked to experiences of choice, positing that their feelings of uncertainty for the future might be understood as an embodied experience. I argued that self-potentiality also offers analytical value as an embodied concept which has the potential to reconfigure student relationships with their experiences as successes or failures, and reshape the framing of student futures. Parental anxieties and investment in their children's futures created new and complicated relations of care for students, where students

owed responsible choices to their parents, over their potentially riskier desired careers. This produced forms of resignation in students, as a reliance on parents left them open to their scrutiny and contributed to their low self-potentiality.

Aspiration among the Global Middle Class: Theorising Self-potentiality

Here, I offer the concept of self-potentiality as a model of relational subjectivity, which presents a way of making sense of how and why students choose and understand particular educational futures. I have previously theorised self-potentiality as an individual's understanding of what they should conceivably aim for, and be capable of achieving, in the future. In chapter 3, 5 & 6, I illustrated ethnographically the crucial role that the learning environment of international schools themselves play in the development of students' self-potentiality. As such, self-potentiality as a theoretical tool can help anthropologists and education scholars to understand how student subjectivities are shaped in school contexts and in relation to others. Self-potentiality offers a way to understand how structural inequalities and positionalities not only intersect in hierarchies, but operate within the cultural and political fields of educational spaces, shaping the ways that students envision the possibility of their future lives, which are in turn situated within aspirational global imaginaries. Self-potentiality provides an opportunity to consider how the affective dimensions of aspiration, where feelings come to shape and inform student orientations towards the future, are necessary to explore and take seriously if we are to understand the choices students make and the contexts in which they make them.

Exploring the contexts in which students develop self-potentiality is also crucial for understanding how students' views on success and failure, whilst shaped by and often symptomatic of privilege, class and race and gender (Brantlinger 2003; Davidson 2011b; Demerath 2009; Fordham 2008; Fordham & Ogbu 1986; Howard 2008; Lareau 2003, 2015) are very closely tied with the on-the-ground ideology of the schools themselves, and the expectations of teachers and families. Alongside achievement ideologies, I have considered how at JIS and GCS, schools' aims to create 'globally minded' and oriented students, combined with the privileges, prejudices and expectations that are present in their home economies. This includes the major role that the gendering of work and constructions of race abroad play in the shaping and self-diagnosing of students' own potentiality. I have also looked to students' educational journeys and personal stories (Chapter 5 & 6) to demonstrate the scope that self-potentiality offers as an embodied concept, which reconfigures our relationship with experiences as successes or failures, contributing to reshaping the framing of student futures. I have also suggested that to better understand decision-making in relation to educational contexts, we need to develop a more complex understanding of student 'choice', which is not, as I have shown, synonymous with student agency. Students' choices at both schools were in fact inherently relational, made with others - parents, teachers, peers, communities, and even myself, but also within the constraints of educational systems. Considering the role that a student's self-potentiality plays in their experiences of aspiring, offers a fertile ground for further research into what shapes students' imaginations of the future, and why they make the choices that they do.

In Chapter 5, I put forward an argument for the productivity of framing GCS students' experiences of perceived precarity as a form of 'negative' aspiration. I suggested that perceived precarity is a helpful way to understand how students imagined potential instability and uncertainty in their futures. Perceived precarity is then a form of "elite disappointment" which is bound up with "expectations, aspirations, and a sense of entitlement among the already privileged" (Millar 2017:5). At JIS, perceived precarity came in other more obvious forms for some students, such as a lack of direct access through their chosen educational institutions to UK universities, as discussed in Chapter 6. Students like Fumika were faced with the precarity of their own Japaneseness, reinforced through classroom encounters at school and with the Japanese university system which classified her as a returnee. JIS students' framing of negative aspiration seemed not to be informed by the same encounters as GCS students (Chapter 5), but potentially by their parents' experiences of fearful media narratives of a shrinking Japanese economy, expectations of globalising workplaces, and the gendered issue of insecure employment and limited career development for women, as discussed in Chapter 4 (Kobayashi 2018). As mentioned in Chapter 2, towards the end of my fieldwork at JIS, this fear became more immediate when the Honda factory in Swindon announced it would be closing down, putting Fumika's father's job, and those of other parents at the school, at risk (Davies et al. 2019). Though insecure employment is becoming increasingly commonplace in Japan, this new form of precarity is replacing a model of lifetime employment previously enjoyed by 'salarymen'. Applying the concept of perceived precarity to both schools reveals that it stemmed from a variety of concerns in

students' lives - cultural identity, future financial stability, familial expectations, not fulfilling their potential, and experiences of migration.

As previously discussed, the term aspiration is normally associated with positive ideals that look towards future goals, hopes, desires, ambitions. However, at JIS and GCS, the avoidance of 'bad choices' and reflections on what constituted an undesirable life and circumstances, were equally important frames of reference. This is what I have termed negative aspiration, where students formulated and expressed their hopes for the future in relation to their perceived precarity - what they explicitly did not want, or hoped to avoid, was an unexpected accompanying explanation, especially when describing their, often, elite career of choice. Ultimately what was at stake for students who attended JIS and GCS was radically different due to their respective access to internationally recognised qualifications and credentials, leaving students at JIS with limited options if they failed to attend a Japanese university or gain a place on a UK foundation course. In both cases, students and their parents made choices about the system of education they would participate in, based on assurances made by schools and universities that attendance of such institutions would guarantee a brighter future. A future with more open doors, international job opportunities, and most importantly the intercultural skills, adaptability and flexibility schools identified as necessary to survive in a shifting global economy.

Trends towards insecure employment in both national and global economies are destabilising global middle class imaginations of transnational mobility and social reproduction, as studying abroad no longer guarantees the same kinds of safe employment opportunities that it once did. Instead graduates are facing highly competitive job markets saturated with overqualified candidates vying for increasingly insecure contracts. This is not to say that negative aspiration is

necessarily more prevalent in international schools than other fee paying or state schools with students from overseas, nor that it is a phenomenon limited to students from the Global South. However, at JIS and GCS negative aspiration was strongly linked to students' personal experiences of migration, cultural identity, the anxieties of their parents, and teacher attitudes. Though negative aspiration was common, the affective qualities of perceived precarity were not always experienced as pessimistic, and anthropologists must pay due attention to the ways feelings and narratives of precarity are re-framed, transformed, and sometimes reclaimed by students. In the next section I consider the role of negative aspiration in fuelling the international education market.

Education on the Market

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, international schools present themselves as institutions with unique capacity to provide students access to the global in desirable ways. Through everyday encounters with JIS and GCS students in the educational contexts they inhabited, I have offered a more complex picture of student aspiration, the ways in which international schools attempt to inculcate and promote cosmopolitan cultural capital or global mindedness (to varying degrees of success) as a form of distinction, accessible to the global middle class. However, in a globalising world, I argue this form of distinction has diminishing returns. International schools such as JIS and GCS seek new ways to distinguish their students and market novel approaches to education to remain competitive (Chapter 2), leaving room for the stratification of international education.

The marketisation of international education and commodification of credentials has created a sticky web for global middle-class students and their parents, who are caught at a critical point of decision-making. Whilst different cultural models of parenting are important to take into account, throughout this thesis I have focused on the ways students themselves interpreted what their parents wanted for their future, revealing anxieties over downward social mobility and cultural alienation, precarious employment, uncertain future career prospects, and making choices that balance their aspirations with those of their families. Parents at JIS and GCS were often very involved in making the final decisions about their children's education, even from afar. Sometimes, as in the case of Kasumi, Jemimah and Jason, their aspirations ultimately converged well with their parents' who, whilst still offering advice and guidance, fully supported their dreams both financially and emotionally. Whilst for others, like Lucia, Fumika, Mei and Risa, they experienced significant tension and even disappointment, generated by the disconnect between their families' concerns over the productivity and sustainability of their choices. Ultimately this resulted in significant compromise and feelings of resignation or ambivalence. By paying close attention to the personal dilemmas and contradictions that shape how students' relate to and engage with their futures, anthropologists can offer a picture of young people in education which accounts for the relationality of their choices, and the intersectional pressures that animate decision-making, even in privileged spaces.

A conversation about students' experiences of international schooling should be understood with the knowledge that finishing school was not the final goal for most students, particularly at JIS and GCS, where young people's eyes were set firmly on the prize of a university education. This becomes clearer still when we take a broader

look at the ways in which higher education policy in the UK has dramatically reshaped the landscape of possibilities for international students, sometimes inadvertently legitimising predatory practices in the pursuit of profit. Whether intentionally or not, universities play a major role in processes of marketisation and the commodification of education through their influence on a student's employability, ongoing competition between institutions for rankings and student recruitment, the introduction and structuring of fees, corporatised management practices, and increasing privatisation of the sector (Brown 2015).

Although much of the discussion in this thesis has revolved around schools, universities must be considered another key player in my research, as they constituted a large part of students' lives at GCS and JIS, both in their imaginations and as a real institutional power. Universities are in fact ever present in international schools like JIS and GCS, and as such they shape the contexts in which students are encouraged to consider their futures. Universities have the power to influence students' educational choices at the most basic level. Schools use universities as a benchmark for how to market themselves to students, the curricula and subjects on offer, and can even shape internal school policies and politics. Furthermore, the value of educational qualifications are inextricably tied to international labour markets, as the reputational value of university degrees can dictate available opportunities (Kleibert 2021). As discussed in Chapter 2, place can be a crucial branding and recruitment strategy for international schools who position themselves as providers of access to global opportunities. The UK is now a leading provider of transnational education (Universities UK International 2022). Transnational education refers to educational programmes delivered across national borders, this could refer to students enrolled at universities in the UK on distance learning

courses, or to online programmes completed at home. The profitability of expanding into new markets hinges on the UK's ability to perpetuate international inequalities in access to the global - a strategy to sustain the struggling UK economy in a post-brexit era. The UK has tied its economic future to the success of international and transnational education, and recent policy agendas set out plans to increase exports to £35 Billion a year (Department of Education & Department for International Trade 2019).

As JIS and GCS are based in the UK, it is critical to situate students' attitudes and experiences within the broader political context of UK education policy and the economy, as it provided the everyday backdrop to their educational lives, requiring students to be more strategic than ever before when thinking about their educational choices. This was particularly true for GCS students, many of whom hoped to stay and work in the UK as graduates. Educational inflation has been a long-standing issue in the national economy, where graduates are taking jobs which they are overqualified for, and which previously did not require a degree at all. This has created an increasingly competitive job market for graduates to enter upon leaving university, and for school leavers the pressure to attend high status universities for traditional degrees is immense. This had serious repercussions for student decision-making. The devaluing and perceived precarity of artistic and non-traditional degrees and careers by families and parents was a persistent theme in my conversations with students at both JIS and GCS, and is mirrored in current UK education policies discussed Part II.

These pressures have caused seismic shifts in the global education market and the dramatic rise in the demand for international education. When considered alongside

the increasing trend towards privatisation of education more generally, particularly in the UK, it is easy to see how popularity of the IB programme has come about, alongside an ever more credentialised education sector. International schools are the first to benefit in the burdening of foreign students with providing proof of educational equivalency for university applications, and failing that, international qualifications such as the IBDP. Students from countries whose national curricula fall outside of accepted qualifications for UK university admission onto undergraduate degrees include mostly countries in Latin America, Eastern Europe, East Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, demonstrating the scale of exclusion from which international schools directly benefit.

Put simply, for international students, where and what one studies *matters*. International schools especially have benefitted from an increasingly competitive education market as they offer students access to qualifications and experiences attractive to universities, positioning themselves as providers of a distinct kind of global education. Throughout this thesis I have explored how students navigated expectations of kin, as well as the contextual utility of cosmopolitanism, and how this created uncertain and messy situations for students thinking about their educational futures. As I have already laid out, international schools stand the most to gain from the institutionalisation of cosmopolitan credentialism. These issues are even more complicated in contexts where the line between cosmopolitanism as something acquired through the market, versus socialisation in intercultural spaces, is blurred. The aspirational paths of students were forged with this knowledge. For students at JIS, the school offered an alternative means to entering university in Japan with a high school diploma which attested to their development as 'globally minded' and adaptable learners. Alternatively, if they chose to attend UK universities, they

acquired the necessary language qualifications. At GCS, the IB promised a transferable and internationally recognisable qualification, as well as membership of a community of 'global citizens'.

The Problem of Cosmopolitan Credentialism

In this section, I offer a critique of the impact of cosmopolitan credentialism and suggest benefits and potential outcomes to its deconstruction for students. International education is a necessary reality, from which some students hoped and dreamed, where others have become disillusioned and resigned. There is no doubt that international schooling has benefitted countless students by providing transferability, familiarity, and consistency for transnationally mobile families (Poonoosamy 2018). These schools provide support for families undergoing similar life transitions, a space of connection for students with common experiences of dislocation and mobility, exposure to diverse student bodies encouraging cross-cultural engagement, as well as desirable qualifications. In theory international schools can offer ready-made communities for young people and their families to join. But how do international schools offer a solution to these challenges, whilst simultaneously solving the conundrum of providing a safe transformative environment, curriculum, and experience, which meets the demands of a globalising economy and higher education sector? I argue that they achieve this by marketing international education as the logical solution to participation in globalisation, whilst profiting from cosmopolitan credentialism.

Cosmopolitan credentialism refers to the ways that specific formal qualifications come to signal desirable forms of cosmopolitan cultural capital. Whilst international

schools themselves may police and institutionalise desirable cosmopolitanism (Igarashi & Saito 2014), through everyday school interactions (Tanu 2018), they do so by marketing particular credentials as necessary to access the 'global'. However, as this thesis has shown, the experiences of students from countries like Japan complicates arguments regarding cosmopolitan credentialism. Japan's position as a former colonial power and dominance within global networks of production has caused tension over the desirability and utility of cosmopolitanism for students (Chapters 4 & 6). At JIS, parents' involvement in students' educational decisions, and even the decision to send them to JIS over international schools in Japan, spoke to concerns beyond just the economic, to anxieties over their Japaneseness. The ability to reintegrate into Japanese workplaces and wider society after study in transnational spaces, whilst also gaining a competitive edge for university admission, and international opportunities for work and study, were complex considerations.

The case study of JIS calls attention to the problematic ways that international schools position and market themselves as effective mediators to global skills and opportunities. Higher education institutions contribute directly to the phenomenon of cosmopolitan credentialism by identifying qualifications such as the International Baccalaureate as one offering universal equivalency. Universities also, whether intentionally or not, promote the IB as the industry standard for international education, a qualification which perpetuates its own ideological stances on cosmopolitanism through its foundational ethos and teachings. Through a discussion and analysis of cosmopolitan credentialism, I argue that my ethnography illustrates not only how inequalities are reproduced and sustained through market driven education, but how this can exacerbate situated inequalities among the global middle class, instead of eroding them. An ethnographic approach to the dilemmas market

driven education caused for students at both JIS and GCS, revealed that students navigated contradictory schools narratives on being 'global', experienced the utility of cosmopolitan cultural capital in radically different ways (along gendered and racialised lines), and the relational qualities of their aspirations. In countries such as Japan, the national policy push to invest in 'global human resources' (Nitta 2019), is reiterated in the stories of JIS students, who framed their attendance of the school as a necessity to keep up with the demands of globalisation in Japan, despite most male students contradictory disinterest in actually pursuing opportunities to develop cosmopolitan cultural capital.

Cosmopolitan credentialism seems to be the answer to what happens when the transformative environment of international schools is marketised. It creates the conditions for a hierarchy of international schools and systems of education, as is demonstrated by JIS's decision to become an IB world school, joining the ranks of other international schools offering the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme. Though this transition was ultimately a practical move on the part of the school to improve the opportunities of their students, I read the news with both feelings of relief and trepidation. Relief that the IBDP may provide new cohorts of students with perhaps more opportunities to study abroad, the barriers to which Kasumi, Risa and Mei had dealt with in attempts to realise their visions of the future. But also trepidation for the growing and problematic promises these institutions make to students.

Whether 'imagined' by students and parents as a result of school narratives and effective marketing, cosmopolitan credentialism does in fact structure the very parameters of the choices and opportunities open to students. Access to the global *is* mediated by international schools for students without acceptable qualifications, and

the broader educational landscape must be accounted for in gatekeeping this access. The IB is not preferred as a medium of instruction by international schools solely on the basis of academic rigour, and this represents a false and dangerous assumption as it presents the IB as a defacto 'logical' choice rather than a political one, effectively obscuring the epistemic hierarchies it relies on. In the gap created between the aspirations of global middle class families and the demands of universities, the market is filled by international schools who actively seek to promulgate the perceived desirability of their packaged curriculum to access competitive universities. Issues of accountability may seem irrelevant in this chicken and egg scenario, however, it would be remiss not to point out that universities, through their admissions requirements, determine the gaps in the market through which predatory schools and an increasingly hierarchical international education sector thrives.

Cosmopolitan credentialism is therefore dangerous on multiple fronts as it a) does not account for the unequal distribution and access to cosmopolitanism among populations (Igarashi and Saito 2014) b) reinforces and reproduces situated inequalities within student populations c) paves the way for pedagogical imperialism through promoting adoption of programmes such as the International Baccalaureate, and finally d) continues to legitimise the epistemic hegemony of English-speaking education systems.

Interrogating cosmopolitan credentialism as an institutionalised phenomenon will enable us to better understand the challenges young people face in making decisions about their futures. What motivates students to study, the why, where, how and what of it, has changed dramatically in recent years. Future research into pre-university decision-making must be challenged to go beyond metrics and economistic analyses as this can only support understanding of students' outcomes, not of students'

journeys. Young people now have to make increasingly calculated choices about their futures, fearing they will be left behind if they are not able to complete their studies at universities which offer access to sustainable futures. Whilst international schools ostensibly provide the solution to many of these growing issues, I suggest the schools themselves fail to acknowledge that gender and racial inequalities are not eradicated by these transnational spaces. They instead contribute to the inadvertent reproduction of inequalities through their complicity in institutionalising cosmopolitan credentialism, and by ignoring the situated inequalities that exist within the schools themselves. This is something which an international education often complicates rather than alleviates. Being a 'global citizen' is not an apolitical identity, as explored in Chapter 4, which demonstrated this identity is deeply embedded in national and racial politics, as well as cultural hierarchies. Furthermore, demystifying the effects of cosmopolitan credentialism can shed light on the reality of students' access to international schools, supporting calls for their decolonisation. We cannot simply focus on what we learn without genuine consideration of who we give access to learning, as such offering alternative accessible routes to attendance including equivalency exams will go some way to improve equity.

Research in international schools therefore offers incredible insight into the ways that social and cultural inequalities are transformed, reproduced and capitalised on. The experiences of students at JIS and GCS have exposed the complex realities of inequalities of educational access, highlighting that these issues are more than those of Global North vs Global South, but are instead indicative of situated inequalities within the global middle class itself. Inequalities to which international education is not the panacea, as the marketing of schools might suggest. Japanese globalisation

has generated anxieties surrounding graduate employability and increasingly competitive entry into university, and as my research with JIS students reveals, Japanese families are engaging in their own projects to develop global human resources (Kobayashi 2021; Yonezawa & Shimmi 2017) whilst ensuring that their children maintain a safe distance from the global.

Implications for Change In Schools

The popularity of international education has grown exponentially, particularly as a strategy of reproduction for global middle class families as they seek to secure the futures of their children. I can offer no definitive solution for the issues raised throughout this thesis, however, a decisive place to start is with international schools themselves. In my experience, the IB is not some incredible tool of social transformation. If that were the case, its own students would be more critical of its expense and gatekeeping elitism. However, at GCS this was not the case, and instead many students felt that they were "lucky" to be in a position to attend the school, having witnessed the lack of mobility of peers in their home countries. This attitude was in equal parts disturbing and understandable. The dangers of an educational programme which suffers from its own idealism is that it prepares young people for a world that does not exist yet. The IB therefore runs the risk of 'creating world leaders' who are detached from the reality of the very real barriers that structure the world outside of the school. A programme which could inspire reflection, instead sought gratitude at GCS. Due to its lack of commitment to accessibility, the IB has been described by transnational education scholar, Alexander Gardener-McTaggart, as a

corporate expert "in the exploitation of educational values and perceived rigour" (2022:12), which fails to live up to its own transformative ethos:

> Put plainly, the IB does not 'put its money where its mouth is'. Despite even the corporate caché in charity, it does not subsidise deserving schools or training for teachers from unrepresented demographics or even invest in schools in challenging contexts (ibid:13).

Globalisation is not only a project of Euro-American creation and orchestration. Any future research must pay due attention to international schools as contexts in which situated inequalities are reproduced if we are to shift educational policy narratives away from developing 'global human resources' or 'global citizens', and towards agendas which genuinely account for the unequal way that international education confers distinction and enables social mobility. As such, more research is needed on the relationality of student decision-making, where perceived precarity affectively shapes students' choices generating negative aspiration, and where schools themselves are treated as focal points of students' development of self-potentiality. This is particularly important in international schools as well as in educational institutions which are adopting internationalised curricula.

I suggest that schools need greater recognition of the emotional burdens and psychic costs that pursuing international education might place on students. In many cases, students were leaving lives and loved ones behind, away from support networks, friends, siblings and parents, something which is not only a reality for boarding students as Jemimah's story shows. Alongside the difficulties of living away from home and the stresses that migration can cause, students are negotiating and balancing family expectations as well as their own. Though for many students the

future seemed bright, its consideration was often a fraught and non-linear process, and one which could take a toll on their wellbeing. Here, we might also consider the place of schools to better support the overall wellbeing of students, whose potential emotional precarity may be felt throughout this thesis. I assert that institutions and caregivers owe students the priority of their wellbeing, something which can be conceptualised as another kind of affective debt, or a debt of care owed to students by those who are responsible for them.

Education must be student centred, and provide spaces where students can share their diverse experiences of schooling (not just for marketing materials). By offering opportunities for reflection in school, a dialogue may be opened to explore how an international education is experienced differently by students whose identities are marginalised, generating possibilities for learning and improvement to services, and raising questions about how we should conceive of the 'global' in schools. This is also crucial for informing the training and onboarding of educators, many of whom may have legitimate frustrations, but whose knowledge of students' challenges may be limited. Recognising alternative discourses on the purpose of international schooling could guide commitments within institutions to holistically support the self-potentiality of students.

Finally, we must remain critical of the realities of educational systems which reproduce the shrinking of education to an instrumental goal, ones which have created space for exploitative educational institutions offering solutions to the anxieties generated by globalisation. As researchers, we must stay attuned to the realities of students' lives and circumstances which make these forms of education appealing and sometimes necessary. The unattainability of international qualifications for those without the financial means has not diminished, and as such

we stand only to gain from challenging and reimagining how our current systems of education operate.

A Note to Students

It would be easy for me to say, you are worthy of any future you can imagine for yourself. It is harder for me to acknowledge that, ultimately, choosing that future might be an impossibility. A choice is a nice thing to have, a sad luxury in luxurious circumstances.

The weight of the future can be as crushing as it is emancipatory. As terrifying as it is, deterministic. No platitudes from me will help with the reality of the circumstances in which you find yourself making decisions.

What I can offer is recognition. Recognition of the ways that you felt were not listened to or supported by teachers or parents; for the decisions that you owed to your families; for the loss of identity and familiarity in pursuit of opportunity; for the distances between you and parents and siblings and friends. The personal cost and joys of being 'global'.

International schools do not need to exist as they are. You should make demands on the education you deserve, one which centres your experiences, and takes access and equity seriously. Hold educational institutions accountable for the decolonising commitments that they espouse.

"Gaining a broad view" is a worthy pursuit, but you should always remain critical of where you are looking to, and from.

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