I don’t even recognise the girl I was when I first arrived to the U.K. I have changed a lot since then, as a consequence of moving abroad, aging and the university experience. I come from a very different country, hence a very different culture. In fact, everything there is different. Venezuela, the country where I was born, has been through a humanitarian and economic crisis since 1999 -the year I was born-. It’s a very dangerous country, with a high rate of inflation and corruption.

As a result of the referred crisis, education had been compromised. Thus, when I graduated, I decided that I would like to pursue my studies in another country, a country that could give me the choices and opportunities that any young deserve. Coming from an uneducated country, I was so surprised with London, I felt so lost. It’s not like I had never travelled before, I have walked through Roma’s cracked floor, I had admired many paintings at the most famous museums in Paris, I had eaten tapas in Madrid… I thought of myself as a very cultural person ready for everything, but then gave me the worst feeling ever, uncertainty. As a sixteen-year-old, I was in love with the idea of living by my own. For me, that meant I could eat whatever I wanted, I could watch Netflix all day long and I could decorate my room. It didn’t occur to me that I needed to know how to cook in order to make whatever I wanted to eat, I needed to study rather than watch shows, and I needed money to decorate my room. Looking back, I feel like I was so immature to make such life-depending decisions as my choice of career. But I don’t regret it. I regret being the girl that thought knew everything, when in fact did not know anything at all.

My overconfidence on myself didn’t help me at all. My expectations were so high. I had imagined how my university life would be. And then, the induction week started. I was completely lost, and I felt like I was the only one that didn’t know what was doing. Looking back, now I know that everybody was just like me.

Everything about CASS was new to me. New country, new language, new culture, new people… that week was hard. It is a lot of changes for just one week. It was overwhelming. I got lost in the tube many times. I started wearing my big coat in October and I didn’t get why people looked me so weird for wearing a coat when it was 16 degrees outside (in my defence, we have summer all year in Venezuela). I had never seen people being so free. I never felt so free. One night I was walking back from Uni, and I remember thinking how these people could

have the nerve to say that this country doesn't respect them or their rights? when in my country, walking on the streets its dangerous, even on daily light. In London, you can see people from every country, with different nationalities and dressing how they like. Falling in love with whom they want. Working in what they like. Its freedom. That week I realised how important is education. I knew it was important, but London gave me the chance to see it. to feel it. It took me only one week to change my decision of coming back to my country when I finished university. After you experience that, you cannot simply go back to a country with no rules, with ignorant people that won't understand how a society works.

I have had many failures since I moved to London, and many of them have been inside CASS. But they have given me the resources to stand up by myself. The experience has thought me that failure is good sight, because you have to keep trying. These past years I have taken so many risks. Risks that I would have never taken before, because now I learned that risks are a little bit more scary opportunities. In fact, the Valeria from three years ago would have never found the courage to enter this competition.