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The American University in Cairo

School of Global Affairs & Public Policy (GAPP)

**What is Beyond Graduation for MENA Scholarship Alumni? Understanding the Global Journeys of Tomorrow's Leaders Scholarship Alumni**

A Thesis Submitted by

AlBaraa Ahmed Quradi

Submitted to the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies

19/12/2023

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

The degree of Master of Arts

in Migration and Refugee Studies



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## Chapter One: Introduction

Many dialogues and discourses centered on migration in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have focused on refugees and ‘economic migrants.’ This tends to exclude migrant students in the MENA context in the migration literature compared to the topic in the context of Asia-Pacific and Europe. The driving factors of migrant students after graduation are interlinked with the factors of refugees and economic migrants due to the home country’s economic and political situations that elicit the incentive to migrate to study abroad and further move and pursue their own paths after graduation.

The magnitude of student migration has increased globally. UNESCO (2015). defines international students as “those who physically cross an international border between two countries to take educational activities in a destination country.” Between 2005 and 2013, the number of international students increased from 2.8 million to 4.1 million, signifying a 46% increase within eight years (UNESCO, 2015)<sup>1</sup>. This increase is significant. International Migrant students share overlapping characteristics with other groups and do not fall exclusively into classifications of “refugee,” “economic migrant”, or other groups. In other words, refugees and migrants may also be international students as migration is mixed in nature where the intentions of migration might vary and yet the causes are the same and the actions are similar. For instance, an international student may claim refuge in a country of education and get employed during their academic journey, as an extreme case to show how the various boundaries intersect for an international student. As such, this research will focus on degree-seeking students from the MENA region who studied abroad within the MENA region and stayed a minimum of one year abroad to fulfill their

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from the UNESCO Facts and figures: Mobility in higher education Website ([Facts and figures: Mobility in higher education \(unesco.org\)](https://unesco.org/en/education/mobility))

degree requirements, focusing on Lebanon and Egypt; although the author could not research and connect with international scholarship students in Egypt who fit the sampling criteria.

The MENA region is faced with multiple constraints, inefficient markets and academic institutions, especially after the Arab Spring, which incentivizes the region's youth to think about pursuing their education abroad. Many determinants play a role in the youth's migration, which will be discussed in detail throughout the thesis, especially with the lack of decent opportunities to pursue higher education and employment in their country of origin compared to the possibility of better quality of education and employment outside their country of origin. To understand students' migratory decisions, the thesis will look into the determinants that played a role. The thesis will examine how these determinants and other factors played a role in the future plans after graduation including going back to their country of origin, residing in their country of education, or moving to a third country.

The existing migrant networks, the failing economies and states in the region, and the lack of opportunities and social mobility in the region are leading factors that push students to pursue migration to improve their quality of life and as a livelihood strategy. This is the reason many youths explore scholarship opportunities abroad to attain better quality of education which in hand is a way to improve their quality of life, while removing the monetary difficulties of funding and acquiring a higher education abroad. As fellowships for higher education covers for a living stipend, an accommodation, full tuition fees, and flight tickets to go to the country of education and back home, they pave a way for students to migrate and study abroad. This enhances their opportunities after graduation.

Migration for educational purposes has been investigated in academia, such as Findlay (2010), Rizvi (2011), Bhandri (2011), Wai lo (2019), and many more. although this group's



presence is considered finite compared to other migrant groups in academic literature. Moreover, the academic literature has looked into the reasons, intentions, directions, and outcomes of migrating and studying abroad and found that the experiences vary greatly affected by certain factors. Such factors include personal characteristics and skills, country of origin, and the context of the host community and country of education. As a result, international students are being studied under the context of *international student mobility/migration (ISM)*.

### *1.1 Research Question and Purpose:*

This Research aims to contribute to the literature on the migration of students from the MENA region by focusing on a case study focusing on the alumna from the undergraduate Tomorrow's Leaders scholarship, to investigate the aftermath of the journey of higher education on a scholarship basis. Therefore, the thesis contributes to the contemporary literature body on migration experiences. It aims to examine how migration relates to development and inequality, and the connection of these migrants with their countries of origin and host communities.

### *Research Question:*

**What factors influence the migratory decisions of scholarship-awarded students from the MENA region at the end of their scholarship duration?**

### *Sub-questions:*

1. What are the policies facilitating international scholarship students' stay abroad?
2. How did the students' experience in the country of education affect their migratory trajectory?
3. How do the students' education and skills affect their migratory trajectory?

4. How does the students' social network affect their migratory trajectory?
5. What are the mobility motivations of international scholarship students after they finish their awarded degree?

*Objective and Proposition of this study:*

The objective of this study is to

- Understand the factors affecting the decision-making of the international student concerning their mobility after graduation.
- Document the students' stories and infer from it the various factors that were under consideration when they made their decision.
- The proposition of this study is that these students tend to keep searching for opportunities to improve as well as find a place where they "belong"/ call "home", due to their experience in the country of education.

*1.2 Structure of the thesis*

In this thesis, entitled "Comprehending the Global Trajectories of MENA Scholarship Recipients after Graduation: A Case Study of Tomorrow's Leaders Scholarship Alumna," the research is organized to offer a thorough investigation of the international migration paths of scholarship recipients from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region after their graduation. The study commences with Chapter One, which functions as the introduction, presenting the significance of the research and posing the research question and purpose.

Chapter Two delves into the existing body of knowledge, providing an exhaustive Literature Review and Conceptual Framework. Various aspects are explored, including the patterns and flows of international students, an overview of the countries in the Middle East and North

Africa region, and the factors driving student migration from this region. Furthermore, insights are provided into the Tomorrow's Leaders Program and the countries where education takes place. The chapter also discusses theoretical perspectives on students' international migration and mobility, determinants and aspirations, the Capabilities Approach, network theory, and the framework of labor policies in countries of education compared to third countries. The conceptual framework and the significance of the study are also presented in this chapter.

Moving on to Chapter Three, the Methodology is elucidated. This section provides insight into the process of sample selection, the characteristics of the sample, the structure of interviews, ethical considerations, coding and analysis procedures, as well as the limitations and challenges encountered during the research.

Chapter Four, titled "Migration Matrix: Policies and Conditions in Countries of Education and Origin Impacting Student Trajectories," constitutes the core of the empirical investigation. The chapter is divided into sections that explore the policies in countries of education, the situation in the country of origin, and the perceptions of students regarding countries of education. This chapter concludes with a synthesis of the findings.

Chapter Five focuses on personal factors and future plans. It delves into the individual experiences of students, the role of social networks, students' plans and aspirations, and the impact of the educational experience on their post-graduation decisions. The chapter concludes with a comprehensive discussion of these factors.

Finally, Chapter Six serves as the conclusion of the thesis. It addresses the research questions and presents the main findings. The chapter outlines the contribution of the research, acknowledges its limitations, and suggests areas for further research.

This structured approach ensures a comprehensive exploration of the various dimensions influencing the global journeys of MENA scholarship recipients after graduation, thereby contributing valuable insights to the existing body of knowledge on international student migration.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

This research will contribute to discussions on “Student migrants” in the context of international scholarship students from the MENA region by investigating their migratory experience and further aspirations after completing their degrees. The Literature review section will consist of literature revolving around paradigms about international student mobility, reasons and intentions of student mobility, an overview of the literature about the Middle Eastern and North African countries regarding highly skilled and student emigration, and a piece of background information about the case study of MEPI Tomorrow’s Leaders scholars, as well as Aspiration and determinants factors, theorization about international student mobility, and detailed description of the concepts later to be used in the conceptual framework such as Capability approach, network theory, and Country of education’s entry visa and labor market policies.

### *2.1 Patterns and flows of international students:*

Most of the literature investigating the patterns and directions of student flows focuses on student mobility within and into the global north. Data and literature on the mobility of students within and into the global south are scarce. Furthermore, this section illustrates the major host education hubs that international students tend to choose. Bhandari and Blumenthal (2011) examine international students’ mobility trends in origin and destination countries. Bhandari (2011; P.8) states that.

*Countries host 64 percent of the world's tertiary-level mobile students: the United States (21 percent), the United Kingdom (13 percent), France (9 percent), Germany (8 percent), Australia (7 percent), and China (6 percent) ... with the United States hosting the most significant number and proportion.*

Furthermore, Guruz (2011) provides an inclusive table about the leading regions in hosting international students and their regions of origin. North America and Western Europe are the leading hosting regions, hosting around 65 percent of the total international students. The sub-Saharan African region leads as a percentage of the total regional enrollment, followed by central Asia and the Arab states.

As such, most of the literature utilizes existing statistics or produces new statistics using the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as a primary source of annual statistical data on international student mobility leading to a focus on mobility to and within the developed countries of the global north (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011; Guruz, 2011; Kritz, 2015; Techler, 2011) and usage of data that does not exceed the year 2014 as an upper limit which some authors recognize as a limitation linking it to data lag between recording and releasing this data on the public domain.

On the other hand, Project Atlas provides a snapshot of contemporary international student mobility in developed countries. Atlas (2020) and (2022) Identify the largest host countries, the field of study of inbound students, and academic levels. Project Atlas shows quantitative data on the MENA region students pursuing their education abroad. For instance, Atlas (2020) and Atlas (2022) state that Moroccan and Algerian students are France's most prominent international student groups, and Syrian students are Germany's third largest international student group. This data can be explained through multiple factors. For example, Syrian students in Germany hold one of the largest groups of international students in Germany due to the significant influx of Syrian refugees

to Germany and the German policy of providing higher education opportunities which benefited this group, as well as the existence of older migrants and student networks in Germany. The historical links between Morocco, Algeria, and France also explain the considerable inflow of student migrants from these countries to France. It can also be inferred from these numbers that students from the MENA region pursue their education abroad to deal with their origin's country situation and as a means to fulfill their aspirations and human capital.

Additionally, according to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA) in the year 2022, UNESCO reported in the year 2018 that there were approximately 449,000 higher education students from Arab countries, who were studying abroad. The top Arab countries of origin for international students were the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with more than 73,000 students, the Syrian Arab Republic with about 56,000 students, and Morocco with approximately 49,000 students. In terms of destination areas, Europe was the primary choice for higher education students from Arab countries in 2018, with more than 182,000 students. Additionally, approximately 102,000 students from Arab countries pursued their education within the Arab region. North America also emerged as a popular destination area, with approximately 95,000 students in 2018. The United States of America with more than 81,000 students, and France with about 76,000 students were the main destination countries for Arab students pursuing higher education. Jordan, Turkey, and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also stood out as destination countries for higher education students from Arab countries.

Furthermore, scarce literature was found which reviewed and looked upon international students from the MENA region. except for some literature that focused on few countries in Africa, such as Morocco, Algeria, Tunis, and Egypt, as part of a study looking into international student mobility and tertiary education capacity in Africa (Kritz, 2013) or viewing Egypt and Lebanon as

a central educational hub for Arab states before the 1980 and the emergence of Qatar in the contemporary time due to internationalization of higher education and cross-border higher education (Bhandari, 2011). However, the studies looking into international students from the MENA region and within the region are rare which goes in hand with the lack of research south-south migration. More importantly, there is no research that talks about where international students from the MENA region ended up after graduation or any information about their lives after graduation. And for this reason, specifically, this research aims to fill in the gap to know what happened to international students, from the MENA region who studied abroad in the MENA region, after graduation and where did they go.

As a result, this section shows that students from the MENA region choose to study abroad in various host countries due to the significant presence of international students that reside in these countries, the lack of high-quality higher education institutions and opportunities in the MENA region and their respective countries of origin compared to the quality of higher education found in developed countries, and ability to pursue their aspirations in these host countries.

## *2.2 Overview of the Middle East and North African Countries and Drivers of Student migration from the Region*

The Middle East and North African region (MENA) have a diverse range of countries. while the number of countries within the “MENA” region varies depending on the definition used. For the purpose of this study, the MENA region is defined and compromised of seventeen countries, from Gulf oil exporting states to lower and middle-income ones. The MENA region encompasses the countries of Yemen, Oman, Kingdom of Saudia Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. Furthermore, the wave of political upheaval known as the Arab Spring started in

Tunisia in December 2010 and expanded throughout the Arab world. By the middle of 2012, millions had been forced to flee their homes. While there was relatively little violence in some nations, there were large-scale refugee flows due to the severe crises in Libya, Syria, and Yemen. Nonetheless, the Mediterranean region's long-term migratory patterns have not significantly changed because of the Arab Spring. The maturation of a young, educated, and aspirational generation has boosted emigration and the possibility of revolution in Arab cultures, as this generation are engendered by vast unemployment, autocratic rule, and corruption (Castles, 2014).

To put things into perspective, The region's markets have not been able to support the expanding youth population. Nowadays, the MENA area has the highest young unemployment rates worldwide. Fifty-four percent of them are reportedly either unemployed or inactive. Political unrest in the area, where 87 percent of children reside in conflict-ridden nations, including Yemen, Libya, Syria, and Iraq, further exacerbates these tendencies (Farah, 2017). Furthermore, the academic institution in the region fail to meet the continuous demand of the region's youth. This results in a lack of quality or accessibility to higher education which in hand further exacerbates the market's inability to support the youth. As such, the societies in the MENA region have many socioeconomic and political structural inefficiencies that cripple the ability of the youth and upcoming generation in the region to lead fulfilling lives resulting in relative deprivation in a way that results in the youth aspiring to migrate from their origin communities to pursue opportunities abroad.

Furthermore, many of the region's students look into migration to improve their human capital and deal with their origin's situation. As such, there are multiple drivers of student migration from the MENA region. Akl, Maroun, and Major (2007) study on the migration of graduating Lebanese medical students identified several factors on why students look into



migration as means of development. These reasons included features within Lebanon and factors abroad, societal expectations that students travel abroad for training and education, media marketing of abroad training, the existence of established migration networks, and an established culture of migration. Furthermore, Dibeh, Fakh, and Marrouch (2017) identify that migration functioned as a way for young Lebanese people to deal with unemployment, a lack of long-term professional opportunities, and restrictive social mobility. Additionally, the authors found that university education encourages the desire to emigrate; as university education provides an improved chance of employment and human capital development. This creates a hierarchy that encourages migration and addresses the domestic issue of an imbalance between the educational sector, labor market and the subpar working conditions in the country of origin.

The factors incentivizing students to pursue education abroad are similar to the factors that pushes students to stay abroad. As the students manages to study abroad and see the difference between the situation in their countries of origin and the outside world, the students start thinking of ways to maintain the position of being abroad, whether by pursuing further higher education opportunities and employment wherever the student believes that it holds development for themselves and ensures a better quality of life. However, the perspective of what the MENA students abroad do after graduation and why they chose such a path is still understudied and often overlooked. This could be a result of the point of view that the moment a student graduates becomes a part of the labor force either in the student's country of education or in the student's country of origin. This assumption comes due to the fact that the majority of studies done on international students takes place in the global north, which leaves the perspective of what happens to students from the MENA region who study abroad in the MENA region. This is where my research comes to provide a viewpoint to the topic from a different context.

The literature on the MENA region showcases the volatility of the area in the socioeconomic fabric of the region due to the stressed underperforming labor markets, lack of sufficient supply of higher education to the students, as well as the declining general situation in the country either due to armed conflict, political upheaval, or general instability in the country. These factors, and many others, play a role in influencing students to pursue higher studies abroad. However, the literature on the relationship of the factors influencing educational migration decisions of MENA region students is scarce due to the lack of quantifiable data regarding the matter. Moreover, the literature regarding the matter does not cover students from the MENA region who studied abroad within the region as most of the literature look into migrating student from the MENA region to Europe, America, and other developed countries.

### *2.3 Overview on the Tomorrow's Leaders Program and Countries of Education:*

Since 2008, the US Department of State's US-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) has sponsored the Tomorrow's Leaders Program (TL), which provides fully funded undergraduate and graduate-level academic matriculation, civic education, and leadership development opportunities to capable and highly motivated young students from underserved backgrounds in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. TL is a leadership-training program that collaborates with top MENA universities that have received U.S. accreditation to develop a cadre of civic-minded, intelligent, and proficient national, business, and community leaders in their fields with the goal of sending this cadre back home to initiate change in the countries of origin.

TL focuses on students from the region with academic credentials who lack the financial means to attend an American-style university. Students will enroll at the undergraduate level in a four-year program or at the graduate level in a four-year program in one of the hosting institutions: The American University of Beirut (AUB), The Lebanese American University (LAU) in Lebanon,

and The American University in Cairo (AUC) in Egypt. Participants receive mentoring and internship opportunities with local civil society, corporate, and non-governmental groups, and each host university offers a civic awareness and leadership-based component.

Egypt and Lebanon are viewed as a central educational hub for Arab states from the 1980 (Bhandari, 2011) and even before, as the American University in Beirut was founded in 1866, the Lebanese American University in 1924, and the American University in Cairo in 1919. Although these countries had their economies and political spheres disrupted since the Arab spring, the countries position in the MENA region, and their relative cultural and language makes it an optimal location to pursue higher education abroad.

The TL scholarship asks its students to return to their countries of origin upon graduation. However, this rule is not an ironclad rule, as the students have the right to choose their destination after graduation to go to, whether the student would like to return to their country of origin or go to a third country, if the student shows proof of employment or higher education opportunity in the third country. Furthermore, the TL program takes students from the middle- and lower-income groups to help them pursue higher education in the American universities mentioned above through an inclusive grant that eliminates the more significant hurdle of migration for these socioeconomic groups: migration costs, to develop students academically and professional to be “change-makers” in whatever context they be in. Moreover, these students are sampled from Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco according to the official websites of the Tomorrow’s Leaders scholarship program on the hosting universities and U.S.A department of state website.

However, these countries’ employment policies put forth multiple hurdles for TI students to integrate into the countries’ economies after the students’ graduation as the scholarship does not

support economic integration in the country of education by promoting the need to return back to country of origin after graduation, as the program see them as purely students and country of education sees them as foreigners, even though these students are viewed as highly skilled, due to their capabilities, experience, and trainings, by the time they graduate, and yet they face issues in economic integration in their countries of education due to their nationalities.

#### *2.4 Theoretical perspectives on students' international migration/mobility (ISM):*

As many individuals see education as a method for a better life, migration for educational purposes is a means to pursue this ambition. Multiple academics investigated the phenomena of international student migration, trying to map out the various aspects of this activity while highlighting the importance of contextualization, social capital, and family's income group in influencing student aspirations, which affects the integration process and outcomes of studying abroad. mapping the various aspects that facilitated and helped the students to migrate for educational purposes is essential as it will help us understand the factors that plays a role in how a graduating student plans for their next step, whether it was to pursue higher education or enroll into the labor force in a country of their choosing.

The existing literature theorizing student migration started with push-pull factors manifested in the supply and demand theories, such as the ones proposed by Findlay (2010), as a method for class reproduction (Findlay et al., 2012). However, the theories of student migration has been expanded, as it was viewed that the multiple theories dealing with student migration are somewhat limited by the original theories of migration, such as the Functionalist theories and the historical-structural theories that Castles, De Haas, and Miller (2014) discuss in their book titled *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, as they are confined to categories that detach the student migrants from their complex nature. As such,

King and Raghuram (2013) and Madge et al. (2014) have argued that the modern discourse holds contradictory values towards “international students” as they are viewed as either simple utilitarians who are trying to maximize their capital or as unneeded people/strangers/others due to migration securitization policies, resulting in a position where more qualitative and ethnographic work is needed to understand the link between mobility and scientific knowledge production, as international students are essentially knowledge receivers and producers. As a result, belonging to the “international students” category also entails falling into other groups, as it necessitates the fashion of “being abroad”.

Findlay (2010) argues that we should look beyond the choices of emigrating students and the contexts that prompted decisions to study abroad as well as what to do after graduation from studying abroad. The author emphasizes on the importance of the context the students are part of when they decide what to do after graduation and their experience in their country of education. Moreover, the author questions the simplistic views of previous theorizations of international student mobility, highlighting the importance of “demand-side” theories that examine students’ choice to move and study abroad to improve their cultural and human capital and “supply-side” theories that investigate the financial interests of academic institutions to attract international students for education. The financial interests of academic institutions in attracting international students is to improve the global standings of the university, gathering funds for scholarships for students, especially international students, and receiving aids programs. Although the financial interests of the university in attracting international students is vital to understanding ISM, we are looking into ISM from the perspective of the students and not the institutions.

Rizvi (2011) shares Findlay’s (2010) perspective on the importance of understanding the pull factors of academic institutions and the host country. It is argued that international student

mobility cannot be fully understood without contextualizing the academic institutional strategies to recruit international students. this aspect is significant as the students evaluate the available after graduation options and where is the optimal place to pursue higher education and higher quality of life based on the pull-power of the academic institutions and their host country

Furthermore, the rationale behind international student mobility depends on the context of the mobility, aid/development programs, social status, or consumption, and the facilitating factors provided by the academic institutions and the state. For instance, the Australian immigration policies facilitated the arrival of international students as the higher education institutions to deal with the state's lack of funds. As such, the shift in policies and views on international student mobility is seen by Rizvi (2011) as an expression and response to the ongoing processes of globalization.<sup>2</sup> The shift in immigration policies that facilitates for the migration of international students is of importance to the graduating students as these changes in contexts may lead to various paths to take after graduation.

The arguments of contextualization and looking into the facilitating factors from the academic institutions are valuable to this research as it is impossible to understand the migration of scholarship students without considering the scholarship itself and the role of the academic institutions in attracting these students. For instance, we must understand how the TL program affected the scholarship student's experience and the academic institution's role in influencing the student's capabilities and aspirations. The scholarship provided a chance for the student to pursue their aspirations and escape from certain constraints in their country of origin. As a result, the

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<sup>2</sup> Rizvi (2011) views globalization as “the idea of social processes that describe the rapid movement of ideas, goods, and people around the globe, radically transforming relations among people and communities across a national border”

scholarship further develops the students' capabilities and aspirations to the point it may lead to various opportunities the students wish to pursue after their graduation.

In addition, the importance of social, cultural, or material capital plays a significant role in the experience of international students affecting the student's aspirations. Liu-Farrer (2016) looks into migration as a class-based consumption for wealthy Chinese people. The author illustrates that one of the driving factors that incited wealthy Chinese individuals and their families to migrate from China to the West is to provide a better education level for their children while utilizing their resources to create an advantage to ensure the social standing of themselves and their families.

Additionally, Findlay (2012) looks into the "world-class" category through the relationship between globalization, class differential, and international student mobility. The author discusses how students, especially students from private schools in the United Kingdom, view international studies and how this group of students' social class influences their intentions. Moreover, the author discusses how international students utilize social and cultural capital for social mobility rather than just reproducing class differences. As such, social and cultural capital is utilized by students to distinguish themselves from the group and showcase their relation to another group, leading to social mobility and opportunities that otherwise were not accessible. This relates to international students as the experience of being part of a "global class" and attaining the resources to chase social mobility is the outcome of human-capital investment to improve and learn, which the graduating students will keep in mind when determining their path to take after graduation, as further mobility is a path to utilize their capabilities and resources that leads to further improvement in human-capital and quality of life.

Thus, the student family's income group standing plays a factor in the aspiration and migration of students as individuals of the specific class hold varying means and capital to achieve

their goals and actualize their selves. Additionally, income groups dynamics influence the motivations and aspirations of pursuing education abroad, mainly to achieve social mobility and higher income to facilitate livelihood improvement and social mobility.

Furthermore, contemporary literature calls for a shift in focus from the “international student” to “international education.” This shift is put forth as the category of “international student” is a static category that fails to encompass the multifaceted experience of this category. Madge, Clare, Raghuram, and Noxolo (2014) argue for a shift in theoretical and conceptual frameworks to adopt the notion of “international study” as they illustrate that the literature on education and migration is limited by focusing only on the student. This point goes hand in hand with the argument of shedding more light on the experience of international education and its different parts and how it effects the graduating students evaluating their after-graduation plans.

Additionally, the author showcases that students have a role in academic knowledge production as the space of the academic institutions do as the international students provide their unique perspective on the topic of their education and later diffuse it to their networks, illustrating the reality of the experience of the mobile student and the knowledge created throughout their experience which improves the chances of the student’s integration in the academic setting. Furthermore, King and Raghuram (2013) illustrate one of the dominant reasons for the shortcomings of categorizing “international students” by highlighting the tensions and contradictions inherent in viewing international students as both “desired” (fulfilling the needs of a highly skilled labor market) and “unwanted” (due to the politics of migration control). These contradictions play a significant role in the student’s integration process in the country of education and may affect their future migration decisions.



As such, the theoretical paradigms of international student mobility suggest that to fully understand the movement of international students after graduation, it is vital that we look into the context of decision making and identify the facilitating factors. Moreover, social capital and resources utilization is important to identify the available mobility options in front of the students. and finally, it is crucial to remember that this is a “learning” experience for international students as they go for educational purposes, learn the country of education systems and culture, as well as engage in knowledge and information production and sharing with their surroundings, which might entice them to further keep looking for opportunities and destinations to learn and improve beyond graduation.

However, literature presents a gap that not many authors considered. The gap inferred from the literature is that they focused on a particular class group of students located in specific geographic locations and studying abroad in major academic hubs in the global north. To clarify, the literature focused on elite-class students from developing countries (mainly South and south-east Asian countries), high-class individuals from European countries, or upper-middle-class students studying abroad to reach the “elite transnational” class. These groups of individuals do not cover middle-class individuals or lower from the MENA region who study abroad on a scholarship basis, and their decision making process of what they will do after graduation and where, which this research will aim to cover a case study from to shed light on this overlooked group.

### *2.5 Determinants and Aspirations.*

In line with the predictions of the theory of ISM to “contextualize” the experience of studying abroad and not understand more about how migrant student can be knowledge producers, this section will look into the most significant determinants and aspirations that were mentioned in

the literature concerning ISM to help map out the factors that pushed students to pursue education abroad, and draw the connection to how these factors relate to the after graduation decision making process of the students.

One of the most significant determinants of global student mobility is the insufficient supply of domestic institutions compared to the demand for higher education in the countries of origin. Bhandari (2011) and Kritz (2013) illustrate that students go abroad because tertiary-institutions capacity is limited in their home countries. Moreover, these authors touch upon the role of networks, education quality, and life prospects in the host communities after the students finish their studies. These factors play an important role in how the students perceive their prospects in the country of education and 3<sup>rd</sup> countries compared to the available prospects in their country of origin

Beine, Noel, and Ragot's (2014) findings support the significant effect of networks and quality of the university available as determinants for students' studies abroad. Furthermore, Beine et al. (2014) state that networks play a role in decreasing the costs of migration, as the presence of national networks and the educational level of the diaspora reflects on the choice inclination to migrate, as with higher education level and quality, there is an increased chance in higher wages and quality of life. Networks have a dual role as they influence both determinants and aspirations. This dual role comes from the social nature of networks, where student looks into networks as a live example and evidence of a specific context resulting in an increase of aspiration to migrate due to the perceived relative deprivation.

Furthermore, the author finds that the students' migration flows are related to the level of education of the existing networks and diaspora in the host community and 3<sup>rd</sup> countries, as the location of student migration is sensitive to the wage levels and quality of education, which is

evident in the network's information, especially where most of the fees of education can be covered by grants. These networks provide the opportunity for students and their networks to know about scholarship opportunities and how to achieve them, removing the obstacle of access almost completely. The networks provide the necessary information to the students to advise them on the common paths taken by other alumna and how to follow them, which removes the obstacle of access to resources and information entirely. Rodriguez Gonzalez, Mesanza, and Mariel (2011) support the notion that higher education grants and funding positively influence international student mobility as financial support helps offset the costs of living and migration.

Additionally, Perkins (2014) shares the same sentiment as his findings showed that the benefits and cost-reducing factors, such as income-per-capita, network existence, and quality of education, have a more significant influence on international student mobility than the pull factors of universities, of higher quality of education and prestige, as the author uses a human capital approach to examine the variations in the motivations of students studying abroad, where the human capital approach indicates that individuals will go for opportunities that have a higher chance of personal and skill development as seen by their colleagues and older networks. De Hass (2011) also sees the human-capital approach as part of conceptualizing the relationship between migration and development, especially since individuals and their families see migration and education as enhancing their capabilities resulting in personal and socioeconomic improvement. As a result, the graduating students will look into the opportunities and path that provides higher chances of personal and skill development, which is evident in the income level and the quality of networks present in the opportunity under evaluation.

Moreover, Perkins (2014) creates the distinction between student migrants from new emerging economies and students migrating from lower-development countries at the factors

looked upon as determinants, as the former looks into the quality of education and capability-enhancing opportunities, and the latter looks into language linkage, geospatial distance, and income differential when evaluating the options of migrating to study abroad, as this can be seen in the case of Algerian and Moroccan students presence in France. Furthermore, Guruz (2011) notes that the leading countries for skilled migrant workers are also the major host countries for international students demonstrating why it would be possible to emigrate to these nations and that there may be a chance to develop ties that will last and developing into business networks, creating justifications for encouraging international student mobility on the part of the students and families.

Furthermore, multiple academic pieces of literature provide an overview of the migration theories relating to migration's micro-level and macro-level determinants (Arango, 2000; Massey, 1993; De Haas, 2007, 2010). These determinants intersect with students' migration as on the micro-level, students decide to study abroad as it yields a positive return on their human capital and provides better employment chances after graduation. Additionally, students consider the availability of better job employment and higher education opportunities provided in the context of their country of origin and education and perspective, where students draw their evidence for both levels from the migrant networks. Consequently, leading the students to draw informed decisions about the desired path to take after graduation.

Regarding intentions and aspirations of migration, multiple kinds of literature investigated African student's intentions highlighting that they migrate for education to attain better employment opportunities, better income, improved quality of life, career mobility, and better education, considering home-country conditions and the existence of networks in countries of education (Abuosi & Abor, 2015; Efonayi & Piguet, 2014; Dako-Gyeke, 2015). Other literature

looked into international students residing in European countries and found that these students are residing due to employment opportunities, international work experience, and other materialistic settlement considerations (Sykes & Ni Chaoimh, 2012; Geddie, 2013). Furthermore, Altberts and Hazen (2005) conclude that professional and employment factors influence international students to stay abroad, while societal and personal factors push them to return. However, wide variations exist among students depending on specific home country situations and their integration level in host countries.

To summarize, the determinants and aspirations influencing international student mobility are interlinked. The incapacity of the home higher education capacity to meet the demand of the students' demographic is one of the most vital factors making students look into studying abroad. Furthermore, migrant networks with high education level in countries attributed with reputable higher education institutions and the availability of career mobility and improved quality of life due to higher wages are the most mentioned factors that increase the flow of international students as these networks ease the migration costs that typically deteriorate migratory aspirations.

This section shows some of the various factors that the theoretical section highlighted. For instance, the context of the higher education supply and demand in the country of origin is important to look into and its link with employment, as the student start thinking about employment opportunities abroad when they apply as well as when they are in their country of education. Moreover, this section illustrates how the migrant's network's experience with education and employment is a facilitating factor that enables the student to pursue a similar path like their networks. This connection between higher studies abroad and employment chances in the host community is seen as a pathway into integration as studying in the host community allows the student to learn about the labor market and prepare for it with help from their networks. This

connection can also be used to create a pathway, utilizing the network and education, to pursue further opportunities in a third country in a less resistant way with the help of network to integrate in the new host community.

In addition, these factors hugely explain the rationale behind the flows and patterns of international student mobility as developed countries of the global north and newly developed and emerging developed economies in Asia attract significant portions of international students. On another note, the literature on determinants and aspirations of global student mobility puts into perspective the context of origin communities and migrant networks and their relation to the phenomena of ISM as preached in the theorizing literature of the phenomena. Furthermore, this section shows the various factors that affect students' aspirations and intentions, and development.

#### *2.6 Capabilities Approach and International Student Migration:*

Merely examining the determinants is insufficient for comprehending the migration of students since they do not account for the agency of the students. To gain a better understanding of students' after graduation choices, it is imperative to utilize the capability approach introduced by Sen, which examines their capabilities, aspirations, and intentions. This approach concentrates on individuals' actual abilities and potential, offering an extensive normative framework for assessing their well-being and social structures. The Capability approach distinguishes between means of achievement, social context, and environmental factors, social institutions and relations, which influence personal skills, intelligence, and aptitude for education, capabilities, and a mix of attainable opportunities that affect the choice made to attain the desired achievements (Robyens, 2007). Furthermore, the author asserts that aspirations have intrinsic value, which individuals actualize through their capabilities to reach their desired goals while navigating social constraints.

Clark (2006) further elaborates on the capability approach by stating that capability is an individual's ability to achieve a particular goal, while functioning refers to what an individual has accomplished. Capability leads to functioning, which results in the attainment of a specific utility such as happiness or a better quality of life. This approach is crucial in assigning value to the choices available to individuals because people differ in their capacity to transform capabilities and commodities into valuable achievements.

Wai lo (2019) links the capability approach with the concept of international student migration by acknowledging that the objective of development is human beings and their flourishing. The capability approach recognizes that an individual's capabilities are the combination of actual opportunities related to the life they may lead by exercising their freedom to achieve. This approach is relevant to international students since education plays a critical role in expanding their capabilities and creating opportunities that utilize the students' intrinsic abilities in conjunction with the political, social, and economic environment.

The capability approach, within the context of international students, is used to understand how students educational experience abroad helps the students achieve their goals and aspirations. For example, a student's means to achieve includes the knowledge and skills acquired during their study abroad experience. These means/commodities are then transposed utilizing the student's intrinsic factors, such as professional and societal, to create the capability to work and live in a different context, providing the student with the chance to achieve their desired work and life status.

The capability approach can even be pushed further to understand how the students developed their own capabilities to accommodate their changing aspiration within the social context they were part of. In this way, we can take into consideration how the students developed

their capabilities along their journey abroad, the factors that played a role in the students' aspiration variation, what were the facilitating factors that aided the student's growth, as well as how did the path the students took after graduation led them to actualizing their aspirations. Depending on the student's choice of returning to their country of origin, further residing in country of education, or further migrating to a 3<sup>rd</sup> country, the students utilize their capabilities and bind the various factors to their will to achieve their aspiration and attain the goal behind their aspiration.

The Capabilities and aspiration approach showcases how an individual's decision making depends on the environment and all of its factors. In the context of an international student, it looks into the factors that allow the student to migrate and further movement in pursuit of fulfilling their aspiration. As such, through the journey of migration and education, the student is able to expand their capabilities and skills in a way to fulfill their initial aspirations. Moreover, throughout their journey, the student has an improved set of capabilities and advanced aspirations that they want to fulfill after this journey. This new improved set of capabilities (hard and soft skills) and aspirations are influenced by the social connections made and developed in this journey, the enhanced view or perceptions of themselves and the contexts they are part (home country and country of education), as well as the available opportunities that is perceived due to the quality of education received and the information and experiences gathered from their social circles.

All of the options that are taken into consideration are further equated towards the person's aspiration, the perceived optimal allocation of capabilities, and the possibility of further personal improvement. These factors play a role in how a student makes a decision about what to do after graduation, whether they go back to home, or residing and integrating in the country of education, or go to a third country and pursue further options.



## *2.7 Network Theory and Migration*

This section delves into networks' role in inducing migration. In addition, supplementing theories explain other determinants and aspirations that affect international students' migration choices. The role of networks and other migration-inducing factors are not only limited to going abroad to pursue education, but rather extend beyond to influence the paths available and decision making process of the student about what to do and where to go after graduation.

Massey (1993) defines migrant networks as connections between groups of people, including migrants and former migrants and non-migrants, connected by relationships to their places of origin and destination, family ties, friendships, a common place of origin, and other connections. The author states that migrant networks increase the potential of international migration as they lower the costs and risks of mobility while increasing the net return of migration. These networks are a form of social capital that people can use to reach various goals, such as gaining employment or finding higher education opportunities.

These networks function independently as these networks are horizontal transnational networks that further grow with migration and connection between migrants themselves. For instance, a group of students who studied abroad for a year form a network that they subsequently relate with other networks they are part of during and after their migration process. In the case of international students, a first-year international student will meet senior international students and will keep communications with them, acting as a social network, that their experiences and information shared act as a vital source of information, inspiration, as well as safety net.

As such, each student migrant acts as a node to various networks leading to an ever-increasing-expanding network depending on its purpose or occasion of initiation. Arango (2000) supports this notion by stating that networks provide various types of support to migrants and non-

migrants in a way that is a vital explanatory factor for migration and has a multiplier effect on migration leading to a self-perpetuating phenomenon as networks are cumulative. As such, networks act as an intermediate actor between the micro-level individual decision-making and the macro-level structural determinants.

The role of networks in student's migration is vast and its evidence is ample. The vital trait of networks that distinguish it from other factors influencing migration is its ability to provide information, which comes through conversations and communicated experiences of the networks, that helps in reducing the risks and costs of migration. As social networks are an informal social structure that allows the students to gather information, actively and passively, about the available opportunities how to deal with hardships and crises and acts as a support system for the student. The student through their networks can gather vast amount of information that helps them to improve themselves, their capabilities, aspirations, in whatever environment they find themselves in whether it is their home country, their country of education, and third countries. this extensive role of networks in how to support student migrants is vital as the role of the network adapts and varies depending on the need of the migrant student, which in hand improves the migration journey and can perpetuate further migration.

Furthermore, the network theory put into perspective the literature discussed the determinants and aspirations of international students and highly skilled migrants. The theories show that students compare the situation in their home country, country of education, and prospective host countries, based on the information communicated from the migrant networks and the viability of job opportunities in both countries, as well as the ability of students to improve their quality of life and capital through migration.

## *2.8 Labor Policies Frameworks in Countries of Education Versus Third countries*

One of the major aspects that influences the international student trajectory after finishing their studies abroad is their ability to participate in the labor market. This section will delve into the labor market policies of the countries of education, mainly Egypt and Lebanon, as well as third countries labor policies, mainly the European union area, as it is a major migrant receiving region according to IOM world migration report (2020), to draw a comparison between the options available to a graduating international student from the MENA region.

Labor policies are put in place to protect the labor market by ensuring no harm is done on the labor market affecting the state's nationals through granting access to foreign individuals who have the ability to have a positive impact on the labor market/economy and have the ability to integrate easily into the country. For instance, Switzerland's immigration labor policy favors individuals with high and rare skills that fills a necessary gap in the labor market who shows the ability to integrate, although some positions and skills are exempted from the integration clause (Hercog and Sandoz, 2018). This instance can be seen in the labor policies in Egypt( Labor code No. 13 of 2003), Lebanon (Lebanese Labor Code of 1964), Switzerland, and the EU, where one of the requirements to be granted access to the labor market is demonstrating the acquisition of highly needed skills or higher qualifications, such as tertiary education and beyond, for highly skilled positions, such as Managers, Specialists, and other unique positions (Hercog, 2018; EU immigration portal)

Furthermore, multiple distinctions arise from viewing the labor policies of Egypt, Lebanon, and the EU. One of the most obvious differences is that in Lebanon and Egypt, the labor code indicates that a company/enterprise cannot have more than around 20% non-nationals working in the institutions labor force (Lebanese Code of Labor, 1964 ; Egyptian labor law, 2003). This

limitation may not be found in countries of the EU or may vary more flexibly compared to Egypt and Lebanon as long as the enterprise can show the need of the highly skilled non-national in the business (Hercog, 2018). Additionally, the procedure required to gain a work permit in Egypt-Lebanon is more exhausting compared to the EU regulations (depending on the EU member country regulations and protocol), considering the outcome of the experience in obtaining employment in Egypt-Lebanon compared to obtaining employment in an EU member country. In Egypt-Lebanon, a highly skilled individual needs to get a work permit clearance before acquiring a work visa which allows the individual to legally reside and work within the country. In comparison, the EU regulations only contain the work visa, if the employment seeker has a skill-set that matches the needs of the EU labor market. While some might argue that work permits are still difficult to obtain in the EU and the USA, certain highly skilled and highly educated workers in high demand occupations have a better chance of getting the visa and employment compared to their chances in Egypt and Lebanon, which has a considerable exodus of highly skilled workers to the EU and USA. Besides that, higher education students, especially international graduate school students in the EU, can enter a naturalization track where they can get a second passport after spending a certain amount of time within the country, based on the country's regulations.

Furthermore, it is easier in the EU for international students to switch from a student visa to a work visa as the student visa allows access and integration into the labor market according to the benefits of EU student visa and the EU member country regulations (EU immigration portal). The complexity and the length of the procedures to gain a work visa plays a major role in the student's ability to choose which labor market to take part of. Furthermore, the same can be said regarding the ease of access to these procedures as the bureaucratic procedures in both contexts vary. In the EU, the state apparatus helps the individuals and the corporations to gain a work visa

(Hercog, 2018), while in Egypt-Lebanon, the individual and corporations needs to go various bureaucratic procedures to get the needed approvals to apply for the work visa according to the labor law of these respective countries.

The difference between EU member states and Egypt and Lebanon can be attributed to various factors. One key factor is the limited demand for individuals with high levels of education in these latter countries, leading to high rates of unemployment and underemployment among graduates with tertiary education. This lack of demand for highly-educated individuals has significant implications for the labor market in Egypt and Lebanon. In particular, it results in a shortage of skilled professionals in certain occupations, such as medical doctors. This shortage in labor supply has a direct impact on the ability to meet the population's demand for healthcare services. To address this issue, it is essential to find ways to facilitate the entry of non-national students who have studied in these countries into the labor market. By ensuring that these students have access to employment opportunities, the shortage of skilled professionals can be alleviated, allowing for a more balanced supply and demand of labor in these critical sectors. Thus, understanding the underlying reasons for the difference in labor market dynamics between EU member states and Egypt/Lebanon is crucial for developing effective strategies to address these challenges.

Labor policies in countries of education and third countries matters to students as labor policies dictate the ability of students to integrate into the labor market which in hand affects their career projections as well fulfilling their aspiration and long-term life plans. As such, labor/economic integration is a vital factor that determines the trajectory of the student after their studies abroad as employment is directly related to the student's aspiration and capability. Due to

the fact that employment is viewed as a result of the education journey and manifestation of the student's aspiration and capabilities.

The labor policies in Egypt-Lebanon differ from the regulations in EU. For instance, students in EU have the right to work and mobility within the EU area, as well as the chance to integrate into the host community leading to better quality of life and employment chances, depending on the EU member state protocols and regulations. While labor policies in Egypt-Lebanon does not allow students to work, requires extensive complex procedures to gain formal access to the labor market, which leads to a sense of instability and volatility especially due to the fragile economic situation witnessed by the students in these countries of education.

Furthermore, Czaika (2016) supports the argument that immigration policies play a role in attracting and settling highly skilled migrants and students by stating that destination countries' policies tend to "mutually select" migrants with employment prospects, in addition to policies that allow international students to stay beyond graduation are a compelling way to bring in high-skilled immigrants at comparatively minimal social and labor market integration costs, as well as post-entry packages such as permanent residence, family reunification, tax reductions, and financial supports to attract further students and highly skilled to stay and choose a country of settlement.

As a result, the level of education and labor market capacity in the origin countries affecting the student's ability to develop and fulfill their aspiration; immigration policies in host countries decreasing the costs of migration play a significant role in students and highly skilled migration which further enhances the chances that these migrants will stay abroad due to the attractive opportunities and policies in their host communities and other 3<sup>rd</sup> countries. Especially, that some nationalities need to follow more complicated entry visa processes to go to a third country, or there

is a lack of embassies in the student countries of origin, which is a risk that the student avoids by residing in the country of education to plan for the next step, or utilizes their ability to land an opportunity abroad to bypass the issue of embassies and nationality regarding obtaining visas and entry permits.

### *2.9 Conceptual framework*

The key concepts I will be using to analyze the migration decision of students are the concept of Networks and their role in migration, Capabilities and aspirations inspired by Sen's Capability Approach, and the role of information in pursuing a migratory decision.

The Capability approach is a theoretical framework that takes into account multiple factors that influence an individual's ability to achieve their desired goals. These factors include means of achievement, social context, environmental conditions, social institutions and relations, personal skills, intelligence, and aptitude for education. By considering these factors, the Capability approach recognizes that an individual's capabilities are shaped by a complex interplay of internal and external factors.

Wai Lo (2019) draws a connection between the Capability approach and the concept of international student migration. According to Lo, the objective of development is human flourishing, and the Capability approach recognizes that education plays a critical role in expanding an individual's capabilities and creating opportunities for them to exercise their freedom to achieve. This is particularly relevant to international students, who face unique challenges and opportunities in their pursuit of education.

Massey (1993) introduces the concept of migrant networks, which refers to the interconnections among groups of individuals who are bound together by their ties to their places of origin and destination, familial connections, friendships, shared places of origin, and other associations. Arango (2000) affirms this idea by asserting that networks offer diverse forms of assistance to both migrants and non-migrants, serving as a crucial explanatory factor for migration and exerting a multiplying effect on the occurrence of migration, thereby perpetuating the phenomenon as networks accumulate. These networks serve as a form of social capital that individuals can use to achieve various goals, including gaining employment. Massey argues that migrant networks increase the potential for international migration by lowering the costs and risks of mobility and increasing the net return of migration.

Furthermore, Bhandari (2011) provides an example of how skilled migration often follows a non-linear migration pattern between various countries. International students and highly skilled individuals maintain connections back home through networks, which further develop into transnational networks that influence their future migration mobility and work opportunities by exchanging information and best practices. This highlights the critical role that networks play in shaping individual decision-making processes.

Social networks provide a venue for the students to change their aspirations which on the other hand allows them to adapt and improve their capabilities. Especially that being four years, on average, in country of education, for educational purposes, puts the student in a situation where they are required to adapt, improve, and thrive. Over these four years, students accumulate knowledge and skills through their educational experience, the social networks developed, and the overall experience of being abroad. The students' experience in their country of education develops



their capabilities, aspirations, as well as their skills, giving them a new perspective on life and what they are able to achieve, which influences their decision making after graduation.

In summary, the Capability approach, migrant networks, and international student migration are interconnected concepts that highlight the complex interplay of factors that shape an individual's capabilities and opportunities affecting the students after graduation decision of migration. By considering these factors, we can recognize the important role that networks and aspirations play in shaping their decision-making processes as well as the various factors in play.

This conceptual framework provides an explanation of the cognitive process that international scholarship students go through when making decisions about their future after graduation. Over the course of their four-year stay in the educational host country, students enhance their abilities through social networks, cultural adaptations (soft skills), and higher quality education. Such factors could have an impact on their aspirations and goals for their educational journey. Furthermore, students collect information and observe the experiences of senior international scholarship students, which displays the functioning migration approaches that may influence their migratory trajectory. As a result, the post-graduation decision of students falls into three categories: returning home, residing in the country of education, or relocating to a third country.

In the decision to return home, students rely on their obligations to family or other social networks and understand that there may be no better options available to fulfill their aspirations and utilize their capabilities for their benefit and that of their community. Two intermediary factors that may play a role in this decision include having a remote job, which allows the student to access jobs that may not otherwise be available in their home country and country of education employment climate and viewing returning home as a temporary solution while planning the next

steps, such as going to a third country to pursue higher education or job opportunities. This happens while taking into consideration the student's perception of the country's stability and ability to improve in the context of the country.

When choosing to reside in the country of education, students base their decision on their ability to work and bypass visa and labor policies due to their nationality. They may choose this option as they are familiar with the systems and structures of the country of education and can navigate them with ease. Additionally, students may perceive residing as advantageous because of the greater job options and mobility compared to their home country. It should be noted that the two intermediary factors, "remote jobs" and "temporary solution," are also relevant in this decision. This happens while taking into consideration the student's perception of the country's stability and ability to improve in the context of the country.

Finally, when deciding to move to a third country, students often do so because of favorable naturalization and labor laws, higher education opportunities, and better employment prospects due to demand to their highly skilled labor potential. The existence of older cohorts in the regions of the third countries may play a role in pursuing this option, as there is a success story available there and a support system in place.

These three decisions are contingent on four factors: the student's aspirations and capabilities, information and experiences of social networks (especially older cohorts), demand for the student's skills to fulfill a labor opportunity and visa policies in the country of education and in third countries, as well as the general political and socioeconomic climate of the country of education. Look into figure 1 to see the relationship between the various factors and concepts that play a role in the student's migration decision after graduation.

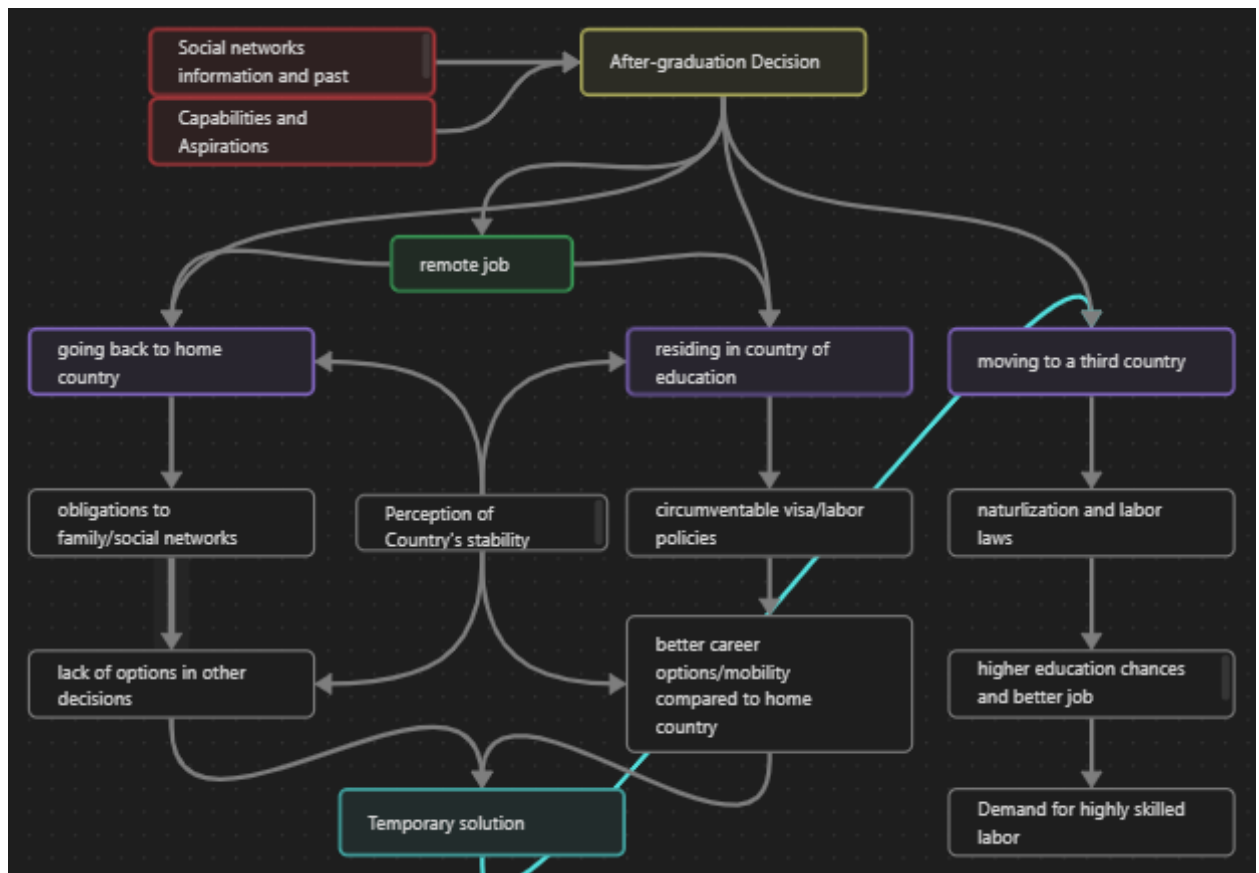


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

### 2.10 Significance of the study

Therefore, investigating the concept and reality of student migrants is somewhat challenging as boundaries are not clearly defined. However, the case study I chose for this study eliminates many obstacles, as will be explained. Nonetheless, my research will adopt King and Raghuram's (2013) recommendations regarding future research on the topic of international student migration, which recommended that future research should take advantage of ethnographic approaches to follow the journey of the students from their home country to higher education, to what is after university, while using history and creative literature to comprehend the concept of

mobility and knowledge better. As such, my research will build on these keynotes as the main pillars of the methodology.

My research aims to investigate the migrant higher-studies (BS, MA, MS) students from the MENA region, their motivations, and outcomes by exploring how their initial migration experience influenced their migration process. Moreover, this research aims to examine their motivations for pursuing further studies in a new location, moving for better opportunities, as well as for returning to their communities of origin, if they do, or settling in their current host community. As such, this research will be a case study of the MEPI TL and TLG community, as I can access this group. This case study will enable me to conduct a qualitative study on this group due to my established connections with the potential participants.

Moreover, this research aims to understand how migrant students view themselves in the various migratory experiences they have lived through, helping to better conceptualize “migrant students” through the participatory discussion. Additionally, this method will allow me to propose further evidence to the literature theorizing international migrant students and their mobility. As such, by understanding the rationale of migrating students through qualitative research, I hope this will provide the academic literature with a new scope to understand the relationship between international mobility and knowledge. This will encompass middle and lower income groups individuals who managed to travel due to academic achievement (human capital) rather than financial capital, as the group in question is sponsored through grants. As a result, migrating students move initially, hoping to improve human capital through improved education and yield further development during and after migration.

Furthermore, this research will cover multiple gaps in the academic literature regarding the matter. First, there is a lack of research regarding the international migration of students from the

MENA region due to insufficient data and a general lack of focus on migration from and within the MENA region. Case studies focus on specific countries as countries of destination or origin (Liu-Farrer, 2011; Madge et al., 2014).

There is also a comparative paucity of research about sponsored international student migration from the MENA region that falls outside the observations of elite “class re/production” and “class consumption” that Liu-Farrer (2011) mentions, which is why I am taking the TL program alumna as a case study to bridge the gap for further research. As such, this research will investigate the intentions, motivations, migration experiences, and what happened after their first migration process to better understand the complex nature of migration, efficiently conceptualize, and contextualize the notion of “international student migration” while aiming to cover a broader range of shortcomings in the geographical and theoretical academic literature regarding the topic of students as migrants.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

To understand the migratory decisions of scholarships-awarded students in the MENA region, the chosen research methodology is a qualitative approach, centering on the case-study of TL scholarship scheme. This research seeks to investigate the complex interplay of factors shaping the experiences of international students, focusing on TL alumna pool. Through eleven in-depth interviews and participation observation, the author being part of the group in question, this study aims to present the nuances of these students' primary migration experiences for higher education and the subsequent factors influencing their secondary migratory decisions.

### *3.1 Sample Selection and Characteristics:*

The sample participants were purposefully selected from TL scholarship recipients in Lebanon, specifically those awarded after 2014. The aim was to capture a diverse representation of experiences, and the study strived for a minimum 50% gender balance. The age range of the interviewed participants was between 20 and 29 years old. Participants were from various countries of origin within the TL program's targeted countries, such as Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Libya, and Tunisia. Additionally, the participants were undergraduate recipients of the Tomorrow's Leaders scholarship in Lebanon.

This group of individuals has been identified due to the author's familiarity with this group, as I had access to this group which I am a part of. The group heterogeneity served to encompass the various issues and experiences of these individuals as they come from different MENA region countries. Furthermore, the interviewees were either engaged in the labor market or Graduate students, with the majority being graduate students.

Conducting the interviews virtually allowed for the inclusion of dispersed participants across different locations. Nevertheless, logistical challenges, including time constraints and

communication issues, led to a female participation rate of 27%, reflecting the inherent complexities of coordinating interviews virtually.

The participants were TL undergraduate scholarship recipients, primarily attending institutions such as the Lebanese American University and the American University in Beirut. 11 participants were interviewed. Graduation rates ranged from 2018 to 2023, with a median graduation year of 2021. It's worth noting that while around 20 alumna expressed interest in participating, several were unable to do so due to personal reasons and logistical constraints.

*Table of Participants:*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Country of origin</b>	<b>Country of education</b>	<b>Country of Current location</b>	<b>Date of Interview</b>	<b>Education with TL scholarship</b>
<b>F</b>	Conflict Affected	Lebanon	3 <sup>rd</sup> Country	17/7/2023	Undergraduate
<b>Z</b>	Conflict Affected	Lebanon	3 <sup>rd</sup> Country	19/7/2023	Undergraduate
<b>V</b>	Other	Lebanon	Origin Country	19/7/2023	Undergraduate
<b>O</b>	Other	Lebanon	3 <sup>rd</sup> Country	17/9/2023	Undergraduate
<b>A</b>	Other	Lebanon	3 <sup>rd</sup> Country	20/7/2023	Undergraduate
<b>M</b>	Conflict Affected	Lebanon	Origin Country	21/7/2023	Undergraduate

<b>T</b>	Conflict Affected	Lebanon	3 <sup>rd</sup> Country	22/7/2023	Undergraduate
<b>X</b>	Other	Lebanon	Origin Country	27/7/2023	Undergraduate
<b>E</b>	Conflict Affected	Lebanon	3 <sup>rd</sup> Country	30/7/2023	Undergraduate
<b>B</b>	Conflict Affected	Lebanon	3 <sup>rd</sup> Country	14/8/2023	Undergraduate
<b>U</b>	Conflict Affected	Lebanon	Origin Country	13/8/2023	Undergraduate

### *3.2 Interview Structure and Process:*

The semi-structured interviews, lasting approximately 45 minutes each, followed an open-ended format with nine questions. Participants were informed at the outset about the interview structure and its purpose. The interviews commenced with participants recounting their study abroad experiences, allowing them to share personal narratives before delving into more specific inquiries.

The questions evolved to cover a spectrum of themes, aiming to uncover the multifaceted factors influencing participants' decision-making processes.<sup>3</sup> The themes included the initial motivations for studying abroad, challenges encountered, variance in plans and aspirations,

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<sup>3</sup> Please see Annex for interview guide.



education, perceptions on country of education and country of origin, the role of social networks in decision-making, and the significance of their scholarship in shaping their experiences.

### *3.3 Ethical Considerations:*

Respecting ethical standards, oral consent was obtained from participants before the interviews commenced. This was in alignment with the procedures and guidelines set by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, emphasizing the importance of ethical conduct in the research process. Furthermore, to maintain confidentiality, the author gave each respondent a random letter that does not correspond with the respondent's name to refer to a specific interview.

### *3.4 Coding and Analysis.*

For confidentiality and anonymity purposes, interviewees were coded in alphabet letters. The collected data included personal narratives and experiences. which will undergo thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was conducted through identifying the emergent themes to draw insights. These insights will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the secondary migratory decisions of TL scholarship recipients to help shedding light on the intricate interplay of factors in their academic and migratory journeys.

### *3.5 Limitations and Challenges:*

Certain limitations faced the author, which is of essence to mention.

The first limitation that faced the author is the difficulty in contacting TL alumna that studied in Egypt in the American University of Cairo. This limitation has caused the sample group to be mainly consisted of TL Alumna who studied in Lebanon. Moreover, as some similarities can be drawn between the TL Alumna in Lebanon context and their counterparts in Egypt, the in-depth

insights of the TL Alumna in Egypt could have provided information enforcing or contradicting angles to the responses provided by their counterparts who studied in Lebanon.

Another limitation that faced the author is an ethical dilemma of maintaining the respondent's identity to be confidential to the readers. As the respondents were all part of the TL community in Lebanon, mentioning the country of origin of the respondent could infringe on the confidentially ethical clause of my research. Since the thesis will be available on AUC website, audience from TL Lebanon alumna community could identify a respondent based on any information provided. For these reasons and as possible, the author has opted to ensure the anonymity of each respondent by not mentioning the participant's country of origin.

## Chapter 4: Migration Matrix: Policies and Conditions in countries of Education and Origin Impacting Student Trajectories.

### *4.1 Introduction*

To be able to understand the decisions taken after graduation by the students abroad on a scholarship basis, it is very important to look into the conditions of the countries of education to showcase the information at hand for the students at the time of their decision. There are multiple factors in play. While some are structural such as policy frameworks, others are subjective based on the different experiences among students. This chapter first tackles the structural factors such as policies concerned with migration and labor in countries of education. Second, it explores the conditions of countries and labor policies of origin which play a role in their migratory decision. Finally, the chapter will investigate the impact of such structural factors in influencing the students' options as well the student's perception on the overall situation in their country of education (C.E). Such factors also include the labor market demand in the students' country of origin (C.O) supporting further the students' choice of migratory trajectory.

### *4.2 Policies in Countries of Education*

Policies in Countries of Education concerned with entry and visa access played a role in the students' access and migratory decisions. This section provides an overview of the key policies and procedures related to the students' movement and entry to C.E by looking into pre-arrival visa procedures and the key policies concerned.

#### *4.2.1 Pre-arrival Visa Application Procedures*

As mentioned earlier in chapter one, the countries of education in question for this thesis are Egypt and Lebanon. The students in these countries enter their respective countries of education on pre-approved visas, meaning that the students apply for the visa at their home country. In the case of Egypt, it is the students' responsibility to apply prior to their arrival. While in the case of Lebanon, the academic institutions apply on the students' behalf and send the visa documents to the students to grant their entry to the country. Furthermore, the students apply for a student residence when they are in their respective countries for the duration of their academic endeavors. This leaves the student on their own the moment they graduate faced with a legal concern. Since they are on scholarships for their academic journey, the scholarships cover the costs of their visa and residency. This means that the students could be considered by state authorities in C.E as irregular migrants after graduation, which in hands puts the students through a vulnerability phase. This creates pressure on the students to try to secure residency after graduation. Residency expiration poses a situation of limbo that the students have to try to avoid. Additionally, this state of limbo puts the students in a situation where a decision must be made around graduation time of their future plans.

#### 4.2.2 Overview of the legal framework in countries of education

Graduating students are faced with multiple options when they start looking into their option available after graduation. One of the options that students may consider is residing in their country of education. However, throughout their educational experience and stay in the country of education, they reside using a "Student Residency Permit."<sup>4</sup> This means that they no longer qualify

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<sup>4</sup> Based on the author's experience as Tomorrow's Leader scholarship student in Lebanon and Egypt.

for this permit as they are graduating from their educational commitments. This leads us to the question, how can the students stay in the country of education if they wish so, and under what residence and visa policies?

The obvious answer to this question is to extend their residence or apply for a new visa. To renew the student residency in the countries of education, students need to submit an enrollment letter, that is impossible to get after graduation, to renew their visa. Students may resort to applying for a tourist visa.

Lebanon has multiple procedures of Visa for different regions. For instance, The Lebanese visa renewal policies sometimes require some nationalities to leave the country to be eligible for this visa, for nationals of the gulf countries.<sup>5</sup> Students are also required to show proof of having adequate funds exceeding 2000\$, such as Yemeni nationals.<sup>6</sup> This is in addition to regulations concerned with each nationality based on bilateral agreements between C.E and C.O. For nationals of the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC), they obtain a tourist visa from the airport of any entry port valid for 6 months.<sup>7</sup> There is also *Conditional Visa on Arrival*, for which the student has to make a reservation and show a proof of accommodation, and a non-refundable round-trip ticket. The student also needs to have at least 2000\$ in cash in his/her possession. This applies to the nationals of Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria.<sup>8</sup> The rest of the countries that do not fall under these multiple categorizations, need to apply for a pre-approved visa from the Lebanese consulate or embassy in their respective countries.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Based on the author's experience as Tomorrow's Leader scholarship student in Lebanon and Egypt; and Interview with Student V, 19/7/2023

<sup>6</sup> Based on the author's experience with the Lebanese visa renewal procedures.

<sup>7</sup> Student O, 17/9/2023

<sup>8</sup> According to the Lebanese General Security website ([www.general-security.gov.lb](http://www.general-security.gov.lb))

<sup>9</sup> According to the Lebanese General Security website ([www.general-security.gov.lb](http://www.general-security.gov.lb))

Egypt similarly follows the visa and entry categorization system. The nationals of the GCC are exempted from the visa where they do not need a visa to enter the country.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, some nationals of certain countries may enter Egypt without a visa for a period as long as the individuals are within a certain age group and characteristics. For instance, students of Palestinian nationalities may be qualified for indefinite stay if they are females<sup>11</sup>, Yemenis are granted tourist visa for 3 months to 6 months if they are below the age of 16 or above the age of 50 or came with a medical certificate stating the individual need for medical care.<sup>12</sup> While the duration and the criteria may vary, the fact is that some nationalities may enter the country in alternative means beside getting a pre-approved visa.

For graduating students, who may decide to reside in the country for a period, changing from a student residency to a tourist visa may be a difficult endeavor or rather a risky one as they need to meet certain criteria as well as the uncertainty of their stay duration after graduation. Additionally, the visa policies may require them to leave the country and return if they want to be staying regularly within the country of education as a tourist. As such, the transformation from student status to a tourist status is rather ambiguous and filled with uncertainty and connected with financial constraints on students.

Another option is getting a work permit to reside within the country of education. However, attaining a work permit follows labor market policies of the country of education that the students need to fulfill to transition from student into the labor force.

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<sup>10</sup> Student V, 19/7/2023

<sup>11</sup> Student U, 13/8/2023

<sup>12</sup> Based on the author's experience with the Egyptian entry visa protocols as a Yemeni national.

Labor policies govern labor movement in the most advantageous manner for the domestic market. These policies are implemented with the aim of safeguarding the labor market, thereby preventing any detrimental effects on the well-being of the state's inhabitants. This is achieved by granting entry to individuals who possess the capacity to yield a favorable influence on the labor market and the economy, while also displaying a propensity for seamless integration within the nation. This instance can be seen in the labor policies in Egypt (Egyptian labor Code No. 13, 2003), Lebanon (Lebanese Labor Code), where one of the requirements to be granted access to the labor market is demonstrating the acquisition of highly needed skills or higher qualifications.

The Lebanese and Egyptian Labor Code indicates that a company/enterprise cannot have approximately more than 10% non-nationals working in the institutions labor force (Lebanese Code of Labor, 1964 ; Egyptian labor law, 2003).<sup>13</sup> This means that the students need to acquire a regular job to be eligible for the work permit in the country of education as this means that the student can be sponsored by the employer which is also a requirement to attain the work permit and in hand leads to having residence as a worker in the country of education. The complexity and the length of the procedures to gain a work visa plays a major role in the student's ability to choose which labor market to take part of. Furthermore, the same can be said regarding the ease of access to these procedures as the bureaucratic procedures in both contexts vary as in Egypt or Lebanon, the individual and corporations needs to go various bureaucratic procedures to get the needed approvals to apply for the work visa according to the labor law of these respective countries.

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<sup>13</sup> According to the Lebanese Labor code of 23 Septemeber 1964 amended (<https://www.ilo.org/dyn/travail/docs/710/Labour%20Code%20of%2023%20September%201946%20as%20amende%20Publication%202010.pdf>) , Lebanese Decree No. 17561 of 1964 regulating the work of foreigners (<https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4c3c5fc57d.pdf>), and the Egyptian Labor Code number 12 of 2003 ([https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/r/natlex/fe/details?p3\\_isn=64693&cs=1Ttd9dix9cLRNs4Fi18z4DKTLjLByGWk4FPykBh3z8eHVWcYH01RhoRdK57vV72O2R2PCwX-Bz1SXZAd5VHJ0hQ](https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/r/natlex/fe/details?p3_isn=64693&cs=1Ttd9dix9cLRNs4Fi18z4DKTLjLByGWk4FPykBh3z8eHVWcYH01RhoRdK57vV72O2R2PCwX-Bz1SXZAd5VHJ0hQ))

Labor policies in countries of education or in other countries of consideration to the student matter to students as labor policies dictate the ability of students to integrate into the labor market which in hand affects their career projections as well fulfilling their aspiration and long-term life plans. As such, labor/economic integration is a vital factor that determines the trajectory of the student after their studies abroad as employment is directly related to the student's aspiration and capability. Employment is viewed as the result of the education journey and manifestation of the student's aspiration and capabilities. While labor policies in Egypt and Lebanon do not allow students to work, it additionally requires extensive complex procedures to gain formal access to the labor market, which leads to a sense of instability and volatility especially due to the fragile economic situation witnessed by the students in these countries of education.

Czaika (2016) supports the argument that immigration policies play a role in attracting and settling highly skilled migrants and students by stating that destination countries' policies tend to "mutually select" migrants with employment prospects. This is in addition to policies that allow international students to stay beyond graduation acting as a compelling way to bring in high-skilled immigrants at comparatively minimal social and labor market integration costs. Such policies also include post-entry packages such as permanent residence, family reunification, tax reductions, and financial supports to attract further students and highly skilled to stay and choose a country of settlement.

The aspect of immigration, entry, and residence policies is of importance as it dedicates an aspect of the graduating students lives. Policies dictate whether students are allowed to work regularly, safety and sustainability to stay within the country. They also govern the procedures to maintain the regular residence status. This is of importance as the students' origin countries situations effect the choices taken after graduation, The ability to reside within the country of



education without any further troubles or extra procedures may entice the students to stay. Additionally, the students investigate the opportunities and prospects of the labor market in their country of origin, as well as the overall climate within the country.

#### *4.3 Country of Origin (C.O):*

The countries of origin of the graduating students can be divided into two categories, countries of origin with conflict situation, and countries of origin with relative stability. The two categories of countries have faced a political upheaval around 2010 known as the Arab Spring. This region-wide upheaval took place for the systematic flaws in the political and socio-economic systems in the countries. This can be seen in the inefficient labor markets where the countries under the lens have one of the highest youth employment rates in the world, as well as the insufficient educational institutions that cannot meet the demand of the upcoming generations with quality education to compete in a global level. This is without mentioning the existence of migrant networks abroad and culture of emigration to pursue better opportunities and quality of life abroad.

##### *4.3.1: Conflict-affected Countries of Origin: (Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine)*

The circumstances of these countries remained unchanged since 2015 and onwards, as they were immersed in civil warfare, revolutions and occupations as well as economic and societal obstacles because of the ongoing conflict, whether armed or not. While some individuals may contend that there has been a slight amelioration in the situation since 2015, these advancements are negligible when juxtaposed with the magnitude of the conflict and its repercussions. The sole benefit of remaining in these countries lies in the presence of safety nets that could propel them

towards a better and more stable existence, particularly considering that the students lack any alternative opportunities apart from returning home. Furthermore, the overall situation in origin countries, as mentioned earlier, in hand with the economic and political instability, could go against the graduating student personal values, especially that the emerging culture in origin countries, due to long duration of conflict, conflicts with the personal values and subjective experience of the student in the country of education creating a sense of dissonance that leads to various outcome as the respondents indicated.

An important distinction to be made is between Lebanese student nationals and other country conflicted student nationals, is that for the Lebanese students their country of education and country of origin is Lebanon. This distinction between the Lebanese students and their counterparts is essential as the Lebanese student do not have the same labor market challenges that their colleagues from the different countries of origin face concerning entering the labor market. Thus, the differences in experience between the Lebanese students and their colleagues in the context of this research provides a new perspective and pathway within this research and future research.

Furthermore, the students' responses indicated mentioned multiple aspects that they took into consideration when evaluating where they wanted to go after graduation. We can attribute the aforementioned factors to the conceptual framework proposed earlier. Firstly, the students described the situation in their country of origin affecting their choice to steer away from going back. This might be linked to displacement in the students' home countries as a result of the violence, which takes many forms in different countries of origin. As a result, the students' preferred desire to not return to their countries of origin underscores the fact that students from

conflict-affected backgrounds are more migration oriented, as it is obvious throughout their responses in this study.

Additionally, the students explained having new goals, such as “exploring”, having “lack of growth opportunities” and the perception on the dominated culture in the country of education, as well as the existence of visa protocols imposed on certain nationalities that makes leaving country of origin, after returning to the country of origin after graduation, a somewhat an impossible task, or easier to move to a third country from the country of education. These mentioned factors are some of the multiple factors that students keep in mind when determining their next step after graduation, however, these factors are factors that makes the student shun away the option of returning home.

#### 4.3.1.1 Political, Social and Economic Challenges in C.O:

The students interviewed from these countries described their countries of origin and the situation there to further showcase the factors that make them consider or not going back home and the consequences of their decision. The students highlighted that while their hometowns might not be under direct conflict fire, the overall situation of the community and the city is under duress of the war. Multiple students have stated that the culture in their cities has changed from when they initially left to go abroad to an extent that the contemporary value of the city contradicts with the values of the student acquired during their education experience. Additionally, the students affirm the fact that with their acquired degree, they could go back home and land a job opportunity with above average employment and benefits. However, they see that these opportunities back home have a glass ceiling that will limit their growth and potential.

According to Student F from a country of origin witnessing conflict:<sup>14</sup>

*I can go back and find a good job due to my credentials if money was my goal. But I want to explore and see new things, especially that the culture in my country currently makes it hard for me to return and enjoy my life there.*

Moreover, Student Z concurred by reflecting as follows:<sup>15</sup>

*The ceiling of growth in my country is very low (the situation is horrendous) beside the overall situation in my home city and change in culture, socioeconomic situation is in shambles, lack of employment opportunities and growth in the last 10 years and the lack of studies opportunities there. nothing of value is there. once you leave, you cannot go back, and if you do, you will feel boxed and be like as you were before you travel and feel limited back home.*

Student F and Student Z stated a sentiment that shows the challenges they perceive exists in their country of origin that counteracts against their aspirations and capabilities, this sentiment is the sentiment of “limitation” seen in the words of “*makes it hard for me to return and enjoy my life there.*” And “*, you will feel boxed... feel limited back home*”. This sentiment of limitation in the country of origin is deterrent to move back to the country of origin as Wai Lo (2019) views the migration of international student as the movement of individuals who pursues development and flourishing of their capabilities and aspirations. As the capabilities approach takes into consideration the external societal factors that effects the student’s ability and means to achieve their aspirations, the students take into account the external societal factors in their country of origins to evaluate the migratory path that holds the most significant chance of development and aspirations actualizations for the students.

#### 4.3.1.2 Labor Market Challenges:

Moreover, they circumvent the limitations of the labor market in their countries of origin by landing remote jobs that provides sufficient financial income to support their families as well

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with student F from a conflict-affected country of origin, 17/7/2023

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Student Z from conflict-affected country of origin, 19/7/2023

as deal with economic and income shocks that the country could face due to the ongoing conflict. Nonetheless, the students indicated that although they were partially satisfied with their stay in their country of origins, they still believe that their stay in their country of origin is “temporary” as they would like to pursue their aspirations for higher education and better employment opportunities in a third country. This according to the students, will help them further grow their capital and potential as well as improve their quality of life and their families.

According to student M<sup>16</sup>,

*I was forced to come back to my home country after I could not find a third option to go ... the job market in my country of origin is not what I wanted, but as I found a remote job, I did not need to move. as my home country is my home with the community there, for now.*

There are some factors that make the student follow the path of returning to their country of origin. The first factor is the student’s prospects, the student was not successful to pursue an opportunity in a 3<sup>rd</sup> country or the country of education. This is called in the conceptual framework as the factor of “lack of option in other decisions”. In this position, the student starts rationalizing the option of returning to home country as a positive thing as there is “no prerequisite” to return home. Moreover, the path of returning home has other benefits as it is mainly seen as a “temporary” path or a “detour” that allows the student to spend time with their family and prepare for the next step of “moving to a 3<sup>rd</sup> country”. It is viewed this way because, to some extent, the decision of taking this path was out of their hands, and the students have the ability to regroup and plan how to pursue their “main path and aspirations”.

#### 4.3.1.3 Legal Factors:

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with student M from conflict-affected country of origin, 21/7/2023

The students stated that they are afraid to be stuck inside their home country as the embassies have closed in their countries of origin and need to go to a second country, like Egypt or Lebanon, to apply for visa for their third countries.

As student T<sup>17</sup> explained:

*We need Visa almost anywhere. Senior Year, I was applying to places for visa. And still did not want to go back home and looked into Egypt but he was rejected, turkey embassy in Lebanon did not let me apply due to "corrupt system" so I had to go back to my origin country due to visa challenges and regulation imposed on my nationality. and later on, I went to Lebanon to apply for the Schengen Visa for the future endeavors.*

The challenge of not having an embassy for countries of education in their home country increases the number of hurdles they need to deal with to leave their country, mainly financial and mental. Staying in a second country to apply for visa with the uncertainty of getting the visa to move further is mentally and financially exhausting. As such, the situation in the country of origin makes it harder for students to pursue their aspirations and enjoy good quality of life which acts as a motivation for students to move abroad to enjoy better living conditions and opportunities.

The only few reasons that students go back to their countries of origin after graduation was that according to one student “*there is no (legal) prerequisite to go back home compared to going to other countries*” as student U stated<sup>18</sup>.. the fact is that if a student could not find a path to fulfill their aspiration abroad from their home country, they are forced to take the path of returning back home, as “there is no prerequisite” to return, to utilize the resources there to plan a route out again that fulfills their aspirations. In other words, there was no other place but home for now according to the students, even if it is temporary, to find where their next home was.

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Student T from conflict-affected country of origin. 22/7/2023

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Student U from conflict-affected country of origin, 13/8/2023

#### 4.3.1.4 Social Networks and Family Commitments in C.O:

Additionally, family networks acts as an obligation by some students as they are expected to support their families and live in the same country where they reside. Some of the students indicated that because they did not manage to land an opportunity outside of their country of origin, they had to take the only option left which was going back home. As they took this option, they rationalized it as a good option as it provides them the opportunity to connect with their families and spend time that they missed when they were abroad. Student U<sup>19</sup> testifies to this point by saying that *“Being abroad made me miss spending time with my family, I did not want to lose any more important phases of my family away from them, which made me feel content about going back.”*

The students maintain their connections with their families back home throughout their stay abroad. As the students develop through their experiences abroad, the students’ experience in their country of education develops their capabilities, aspirations, as well as their skills, giving them a new perspective on life and what they are able to achieve, which influences their decision making after graduation. According to Massey (1993), a student’s family is part of the student’s social networks which helps in the development of the student’s social capital and increasing the net outcome of migration. In this manner, returning back home and reconnecting with the family, is one of the ways that students can rationalize their migratory path after graduation by giving “family-time” enough emphasis, especially that the family is something of constant significance to the students, through accepting the circumstances of “no other path/options than home”.

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Student U from conflict-affected country of origin, 13/8/2023

#### 4.3.2: Other Countries of Origin: (Tunisia, Bahrain)

Although these countries do not find themselves in a state of war and are generally perceived as more stable in comparison to their counterparts, they encounter a plethora of challenges encompassing unemployment, political turbulence, socioeconomic instability, and various other complex issues. Consequently, these countries are often perceived as a temporary solution, serving as a steppingstone until a more sustainable environment presents itself for individuals to relocate to and gain valuable experiences.

##### 4.3.2.1 Social Factors in C.O:

According to Student V<sup>20</sup>

I am currently in my country of origin to reduce living expenses to save up and plan for the next move. This is because I had to change my grouping grounds from Lebanon to my home country due to COVID-19 and the ongoing crises in Lebanon which came at the cost of losing my support system.

The sole advantage of returning to these countries lies in the presence of safety nets (in the form of direct family members) that can potentially propel individuals towards enhanced well-being and increased stability in the future. The students from these countries face similar challenges about their countries as their counterparts from the conflict-affected areas. While the students from the relatively stable countries have the option of safe and stable passage to their home countries compared to their colleagues from conflict-affected countries, both groups of students face the issues of social reintegration and the employment market difficulties, as well as subjective issues faced by the individuals and their environment and aspirations.

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with student V from other countries of Origin, 19/7/2023



The students' responses from these countries regarding their perceptions and experiences after graduation are similar to their counterparts from countries affected by conflict. Although the students from stable countries did not report the aspect of change in values of the communities, some of them still indicated that they felt/feel constrained and boxed in the social norms of the origin's community. This concern mainly came from female respondents as they indicated that they and their families were under criticism from the larger family and the family's social network for letting their daughters travel abroad alone. The societal expectations and scrutiny from extended family members in the home country, experienced by female international scholarship students, represent one aspect of the multifaceted influence of gender on how the study abroad experience impacts students. This is highlighted by the narratives of students A and V below. On the other hand, the male respondents indicated that sometimes they feel that their personal freedom was constrained as they are living with their parents in comparison to the lives they had in their country of education. While family is considered by all respondents as a support system, the larger family network is a source of negative support as the respondents did not fill the cultural norm box, which leads to the feeling of disconnection with the old social networks as well as pressure to "fall in line" with the cultural norms.

As Student A indicated: <sup>21</sup>

My family and I always hear criticism from our distant family about how they let me go and study abroad alone

Student V also stated: <sup>22</sup>

I am avoiding restarting my life in my "home". Four years in Lebanon have strained the relationships in my home country as I changed, and they stayed the same. In Bahrain, I would have to rebuild my social connections and support systems.

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with student A from other countries of origin, 20/7/2023

<sup>22</sup> Interview with student V from other countries of Origin, 19/7/2023

Furthermore, some students stated that they went back to their home country because of Covid-19 regulations and Lebanon's situation after 2019, which fueled their motivation to go back to their home country to be with their family. While some indicated that the choice was forced upon them because of the situation in the country of education, some indicated that they chose to go back home for family reasons. The common perception among the students who went back to their country is that they did not have any other option other than going back home or chose not to look for other options after graduation to reconnect with their family and gain experience to land better opportunities abroad. In other words, they all went back home to regroup and plan their next steps.

As reflected by Student X<sup>23</sup>,

I chose to go back and connect with my family as my views on life changed from being abroad. At the same time, I still plan to explore new ventures outside my home country. I went back home as I felt disconnected from my family when I used to go back home for vacation and COVID-19. Now after I graduated, I want to spend time with my family before I start moving again.

#### 4.3.2.2 Labor Market Restrictions resulting from COVID-19 outbreak:

Furthermore, the students reflected on how the labor market and economy of the country influenced their aspirations as they deem the labor market to be unstable especially with the volatile economy which affects their purchasing power and incites them to investigate different paths to migrate to secure better opportunities. Most students talked about how using their home country as a regroup opportunity to plan not what to do next, but rather plan where to go, as most students indicated that they are planning to pursue higher education in a third country, especially that they managed to get professional experience in country of origin.

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with student X from other countries of Origin, 27/7/2023

### According to Student O<sup>24</sup>

Besides being with my family as a top priority to return. I pursued a teaching opportunity back home because I wanted to confirm what I learned in my undergraduate studies... this experience showed me what I wanted to do and why... Because I managed to get some professional experience in my home country, I managed to plan and pursue my current opportunity higher education.

While the situation may differ for students from the other countries of origin compared to their counterparts from conflict-affected countries of origin. Their responses that mention their country of origin and factors can be attributed to the conceptual framework in a way to explain their decision making. The factors mentioned by some students from the other countries of origin tackle the factor of “lack of options in other countries” but from another perspective, they talk about the factor of “crisis” in the country of education. As the country of education got hit with a financial crisis and COVID-19, the students opted to go back to the country of origin rather than staying in an unstable country, mainly to save on living expenses, especially that the labor market in country of education was directly affected by the financial crisis, and as a way to regroup and plan for the next step to continue pursuing their “aspirations and path” outside their country of origin. However, returning home came at a cost, this cost was “Social networks”. The students’ social network played various roles in the students’ life’s back home. Some parts of the social network (extended family) added pressure on the students, while the immediate family, professors, friends in country of education provided support to the best of their abilities to help the students pursue their aspiration, while the students were in their country of origins. Nonetheless, returning to the country of origin resulted in losing “safety networks” that the students created during their stay in the country of education.

Secondly, some students have stated that they made the “conscious active” choice of returning home after graduation to see and spend time with their immediate family. This choice to

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with student O from other countries of origin, 19/7/2023

return home came as a result as a change of “aspirations and perception” prompted by the change of status in the country of education (structural factors), or as a personal choice affected with personal factors (capabilities and aspirations) around the graduation timing. The choice of returning home, according to the students, was influenced by COVID-19, Crisis in Lebanon, wanting to gain professional experience, and perception on the relationship between the individual and their family. Nevertheless, the moment the students see themselves as accomplishing the goal/s they returned back home for, the students start looking into new endeavors to pursue, these endeavors are mainly aspirations that they put on hold because of the situation variance in the country of education around their graduation time, which made the students highly prioritize going back home compared to going to a 3<sup>rd</sup> country.

#### *4.4 Perceptions on Countries of Education (C.E).*

The students’ perceptions on the Country of education play a role in the choices they take after their graduation. Almost all students favored living in the C.E as they kept reminiscing about their experience and referring to their experience “Good” or “Eye opening”. The students explained how their C.E allowed different factors and aspects of their lives to flourish. The perceptions of their experiences in the country of education relate to various aspects influencing personal/subjective experiences. In the eyes of the respondents, the country of education had such a fertile ground to cultivate useful social connections with their colleagues, professors, and nationals of the country of education. Additionally, the students showed that the country of education provided a great environment for personal, academic and professional growth, through providing the students with space for independent actions and thoughts. This helped the students by fostering various relationships that through experience and events with these relationships, the

students managed to develop their subjective perceptions on the city and group dynamics within the city, which in hand helped the students adopt to the new environment and explore their potential through the city activities.

#### *4.4.1 Psychological Impact*

However, the emotions related to the city and country of education changed after 2019. As the country of education (Lebanon) went through various conditions. To name a few, political upheaval, COVID-19 quarantine, collapse of the financial sector and economic situation, and the August explosion affecting multiple students' perceptions of the city. While the city maintained its position in the students' experiences, the city brought old traumas or even new ones to the surface in the minds of the students.

As Student X stated (written as the author's account of what the respondent said)<sup>25</sup>

The financial crises in Lebanon made the country volatile as well as removed the option of financial stability to stay within the country, in addition to the Beirut explosion that showed me how life is fragile and fleeting that I need to connect and spend as much time with my family.

The students from conflict-ridden countries have indicated that the situation in the country of education have brought "trauma flashbacks", seeing their country of education, which they initially appreciated and saw it to some extent as a "safe haven" plunge into a situation similar to how their countries fell into chaos. The volatility in the country of education has reminded the students that "stability" is what they seek as the volatility of the country of education created uncertainty for students.

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with student X from other countries of Origin, 27/7/2023

As stated by Student A stated <sup>26</sup> “Instability in Lebanon made me seek stability”. Student T also mentioned “around 2019, Lebanon situation deteriorated in a similar way to how my C.O collapsed. Lebanon was great until it became flashbacks of my C.O ”.<sup>27</sup>

#### 4.4.2 Labor Market Challenges

While the labor market was better equipped in the country of education compared to the students’ countries of origin, the ability to take part of the labor market after 2020 was significantly reduced which incited many of them to pursue remote jobs or find jobs in their country of origin with the help of their social networks.

As summarized by Student M<sup>28</sup>

The Situation in both countries of origin and education is not good and the type of companies operating reflects that. So, I did not want to invest in a country (in Lebanon) and a job if there is no rewards in money and stability, and that is why I looked for remote jobs.

It is worth noting how the students described their experience in their country of education in relation to their personal perception of who they are. To start with, the experience in the country of education had such a large impact on the acquisition of the professional skills for the participants. The acquisition of professional skills was due in part to the scholarship requirements. The scholarship asked each student to do multiple internships throughout their educational experience, minimum of one internship per year. This requirement made the students foster networks and be active in the community to be able to fulfill their professional component of the scholarship. One might think that by fostering professional development in the country of education, it leads to better employment opportunities in the country of education. However, the issue that even though it leads to better employment opportunities, the labor market policies in the

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with student A from conflict-affected country of origin, 20/7/2023

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Student T from conflict-affected country of origin, 22/7/2023

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Student M from conflict-affected country of origin, 21/7/2023

country of education has in place multiple hurdles that inhibits the student formal attainment of employment in the country of education, and let us not forget that this is without considering that the labor market in the country of origin may not even have a sector that corresponds with the students' professional experience accumulated as of yet. As a result, the structural factors in the country of education led the students to be excluded from the labor market in the country of education or work irregularly in best-case scenario, which makes residing in the country of education a “temporary” solution or the students may not consider it as a solution at all.

Student T explains one of the issues they faced in pursuing employment in the country of education:<sup>29</sup>

*Work Permit was an issue in Lebanon as I needed sponsorship to stay within Lebanon. For example, if I found a certain job with good money, the employer would not provide a sponsorship for the work permit. Which puts me in a position to be employed irregularly and reside within the country on a false permit.*

Additionally, student V shows how their professional experience, that was useful in the country of education, faces challenges to employ in their country of origin:<sup>30</sup>

*The initial plan was to part of the international development sector: Lebanon had multiple challenges especially in the job market as compared to no opportunities in Bahrain. The common challenge was that there is lack of labor access in the country of origin compared to knowing the market and the networks in Country of education, especially due to experience in volunteering and internships which helped me focus on what to specialize in. Although I worked in Lebanon for some time (Irregularly), around 2019 Lebanon stability started to falter and I had to go back home due to the crisis and COVID-19.*

#### 4.4.3 New Understandings of “Belonging”

The participants lived for four years in their country of education, away from their family and everything that is familiar to them. This helped them to create new social networks and experiences that made them feel at “home”. This experience of having a “secondary home” and later leaving it made them start questioning the ideas of “home” and “belonging” as of “where or

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Student T from conflict-affected country of origin, 22/7/2023

<sup>30</sup> Interview with student V from other countries of Origin, 19/7/2023

what is home?” which in hand led the student to be more mobile. This can be seen in the respondents’ statements of “not feeling at home when I am home”, “I want to continue my life outside of home”, or as student E explained “I have never stayed at one place more than 4 years and the idea of settling in terrifies me”.

These statements can be understood in various ways and for multiple reasons. The common perception of them is that the country of education allowed them to create a “personal home” different from their “original homes” that made them feel safer and be themselves without any constraints. This point is important as it shows how the students pursue opportunities and paths to find their “home”, especially after leaving it twice; leaving their home country is the first, and then leaving their country of education is the second. The students have indicated that their behaviors and character in the country of education is different from the one in Country of Origin, and so on. To elaborate, person A who left their C.O to go C.E developed persona 1, that is different from their identity 0 when they were in their C.O. Moreover, when they leave their C.E to either return or go to a third country, the student will develop a facade 2 to adhere to social norms. This variance in personages is a result of their experience in the country of education as well as their personal development in their sense of aspirations and capabilities, manifested in their ability to adapt. Additionally, this character creation is a method, as mentioned by the students, to find their social groups, to find their “home away from home”.

As stated by Student E explicitly: <sup>31</sup>

*What am I at home (how I behave)? I am so different to many people, which hinders my social life. People in Lebanon know a side of me, other people will not know. My family knows a side of me that no one else knows about. And here (talking about his 3<sup>rd</sup> country), people know me as a person that my precious circles do not know about. I have been here for 5 years, and I am scared, there is a sense of urgency. I am not used to being in one place for too long. I used to think that my life and connections are temporary.*

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Student E from conflict-affected country of origin, 30/7/2023



#### *4.4.4: Perception of country of education and the after-graduation decision*

The perception of the country of education and its effects on the students played a significant role in the after-graduation decision. How the country of education changed the perspectives of students and the aspects attached to it relates to the conceptual framework in more than one way. The first and foremost way is that the country of education improved the students' social networks as well as developed the students' capabilities and aspirations in various ways. The country of education created a new perspective for the students that students use in various matters. For examples, the environment of the country of education that fostered personal, academic, and professional growth that taught students to adapt and strive in any context and the supportive social networks created a set of standards and value the students hold to evaluate their paths and future decisions. Another aspect of the psychological impact of the country of education on the students, an understated aspect, is the notion of "belonging". The notion of belonging is like a ghost that haunts the students after graduation. The students lived in a new context for four years where they developed themselves and created a "home away from home". At some point, the country of education became their home, especially for students from conflict-affected origins who could not visit or go back to their countries due to various reasons, logistical and/or personal. As a result, after graduating, the students, no matter which path they took, found themselves in a new context, even if they returned home, manifesting feelings of nostalgia and difference from the context, leading to the question of "where do I belong?". Which in hand prompts students to pursue opportunities in 3<sup>rd</sup> countries, as the 3<sup>rd</sup> country path may result a situation where the student can develop "a 3<sup>rd</sup> home" in a similar way to how they did it when they were in their country of education, as viewed from the perspective of the students.

The experience in the country of education provided the students with various means (means to achieve), the most important of them was the emotional and soft skills that becomes a second nature for the students. The psychological effect of the experience pushed the students to seek stability and connection with family, as the students lived in somewhat stable environment in their country of education, until the character of “stability” was removed from the characters of the country of education, the students realized the importance of “stability” in their life after graduation and pursued the paths containing “stability”. Additionally, the labor market hold value to the students as “stability” cannot be achieved without a stable labor market that can offset the turbulent economic situation in the country of interest, especially that the students attained necessary professional experience and skills to participate in the labor market. As such, the students tend to pursue opportunities in their countries of origin or 3<sup>rd</sup> countries based on the prospect of “stability” as well as growth within the field and personally. In the end of the day, these are students who feed on growth and strive in adapting to the circumstances.

#### *4.5 Conclusion*

In conclusion, this comprehensive exploration has unraveled the multifaceted and interconnected dynamics governing the experiences of international students. By navigating the intricate web of education policies, home country realities, and individual perceptions, a profound understanding has been achieved regarding the transformative journey of students pursuing education in foreign lands.

The challenges posed by Lebanon's financial turmoil, compounded by the devastating Beirut explosion, have acted as catalysts for a paradigm shift in the aspirations and priorities of international students. This crisis-driven shift has led some students to venture beyond their homeland, a poignant manifestation of their acute awareness of the impact of external circumstances on their pursuit of stability and a secure future.

Navigating the intricate labyrinth of visa policies emerges as a pivotal challenge for these students. The transition from student residency to a work visa, entangled in ambiguity, becomes a

significant hurdle, compelling many to navigate a bureaucratic maze. This complexity in securing post-graduation prospects creates a landscape where students often find themselves in irregular employment situations, highlighting the formidable challenges they face.

Amidst these challenges, the host country emerges as a crucible for holistic growth. Beyond academic pursuits, it becomes a nurturing space where international students not only acquire knowledge but also forge meaningful social connections. These connections, cultivated in diverse academic environments, evolve into invaluable assets propelling students toward opportunities that transcend geographical boundaries.

The contemplative exploration of students returning to their home countries adds a nuanced layer to the narrative. Their strategic decision, seemingly contrary to the pursuit of global opportunities, is rationalized as a temporary respite and an opportunity to reconnect with familial roots. This complexity underscores the dynamic nature of international education, shaped by external factors, individual aspirations, and evolving socio-political landscapes.

Furthermore, the experiences gained in the countries of education and the communities formed therein, along with the prevailing situations in their countries of origin, play pivotal roles in determining students' post-graduation plans. The quest for a sense of "home" and "stability" propels them toward environments fostering personal and professional growth, where a strong sense of belonging is cultivated.

In essence, this exploration illuminates the intricate dance between external circumstances and individual choices, shaping the trajectories of international students. It underscores the imperative for adaptive policies and support structures that can navigate the challenges posed by externalities. Ultimately, international education emerges as a transformative force, fostering not only academic growth but also contributing to the development of global citizens interconnected by shared experiences and aspirations.

## Chapter 5: Personal Factors and Future plans

When investigating the factors affecting the migratory trajectory of graduating students on scholarships abroad, research findings have underscored that their personal experiences play the largest role in the migratory decision-making process. The subjective life experiences that students go through on a daily basis as well as the total four-year experience, influences the students in a great manner. As such, their education and scholarship play a role in improving their capabilities. This has played a role in changing their initial aspirations to new goals. Furthermore, their social networks play a great role in supporting the students throughout their experience abroad. As a result, the students' plans and aspirations change due to the living experience and available means of support, consequently affecting what they do beyond graduation.

### *5.1: Students Individual Experience*

The student's individual experience can be seen in two contexts, the education context manifested in the scholarship and degree and social context reflected in their networks. These two contexts are vital as they promoted the students' capabilities and aspirations as the students developed their personal skills and their access to information social network. The students have identified how the scholarship, and their social networks helped them develop their capabilities within their four years abroad. The most significant way that these factors helped them was by creating a safe space that prompts self-discovery. However, despite its benefits, there were some limitations to such safe spaces.

#### *5.1.1: Education and Scholarship*

The educational and scholarship experience played a significant role in the development of the students' capabilities which influenced the students' choice of migratory trajectories. While the

participants' responses varied based on their individual cases, certain elements were common between all of them. The students noted that the largest impact on their capabilities came from the indirect impact of scholarships, including the access to networks as well as the safe space to enhance their skills. The impact of the scholarships was reflected in the employment opportunities. As student X indicated that *"In a Job interview, being a scholarship student gives a certain advantage as it means being academically inclined and have good work ethics."*<sup>32</sup>

The scholarship program/office helped the student by providing support when needed as well as offered workshops linking them to opportunities that helped the students embark on self-exploration journey. Additionally, the scholarship helped the students escape certain constraints regarding their education attainment. For instance, students stated that if they were not accepted by the scholarship, they would have pursued "normal" educational paths in their home countries, such as Medicine and Engineering. Additionally, the educational system in the student's host universities enabled the students to enroll in new disciplines university until they found the one they were most interested in and excelled.

#### *5.1.2 Education and Capability enhancement:*

Education is one of the factors that directly influenced the students' decision after graduation. Attaining education directly influences the students' capabilities and aspirations of the students. This influence is further compounded when we take into consideration that the students attained their education as part of a scholarship program in a prestigious university in a different country than the students' country of origin. Additionally, as the students were part of a scholarship

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with student X from other countries of origin, 27/7/2023

program, they also had a community of students who were from various countries under the same program.

Student U stated,

*Once I started studying for my BA (abroad), I got interested in international education and specialized in that... My senior study was using storytelling as a coping mechanism for war survivors. TL (scholarship and community) and my education helped me realize that I can follow this path for my MA and PhD in the future.*

Furthermore, the education attained by students played a role in their plans after graduation. As student U stated, education played a role in expanding the capabilities of students to the point that the student views their education as means to achieve aspiration as their education sheds light on what they would like to achieve in the future. Most students mentioned that they pursued employment opportunities as well as higher education that relates to their education major. The attainment of education increased the capabilities of the students, to the point that the students can leverage their education to attain improved employment and higher education opportunities. The role that education plays with students' capabilities enhancement conforms with Wai lo (2019) view on the relationship between education and international students through the lens of the capabilities and aspirations lens.

As student O<sup>33</sup> stated that:

*I wanted to confirm what I knew. My education influenced my way of advocacy as I do a lot of my talks about psychology and mental health and chronic diseases... it had an impact on my research, as my major focused on research and its skills which opened multiple doors and opportunities as it grants great basis. I choose my first job because I wanted to apply what I learned, as I saw that there was variance between the theory and application, which lead me to my current higher education opportunity to further improve the research in the region in the topic I am interested in.*

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Student O from other countries of origin, 17/9/2023

### 5.1.3 Scholarship, Education, and Social Network:

Furthermore, the ability to choose their own paths allowed the students to develop their own potential and soft skills to keep up with their colleagues and older cohorts. The culture of the scholarship community helped the students to develop their skills as access to the tomorrow's leaders colleagues and alumna community is dependent on being recipient of the scholarship. As such, the scholarship community culture and value helped the students to venture into new experiences and utilize their potential. The scholarship community, the older cohorts and community helped the students to deal with the academic pressure created by the scholarship and the university by providing information and mental support to the new-coming students. The older students would guide the new students about the university's system (registration, classes, workload...) and share their information to help them to deal with it better, as the older students did not have the support that they are providing to the upcoming cohorts. As result, information has helped in formulating the community and strengthening the bonds between the individuals, because in the end of the day we were all in the same boat.

Student V summarizes the role of the social network within the academic context by stating,

*Grades and courses did not go as planned, I was suffering mentally, until my freshman year roommate opened my eyes in regard to mental issues. Sophomore year was rock bottom, trying to rebuild passion and direction. The (TL colleagues) community helped me in getting back up... It was normalized in the community to feel at rock bottom. The community taught me how to build and reach where I want to be, be more free-flowing, and have self-sympathy. In the end, we (TL Community) all was following the path of let us survive and let's see what is next.*

The students highlighted various factors in regard to their education that the conceptual framework will help us to understand. The students talked about the benefits of their education and scholarship, and how they managed to utilize this benefit. The large umbrella that all factors may

fall under can be described as “Means of achievement and growth potential” which aligns with Robyens (2007) categorization of capabilities under the capabilities approach and Wai lo (2019) proposed relationship between education abroad and student’s capabilities. The availability of various resources throughout their education and the space for growth and exploration, in a manner that created “primary goals” pushing the students to follow and adapt to achieve. This can be seen in how their education and scholarship allowed the students to attain better employment and higher education opportunities that the students desire and according to their perspective, compared to the opportunities available if they studied in their home counties.

Additionally, the education and scholarship attained by the students helped the students discover their own path and what they were passionate about. The students were able to discover and find their own path and “aspirations”, because there was a space to explore and people to guide and help, as Massey (1993) showed that social networks help individuals to integrate and develop by limiting the obstacles an individual may face through providing essential information. The social network, whether professors, colleagues or scholarship staff have supported the students to figure out their own skills, goals, and competitive edge. The feeling and perception of growth and learning by the students may become addictive to some students, creating the urge to further chase this feeling. In this sense, the students will aim to pursue the path that holds the greatest growth and learning potential.

## *5.2: Social Networks*

[Social networks played an underlying role in the experience of the students and their prospects after graduation. Social networks, as highlighted by students included and were not only limited to the university professors’ and the scholarship international student community (which might have nationals from the student’s CO on the same scholarship), as well as C.E nationals,



and various social networks the students may subscribe to. For students, social networks acted as sources of information helping the students navigate the daily-life circumstances, especially when the new-coming cohorts were less familiar with the city for which the older cohorts provided guidance. The older cohorts played a crucial role in assisting the new students to effectively pursue and achieve their aspirations, drawing parallels to the manner in which the older cohorts themselves had gone about their own dreams. Moreover, owing to the inherent nature of living in a foreign country, where one lacks familiarity with the surroundings, there existed a shared camaraderie amongst them, thereby necessitating the notion of supporting and looking out for one another. This strong sense of unity and kinship formed the bedrock of our collective experience abroad, establishing a strong bond akin to that of a close-knit family.

As student Z<sup>34</sup> expressed “*Older MEPIs has been there, done that and their information is valuable, especially that we are all in the same boat.*”

Or as student V mentioned<sup>35</sup>,

*But there was an expectation to fulfill, build a career after seeing success stories. People who did good and migrated and inspired me to be like them. This kind of education and community is incomparable, our experiences (individual/collective) were unique and made us adapt and be hard worker to try figure things out.*

Living in a space where guidance can be sought if you ask for it is very important to how the students develop themselves and their character. It meant that a student could ask, experience, discover, and know in the end that there are some people who help them when they need it. Consequently, social networks provided motivation to the students to pursue certain options. Hearing about the success stories, seeing graduating students pursue certain migratory trajectories, showed the new-coming cohorts that there are multiple path after graduation, instilling the idea of

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with Student Z from conflict-affected countries of origin, 19/7/2023.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with student V from other countries of Origin, 19/7/2023

“if they can do it, that means I can do it too”, which created a friendly atmosphere of personal competition, where the students aimed and worked to be a better version of themselves to attain the new ideals and dreams they have created for themselves. This even shows how the students weigh their options after graduation. As the new-coming students observe the graduating cohorts and their paths, the information they gather benefits them later when they are about to graduate as they see the available options and determine the ones that aligns with their goals and capabilities. Additionally, the graduating students can turn to the older cohorts who already graduated to help with attaining common opportunities as well as to gain information about the best possible path for them.

Student F<sup>36</sup> compliments this by stating,

*Talking to friends for scholarships and sharing information and seeing the "good options" and choosing options with similar backgrounds to people who are already in it. Social networks act as information sources and motivation to pursue an option. Having people abroad is not the main reason to go there but rather a motivation as Opportunities are the main reason.*

And student T<sup>37</sup> by stating,

*Social Connection (direct and indirect encouragement and information sharing) (MEPI TL Senior) helped me realize that its always possible, the people around me opened my eyes that because they accomplished things, especially when you are hung up on old matters with narrow vision, so they helped me to increase my self-confidence. They helped me because they showed me that I can compete and achieve things as their information sharing helped me to be where I am now.*

It is not just the close social network that supports the students, but also the connections made with the university professor's that goes beyond graduation and the education experience that could change the path of students. Multiple students talked about the effects their professor's had on their life and options, especially after graduation. Some students talked about how they maintained relationship with their doctors after graduation which helped them adapt to being back

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with student F from conflict-affected countries of origin, 17/7/2023

<sup>37</sup> Interview with student T from conflict-affected countries of origin, 22/7/2023

home and plan their next steps, some students explained the effect their professor had on them and how they would like to have similar effect to future generations, others said that they would not be where they are now if it wasn't for a professor that helped them pursue the path they are on now.

Student E<sup>38</sup> states that

*I worked to have a research opportunity with a doctor in his major.... Moreover, this same opportunity allowed me to pursue higher education (MA/PhD) in a third country,*

also, student A<sup>39</sup> said,

*Relationship with professors paid dividends in advice, guidance, support and letters for the scholarships and labor market, which helped me not to get burned out and follow the path that I dreamed of.*

Based on the accounts above, it is clear that students utilize their social networks to bypass issues they face in their abroad experience and beyond graduation. The students' interactions with their social networks influence their aspiration, making them realize they could do more and be better, which in hand allows them to improve their capabilities. As Wai lo (2019) describes how students pursue certain paths to improve their capabilities or achieve their aspirations, the student's social network are seen as one of the external factors that enhances the student's capabilities to reach their goals and aspiration. The students improve their capabilities to attain their new aspiration through the help of their social networks who provide them with the necessary information to follow the paths they intend to carve themselves, as well as the support the graduating students need along their journey, before graduating and after graduating.

Social networks are the main facilitators of migratory movements helping the students make informed decisions (Massey, 1993). Social networks are first and foremost, information sources, a source of stories that helps the individual draw conclusions and practices that influences

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with student E from conflict-affected countries of origin, 30/7/2023

<sup>39</sup> Interview with student A from other countries of origin, 20/7/2023

the final decision and path. As the social network provides information to the students, they help the students on a case-by-case basis from the accumulated information and experiences the social network have lived through. Moreover, hearing the stories of alumna helps the students reach out to these alumni to gather information or dream a dream as big as theirs, to reach where the alumna and community have reached. This attitude and culture that the social networks create by sharing stories and information further fuels the students' ambitions to achieve their aspirations, especially that the students have gathered the information and attained a similar skill set that puts the student in a similar position as the student is part of this community now.

### *5.3: Students Plans and Aspirations*

The student plans and aspirations play a significant role throughout their journey and how they tackle their paths after graduation. However, the student's plans and aspiration are always changing, it's a dynamic part of the students' journey where the students follow multiple things, sometimes at the same time, to efficiently utilize their capabilities while maximizing the outcomes of their efforts. Furthermore, students change their plans and aspirations for various reasons, mainly depending on the context they are within and dependent on how they can achieve such aspirations.

It is important to note that most of the respondents stated that their plans changed at least once within their experience, with the first time being around their sophomore year when they started to get comfortable within their university's system and their plans gets into conflict with their academic achievement. This leads many students to evaluate their capabilities, their interests, and what they would like to do in the future. This is shown in multiple respondents' responses stating that they started their university experience in one educational major, and then switched to

another because they either did not like the initial major, took a class that made be interested in the new major, a professor or older cohort that advised the student to change majors as it aligns better with the student's aspirations. This is how students changed their majors as it aligns with the student's capabilities to utilize their information sources. A comparison can be made between the change of major and change in plans affecting the migratory trajectory after graduation, as the change in overall context, capabilities and means to attain, and available paths to pursue aspiration, may lead to change in plans and migratory trajectory.

However, many of the students did not have drastic changes in their majors, maybe my case (the author's case) is the most drastic as I changed from a Mathematics major to a business major. Most student changed their majors within the larger field of their major, for instance student will change major within the social science field, or change within the multimedia and journalism realm, change within the business atmosphere. They do so because most of the time they want to still maintain a path that leads to their main aspiration, such as helping my origin community, study abroad for MA and PhD, practice what I learned and aspire to upcoming generations.

### *5.3.1: Reconfiguring student's plans*

There are multiple reasons why students change their plan during their experiences. One of the reasons is that the student's realization that their initial major and plan leads to a path with limited options abroad compared to options available at origin. This reason, or line of reasoning, stems from the student's initial plan and aspiration which they curated due to their origin environment, and when they experience the reality of the outside world as a globe, they realize that there are more needed paths in demand which the students seem themselves more compatible with. Additionally, this change in major and paths can be because of the variance in the student's

capabilities and aspirations as they have contacted various social networks and the university system, which led to formation of new capabilities to attain the students' new aspiration. This alteration in ambitions as a result of differences in abilities and avenues for success is corroborated by Robyens' (2007) contention that aspirations possess inherent worth and represent the objectives individuals strive to attain based on their capabilities, the resources at their disposal, the impact of social connections, and the prevailing circumstances within their country of education.

The second reason is related to the country of education volatility as well as the family pressure to look for another path, convincing the student to change paths. However, having education in an academically flexible environment and the support of professors and colleagues allowed students to choose a path where they can utilize their skills in a way that makes the student happy as well as playing the situation to their benefit. Changing majors is a choice made by the students in a way to find a middle ground between their personal capabilities and aspirations as well as family pressure by evaluating the paths available in country of education and origin, to find that middle option where they can still satisfy their personal perception of themselves while proving to their families that the student's path is as valid of a path to the path the families suggest.

As Student B<sup>40</sup> said:

*When I joined the scholarship, I was following society pressure to be a medical and engineering student, as the TL program did not provide engineering, so I took the medical course... When COVID-hit, I realized that I have a voice and opinion, so I changed my plans and motivations to go for a career of researcher. so, I stayed in the path but in my own way after receiving the support of my friends (TL community) and being inspired by them... In 2020, With the covid and economic collapse, I realized that the path my family (older generation) took that led to the current situation in my origin country and they are trying to make me take the same path. The family was worried about the path I took, as well as worrying how to tell the larger family. Explaining the plan to them helped them understand me and my plans.*

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with student B from a conflict-affected country of origin, 14/8/2023

As a result, we can see that students change their plans, by changing their majors in a comparable way to how students choose where to go after graduation. The students' perceived optimal path is choosing an option that is network influenced and motivated, as well as compatible with the students' capabilities and aspiration within the available attainable paths from the student's perspective.

Additionally, choosing a path to follow after graduation is the result of the student's information gathering efforts and observing others who graduated and evaluated where they went, why and how, and how they are now to evaluate the options the student has after graduating.

As Student V<sup>41</sup> stated,

*Previous cohort stayed in Lebanon and tried so hard that it seemed possible since it looked like a safe bubble and not to start from scratch in a new place. The experience of friends made me feel that there are various pathways after graduation which made Lebanon situation a viable option after graduation as the situation in the country deteriorate, so it was the smart option due to presence of NGOs, my relative professional and personal experience in the country, and presence of community.*

However, the influence of the network on the migratory movement after graduation decreases if the student already has an option/goal in mind that they would like to fulfill. For instance, some students indicated that when they were about to graduate, they never thought of anything besides going back home because either efforts to pursue other options failed or knew that going back home was what they needed to do at the moment.

Student O<sup>42</sup> stated:

*One of the biggest social connections that affected was my family as I want to go back home especially after 3 years abroad. Especially since I graduated through COVID-19. Going back home was a top priority. the situation in Lebanon was not ideal to stay in, so it enforced my priorities.*

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with student V from other countries of origin, 19/7/2023

<sup>42</sup> Interview with student O from other countries of origin, 17/9/2023

This statement also helps us to understand how living abroad changed the students' perceptions of who they are and their family relationships and that they are willing to change their plans to help accommodate their new aspirations. In the end, living abroad for at least three or four years changes the student's perception on their duties to their families as well as realizing that they have a duty towards their family which leads to fulfilling their own aspirations. And when the two sides of the student, the personal and family, connect or intersect together, it creates a path for the student in a way that improves student's quality of life and their families.

As student U<sup>43</sup> said:

*Another kind of family pressure is that of age and being abroad. When you are abroad, you are losing time that could be spent with your family, so you start missing their time and their important phases. This is the thing that helped me accept the decision to go back home.*

As have been mentioned earlier, the social networks of the student in their country of education helped the students to follow their own dreams and carve their own path. As a result, many students change their plans during their abroad experience in varying degrees. Some students followed their own path from the beginning but had to change their plans due to the circumstances in their country of education. For example, some students plan to stay in their country of education after graduation to pursue employment. Students from the older cohorts (before 2020) managed to stay and pursue employment opportunities in Lebanon in somewhat irregular positions, such as staying in Lebanon on Student Visa, or attaining employment on Tourist Visa. However, after 2020, after the COVID-19 and Beirut explosion, many students chose to go back home to “recollect” and “plan the next move.”

And finally, there are students who went and followed their own paths from the beginning that went against their own family expectations because of the country-of-origin situation. As Wai

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with Student U from conflict-affected countries of origin, 13/8/2023



lo (2019) shows in the relationship between the capabilities approach and international student migration, the act of change in plans and aspiration or maintain the same aspirations and goals are sign that the student determined the path with the largest potential growth within the available paths and capabilities and constraints. In the same sense, many students have followed their own path from the beginning, utilizing the benefits provided by the scholarship to follow their own aspirations, even though it meant going against the family traditions. This can be seen in female recipients who went and studied abroad against their country-of-origin cultural norms as it is evident in their statements about how their extended families and origin communities always talks about how they managed to go and study abroad, which these statements create some sort of pressure and tension on the graduated female students and their families.

The change in students plans and goals throughout their experience abroad showcases the change in capabilities and aspirations of the students from what they had when they first went abroad and what they have when they graduated. Many things can be inferred from the variance in plans and aspirations. What I will infer is as follows. The change in plans and aspirations happened because the education attained and the opportunities available outside the country of origin showed the students that they are more capable and different than what they used to think, which supports the arguments of the capability approach (Clarck, 2006; Wai lo, 2019). This is evident in how the students chose to change their majors to find a common ground that perfectly fits within their current set of capabilities, their dreams and aspirations they want to achieve, and the external factors of family and opportunities available in their country of education, country of origin, or 3<sup>rd</sup> country.

This brings us to the second point, that the students' ability to adapt and constant craving to grow and learn fueled a greater ambition and goals, which without being abroad would have

been hard to think about. The social network comes in this stage and plays the role of the facilitator which shows the students that there is a way to achieve their new aspirations, guiding them to acquire new knowledge and capabilities to pursue their new goals, in a similar fashion to how their predecessors carved and followed their own paths, which is in line with Massey (2019) argument about how social network act as a source of information to enhances the quality of the migratory experience for the students.

#### *5.4: The experience effects on what is beyond*

In the end, this thesis aims to understand how the experience of studying abroad changed the paths of the students after they graduated. In this section, we will understand how the various factors played a role in what the students did after graduation. This section shows how the educational experience, social networks, student's own aspiration and capabilities, and the experience in the country of education, meddled together showing a path for the students to take after graduation. The most interesting insight that is inferred from the respondents' response is that there was significant personal and social pressure to propel their careers through the scholarship and experience of studying abroad. It can be seen in how many students did not plan or want to go back to their counties of origin after graduation, but at some point, they deemed this option as necessary, and hopefully as temporary. The students saw that the option of returning was necessary or the safest option at the moment, as many students graduated after 2020 Lebanese financial and COVID-19 crisis.

##### *5.4.1 Perception on being abroad and takeaways from the experience abroad:*

The perception of the experience for the students played a large role in knowing what they are doing after graduation, as this experience for most students were the first time that they were independent and reliant on themselves without any prior safety nets. This situation provided the students with unprecedented amounts and spaces of freedom and growth potential that set precedence for future endeavors for the students. This unique situation taught the students how to adapt and thrive in new environments. As the students got accustomed to this environment of continuous adaptation and freedom, many students continue to chase such situations by looking at the available opportunities in third countries. Additionally, the experience of studying abroad have shown the students benefits of studying abroad path for after graduation, as student Z identified that *“Studies abroad is better to learn the culture and the context of the country giving an easier pathway into integration in the new country.”*

As student F<sup>44</sup> stated:

*I wanted to stay abroad for freedom, opportunities, and jobs. That's why I chose this 3rd country as it provided a chance for growth, personally and professionally. and having a scholarship helped me in moving to another country by financing my education, in the same way I managed to go to my country of education.*

However, not everyone was successful in getting their first option path to a third country. The reasons may vary from person to person, but this does not mean the end of the road for groups of people who thrive when they adapt to new situations. In such spots, the students always adapt their plans in case unforeseen events happen. This could be volatility in the country of education, skill set does not fully integrate in a specific market, or more.

#### *5.4.2 Paths Decision-making after first path is unattainable:*

In this position, where the major chosen path fails to be fulfilled, for instance going to Europe for higher education, the students choose whether to continue being abroad either in the

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with student F from conflict-affected country of origin, 17/7/2023

country of education or a 3<sup>rd</sup> country or return home. At this position, the situation in the country of education and the personal perspective of the student on the matter at hand is what determines the situation. If the student leans toward “I do not want to go back home”, then the student will look for options that enable them to maintain “the abroad” status. If the student leans toward the “I am missing something back home”, then the student finds a way to finance their return and themselves while being back home.

We can see the two standpoints from the following quotes.

Student Z<sup>45</sup> statement shows how the student choose a path when they did not want to return to their country of origin and did not manage to get their main path attained:

*I applied for a master's (because I did not want to go back home) and was not successful, which left me without a plan when I graduated. Moreover, my brother influenced me to leave the masters route and come to city X for work, although I aspire to do master. City X was convenient for money and experience reasons. Also, city X has a favorable work climate due to its global experience and expansion in an Arab country especially that it had easy visa requirements.*

Student U<sup>46</sup> statement shows how the student returned to their country of origin after the main path was unattained:

*We all are trying to evade going back home. I applied to opportunities in Lebanon and other countries because it is better than going back unemployed to my family. One mutual motivation was that it's an escape tool, coping mechanism to deal with home country situation, so we are applying to different countries to support our dreams. The countries in Europe support people's dreams through resources while countries in the MENA region always limit our dreams. In the end, we all tried to hustle and work because then we can rest, and then we can go back home. At some point, we got burned out (because of the Beirut explosion), so we chose to go back home to gather our plans again and plan and keep doing what we were doing. Going back home was the last thing I wanted but it was necessary. I realized that a lot of people did that to relax, restore our mental health and plan forward.*

#### 5.4.3 Search for Home and Stability away from Home:

the graduating students matured exponentially throughout their journey abroad, the students face new circumstances compared to the old cohorts, especially the cohorts who graduated

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with student Z from conflict-affected country of origin, 19/7/2023

<sup>46</sup> Interview with student U from conflict-affected country of origin, 13/8/2023

at 2020 and after. However, the stories are always similar, what the students look for is stability, a place where they can call “home”. The students found their “second home” in their communities in their countries of education. However, the moment their country of education plunged into disarray, the students continued their quest to find “stability”. Multiple students have talked about how the instability in the country of education was a major factor in looking for stability, even if it was temporary by going back home. Consequently, the student continued to look for a “stability and home”. Going back to the country of origin after graduation may have caused some people to feel disconnected from their “home” in the country of education, which required them to get used to it again to connect with their “home at home”. However, many students realized that they still want to continue their initial aspirations of going to a 3<sup>rd</sup> country to pursue higher education and integrate in a “suitable stable environment”.

Student T<sup>47</sup> stated:

*The country of education instability reminded me of the situation in my country of origin which I thought I initially escaped, but the situation in both countries made me realize that I am looking forward to leading a normal life. Which is why I am choosing the master's program I am in currently as it opens multiple opportunities for me in a suitable stable environment.*

Student A<sup>48</sup> says:

*I always felt, as A, that I have purpose in Life and that cannot be achieved in my country of education and origin. It is not just happening and that is why I am looking outside. We became more hyper mobile because we do not have a connection to a place, but home became a series of connections due to shared experiences.*

#### 5.4.4 Chasing Growth in Growth-Limited Space:

In the end, the students lived for four years in a competitive and ever-growing community. Having the space to alleviate their skills and grow is a large factor that played a role in choosing a path to follow. The space for growth is essential to the students, however stability comes first, as

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with student T from conflict-affected country of origin, 22/7/2023

<sup>48</sup> Interview with student A from other countries of origin, 20/7/2023

with no stability, the roof for growth becomes limited. In this space, the students choose to follow stability and a path of improving their community and the people around them as this provides the opportunity to grow on their own. This also shows how the students adapt to their environment in a way that helps them utilize the available resources to them.

Student M<sup>49</sup> shows this sentiment by saying:

*I was forced to come back to my country of origin after I could not find a third option to go to. But after spending time in my country of origin, I gained some sense of patriotism and some social connections that fuel my ambitions and goals for the moment. After being and staying in the country of origin, I started to notice the actual flaws of the country and started to help in how to fix some issues. I related to the people as they do not have the education they need, so I started my organization related to Artificial intelligence education to fill that gap. I think that I started my organization because of the environment and competitiveness which helped me to grow and be a better version of myself.*

While the option of pursuing a 3rd option, even after returning home, is driven by the positive outcome of pursuing higher education and improved opportunities in a stable environment. The experience the students had in their country of education, which provided a higher and more stable situation than their context in their country of origin, implemented the notion of the importance of stable growing environment.

#### *5.4.5 Collateral Effect of the Experience:*

Moreover, the experience of the students in the international student's community in a foreign country allowed the students to create a system of personal integration into whatever context they are thrown into, which also can be seen in their ability to adapt and thrive. The effort the students put into adapting and growing in a foreign environment and the skills acquired in the process have shown the students how education and human capital investment is important and should be utilized to their benefit, yielding their context to serve their aspirations. On the other

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with student M from conflict-affected country of origin, 21/7/2023

hand, this came at the cost of the personal perception of being “different”, of always looking for “home” and what does it mean to belong.

As student E<sup>50</sup> stated perfectly,

*MEPI is enriching and everything, but it is painful because you are culturally mixed and adaptable, so you are neither home or host and the further you stay the more you lose part of yourself and lose base in Lebanon. we are culturally homeless "third culture kid". I can relate to the community, but they cannot relate to a part of me. We have flexibility because we live together and without families, this helped you to adapt and give and take with the environment compared to other people. The education and life in Lebanon gave me a big boost. there is human capital investment, as I am different from people and ahead of everyone, which helped me to adapt and integrate into the society in my third country as well as professionally here.*

As being the creation of two various contexts and always adapting, the student has created a sense of difference that can be their source of competitive edge as well as hyper-mobility. In student A<sup>51</sup> words, *“We became more... mobile because we do not have a connection to a place but home became a series of connections due to shared experiences; we are adaptable and can live anywhere.”*

Multiple effects of the experience played a role in the decision making after graduation. Many of these effects and factors can be attributed to the conceptual framework to understand how it helped the student be where they want to be. One of the biggest factors is the feeling of “freedom”, “self-reliance”, “growth”, basically the sense of being oneself while having the space to discover beyond oneself. According to Wai lo (2019) this feeling relates to the students’ capabilities and aspirations, as it alleviates the students’ notion of “oneself” and what they are capable to do, as well as the students’ dreams and goals that by achieving them creates a sense of growth and accomplishment. This is evident, especially when students are not able to pursue the path they desire and need to take a detour, by going to their country of origin or residing in their country of education, to

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with student E from conflict country affected by conflict of origin, 30/7/2023.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Student A from other countries of origin, 20/7/2023

“regroup” and plan for the coming step that leads down the desired path of achieving their aspirations and goals.

While this continuous chase of growth may be faced with some obstacles, the students keep looking and searching for a place they can call “home”, for the third time, a home that is stable and helps them to further grow and actualize their potential, in the form of hyper-mobility. The search for “belonging” and home” is not unique in its own for these students, as they already left home when they went to study abroad and learned how to build their “home” in the country of education. Yet they left their “home” again when they graduated, and now are on the lookout for their new “home” again, whether it is inside their country of origin or outside it. The question now in the minds of the students, “will I ever find home again?” since most students know that they are different from their communities, no matter where they are now, “will we ever find a home that feels the same as the last home we left behind?” that is the question that haunts the students, while living their lives planning for their next step to move forward.

### *5.5 Conclusion*

Personal experiences and social networks play a significant role in shaping the trajectory of scholarship students as they navigate the complex landscape of decision-making beyond graduation. These transformative forces are dynamic and subject to change, influenced by various factors such as familial pressures, the evolving situation in their home country, and the powerful impact of social connections. Understanding the fluidity and adaptability inherent in these influences is essential to comprehending the intricacies of post-graduation decisions.

Studying abroad provides an invaluable experience for personal growth, acting as a crucible that fosters adaptability and resilience in the face of unfamiliar environments. This transformative journey serves as a precedent for future endeavors, leaving a lasting imprint on students' lives and equipping them with the necessary skills to successfully navigate diverse landscapes. The knowledge and insights gained from studying abroad enrich students' capacities



and broaden their horizons, serving as a repository of skills and perspectives that will shape their future endeavors.

Social networks, which play a crucial role in shaping students' trajectories, serve as information hubs that influence their decision-making processes after graduation. The exchange of information within these networks is a symbiotic process, with personal experiences and social connections informing and guiding students towards choices that align with their evolving aspirations. These social networks become a valuable resource for students as they seek guidance and support in making informed decisions about their post-graduation plans.

Realizations gleaned from social networks can lead to shifts in plans and majors, especially as students become aware of the limitations of their initial paths abroad compared to the opportunities available in their home countries. This adaptive process involves the development of new capabilities and aspirations through interactions within social networks and the academic system. The interplay between personal experiences and social networks not only shapes but also redefines the fabric of scholarship students' lives, enabling them to navigate the complexities of their academic journey.

In the intricate dance of decision-making, familial and professorial social connections emerge as influential guides for scholarship students. Family pressures, the feeling of missing significant life phases, and the situation in the country of education act as motivators for some students to redirect their paths homeward. Simultaneously, relationships with professors provide not only academic support but also serve as conduits for opportunities such as scholarships and entry into the labor market. These social connections form a nexus of influence that shapes students' post-graduation trajectories, guiding them towards paths that align with their aspirations and goals.

The experience of independence and self-reliance cultivated during studies abroad further amplifies the shaping of students' perceptions and future plans. As students learn to navigate the intricacies of foreign environments, the imprint of adaptability and resilience prompts many to seek similar opportunities in third countries. The seeds of self-reliance sown during their academic journey burgeon into a pursuit of new horizons beyond their current host country, as students embrace the idea of exploring different cultures and expanding their horizons.

In summary, this exploration uncovers a rich tapestry of interconnected elements that shape the plans and aspirations of scholarship students graduating abroad. The interplay between personal experiences and social networks, influenced by familial and professorial connections, becomes a dynamic force that propels students towards multifaceted and adaptive post-graduation paths. As these students stand at the cusp of a new chapter in their lives, the enriched capabilities nurtured by education and scholarship pave the way for novel goals and aspirations, bearing witness to the enduring impact of personal and social dynamics on their academic odyssey.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

### *6.1 Research Questions and Main Findings*

This research investigated the factors that influence the migratory decisions of scholarships-awarded students from the MENA region after their graduation. The research looked into policies, motivations, labor market conditions, skills and networks affecting their decisions. These factors played a various role in significance to the students' decision-making process based on their individual cases. However, certain factors took precedence over other factors as some internal and external factors played the most important role in evaluating the viability of the paths considered.

This exploration conducted by this study has uncovered intricate dynamics governing the experiences of international students, encompassing the realms of country of education policies, realities in their home countries, and their individual perceptions. This research has shed light on the challenges that have been presented by Lebanon's financial crisis and the devastating Beirut explosion, which have acted as catalysts, prompting a paradigm shift in the aspirations of these students. It is important to note that visa policies have emerged as a pivotal challenge in this context, as the host country has become a space that fosters holistic growth, facilitating both academic and social development. As a result, the situation in the country of education led the students to pursue opportunities in other countries (origin or 3<sup>rd</sup> country), but if the student did not manage to gain an opportunity in 3<sup>rd</sup> country, then home is where they head temporarily until the students find new opportunity within an environment that fosters holistic growth, facilitating both academic and social development.

The perception of the students on the Country of education played a significant role as the psychological effect of the experience, the labor market hurdles present, and the concept of “belonging” all leads the students down the path of movement outside the country of education, especially if the situation (economically and politically) in the country of education lacks stability. And the perception on the country of education (lack of stability) and the reality of country of origin (conflict affected) leads the students down the path of movement to 3<sup>rd</sup> countries.

The nuanced and detailed exploration of the experiences of students upon returning home adds complexity to the understanding of this phenomenon, revealing strategic decisions made by these individuals as temporary respites and opportunities for familial reconnection. The experiences in the countries where they received their education and the communities that they formed therein play pivotal roles in shaping their plans after graduation, with a clear emphasis on the quest for a sense of "home" and "stability."

The students' return to country of origin is dependent on the perception on country of education and choice. Some students did not desire to go back home and yet they did due to lack of other options and inability to attain any other path. And some students wanted to go back on their own accord, to reconnect with their family, because of their changed perspective on the country of education and personal value.

Personal experiences and social networks are found to be central in shaping the trajectories of scholarship students. These transformative forces, which are subject to change, are greatly influenced by familial pressures, the situations in their home countries, and their social connections. It becomes evident that studying abroad serves as a crucible for personal growth, fostering adaptability and resilience in these individuals. As such, the situation back home acts

mainly as a deterrent for the student's return. However, if there is no another path to go for the students but to go home, then going home is as the students adapts to the situation.

Social networks, which prove to be crucial in shaping trajectories, serve as information hubs that greatly influence the decisions made after graduation. Realizations that stem from these networks can lead to shifts in plans and even in the choice of majors, highlighting the adaptive process that takes place within social connections due to their experience and information provided. It is worth noting that both familial and professorial connections emerge as influential guides, greatly shaping the paths that students choose to take after graduation. As the former being seen as a reason to return back home, and the latter as a source of motivation to pursue opportunities in 3<sup>rd</sup> country.

Social networks played the largest role in the experience of the students and had significant indirect effects on the students' choice of movement trajectory. The social networks, especially the ones developed in the country of education, provided information and guidance to the students that helped the students improve their academic experience, their migratory experience in the country of education, and provided inspiration and motivation to pursue certain paths and aspirations. Consequently, social networks improved the students' capabilities and aspiration by providing significant amount of information and resources, that otherwise the students would not be able to access. Furthermore, social networks can be seen as part of the collateral effects of the experience that the students maintain to chase afterwards, as these social networks provided a sense of "belonging" and "home."

The experience of independence and self-reliance further amplifies the perceptions and plans of these students. The seeds of self-reliance that are sown during their studies grow into a pursuit of new horizons beyond the host country, as these students embrace the opportunity to explore

different cultures and broaden their horizons. As such, the experience of independence promotes the movement of students depending on the students' perspectives, on the situation in the country of education and origin, leading to the path with the greatest independence and growth potential.

In summary, this exploration uncovers a rich tapestry of interconnected elements that shape the post-graduation plans of scholarship students. The interplay between personal experiences and social networks, which are greatly influenced by familial and professorial connections, propels these students towards multifaceted and adaptive paths. As these students stand on the cusp of a new chapter in their lives, the enriched capabilities that have been nurtured through education and scholarship pave the way for the pursuit of novel goals, bearing witness to the enduring impact of personal and social dynamics on their academic odyssey.

### *6.2 Contribution of the Research:*

This study contributes to the emerging field of international students' migration and the theories of social networks and capabilities and aspirations in relation to migration. As this study takes a case study of international students from the MENA region who studied their undergraduate abroad in the MENA region, this research provides a unique lens and approach to investigate the experience of international students and their consequent migratory trajectories. Furthermore, this study draws a bridge between the theories concerning international student migration and the reality of these students in an understudied region such as the MENA region.

This study contributes significantly to existing theory by shedding light on the intricate dance between external circumstances and individual choices under the capabilities and aspiration theory. Furthermore, it underscores the transformative force of international education, which has

the power to shape individuals not only academically but also in terms of their development as interconnected global citizens.

This study contributes to the theory of social networks by showing that as certain social networks are beneficial to migration and perpetuates migrations, some social networks such as extended family can be a deterrent to migration and brings harm/stress to the migrants and their migration experience. Additionally, this study contributes to the theories of social network and its relation to social network by showcasing the various social networks international students utilize and how these social networks vary in function depending on the context the students are in or the information the students would like to acquire.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the capabilities and aspiration theory by providing a unique case to showcase the relationship between personal factors and structural factors and the migratory decision made. Additionally, this study shows how can aspiration and capabilities be improved and enhanced by education, social network, and overall context the student was part of. And more importantly, this study shed the light on an important factor in the migratory decision making which could be highlighted in the capabilities and aspirations of students, which is emotional factors and notions, such as “stability”, “Home”, and “belonging”. These emotional factors played the largest role as they acted as the intrinsic value of the aspirations.

### *6.3 Limitations*

There are a few limitations encountered in this study. Besides the limitations discussed in the methodology chapter regarding the sample selection, the author senses that there is limitation in this research due to the author’s prior experience and connection with the sample group. Another limitation is the sample group size and characteristics. As the current group characteristics are

similar to each other, there might be a possibility that a significant finding was not observed due to the lack of various characteristics within the sample group. Another limitation came as part of implementing the capabilities and aspirations approach where the author emphasized more on the aspirations of the students compared to the students' capabilities. This was done so because the author believes that the student's aspiration is the largest motive for the students' movement after graduation as well as that the student's aspiration is what leads to improved capabilities as way to achieve personal growth and actualizing the student's dreams.

#### *6.4 Areas for Further Research*

Recommendations for further research are numerous. The first recommendation is to replicate the research on a larger sample group size with participants from the TI program in Egypt and Lebanon, to investigate if the findings are similar across the whole context. Additionally, research looking into the variance of capabilities within the experience abroad of international students will help to further understand the factors that changes the students' capabilities, and what capabilities are varying in the international student context. Furthermore, researching the very concepts of "home" and "stability", as well as investigating the relationship between the concepts of "home" and "stability" and the hyper-mobility of the international students, looking into this case as theoretical investigation which could open new avenues to understanding the after-graduation paths of international students.



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## Annexes:

### *Interview questions*

1. Can you tell me how did you think of your studies experience in the country of education?
2. Please describe to me how your scholarship education influenced what you did after graduation.
3. Can you please tell me your plans and motivations after graduation throughout your journey?
4. Please tell me how your social connections affected your higher studies and occupations after graduation.
5. Please describe how your stay in your country of Education influenced your decision.
6. How did your Education major influence what you did after graduation?
7. When you looked at your options, how did visa policies affect your decision?
8. When looking at your options, how did the situation in your home country and country of Education influence your decision?
9. What other factors you think might have played a role in your decisions and plans forward?

### *List of Terms and Abbreviations.*

<b><i>Terms/Abbreviations</i></b>	<b><i>Definition</i></b>
<b>UNESCWA</b>	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>MENA</b>	Middle East and North Africa (Yemen, Oman, Kingdom of Saudia Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco)
<b>MEPI</b>	US Department of State's US-Middle East Partnership Initiative
<b>TL</b>	Tomorrow's Leaders Program (scholarship for higher education, undergraduate and graduate level, in Lebanon and Egypt for students from the MENA region)
<b>AUB</b>	The American University of Beirut
<b>LAU</b>	The Lebanese American University
<b>AUC</b>	The American University in Cairo
<b>ISM</b>	International Student Mobility/Migration
<b>Contextualization</b>	To take into consideration the relevant factors within a situation/context/location to understand the actions taken.
<b>Determinants</b>	External factors that influence an individual (environmental factors, social institutions, and relations...)
<b>Capabilities</b>	means of achievement (personal skills, intelligence, aptitude for education, attainable opportunities...)
<b>Aspirations</b>	In this research, aspirations refer to desired goals and values which individuals actualize through their respective capabilities.
<b>Networks</b>	connections between groups of people, including migrants and former migrants and non-migrants, connected by various relationships ties