Mobility as a Way of Life:

European Millennials' Labour Migration to Asian Global Cities

人生における道筋としての可動性:

ヨーロッパミレニアル世代のアジアグローバル都市への労働移動

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Helena Brigitte Hof

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Waseda University

Tokyo, Japan

Main Academic Advisor: Gracia Liu-Farrer

Co-advisors: Glenda S. Roberts, Adrian Favell, Miloš Debnár

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Preface

It is a hot weekday morning at trendy Kith Café in Dhoby Ghaut, close to Singapore's central nightlife districts. The sun is already burning the asphalt surface of the streets. Kith's air-conditioned interior is fully occupied by fashionable Singaporeans whereas just a few foreign customers sit on the spacious wooden terrace. Andras arrives late, and, having ordered a café latte grande with double espresso, introduces himself as a 36-year old Hungarian with "a quite interesting childhood." Over more than two hours he tells me his story – a mobility story whose elements form the heart of this dissertation.

Andras' childhood in 1980s communist Hungary ended with his diplomat father's delegation to the US. When the family returned to ex-socialist Hungary four years later, the ten-year old boy experienced a culture shock and since then dreamt of life overseas. In his early twenties, Andras went to the United States for voluntary work and for an exchange term to Finland. After his bachelor in tourism and hospitality management, the young Hungarian started his dream career in a luxury hotel chain in Budapest. A year later the relationship with his girlfriend broke apart. Andras decided to finally embark on an international career. This marked the starting point of a life "always on the move" as he reflected over coffee on that hot day in Singapore.

His first journey led him to Paris with the same employer. The planned year in Paris turned into four. Yet the promotion he was hoping for did not materialize. At the time, Andras first heard about Singapore. Fascinated by his image of tropical Asia and encouraged by Singapore's supposedly welcoming attitude towards foreign talent

Andras wanted to move.[1] However, as a junior employee he did not qualify for internal transfer within the hotel system.

An unexpected vacancy as a local hire in the Maldives brought him one step closer to Asia and via another 3-year detour, he finally came to Singapore in 2011. The move put an end to his already strained distance relationship with his French girlfriend, but the excitements of his new life helped Andras to get over the emotional loss. Starting anew for the third time felt almost like a routine, and yet, Singapore was different. Singapore was the "toughest place." Most expats, Andras told me, preferred to stay among same-country nationals or the international expatriate community.[2] Andras, who came to Singapore for his interest in the country and the people, struggled to befriend Singaporeans. As a Caucasian foreign talent, Singaporeans seemed to regard him as a temporary, affluent stayer.

Again, Andras felt as an outsider. When we first met in 2015, the relationship with his Filipino girlfriend was becoming closer. However, the couple struggled with life as foreign workers in Singapore. Andras coped with a 12 - 14 hour work day, completing an MBA course next to his full-time job at the hotel. He hoped that the business degree would enhance his employability. Ever rising requirements for the professional visa in Singapore meant that Andras constantly worried about his legal status in the country.

During our conversation, I came to understand how geographical and professional mobility run like a golden thread through Andras' life. Looking ahead, the question of mobility became predominant again for Andras and urged him to reflect on his migratory trajectories. After years of a "gypsy lifestyle", Andras felt worn down.

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[1] "Foreign talents" is the official term in Singapore for highly skilled foreigners.
[2] Foreign professionals in Singapore are commonly referred to as expatriates, or short, expats.

Despite everyday frustrations, the stability in his current life made Andras regard Singapore as a positive experience which he became reluctant to easily discard.

Andras has grown accustomed to his mobile lifestyle – it has become part of his life and of himself. When we talked via Skype in 2017 again, the couple had married and left Singapore. With an MBA degree, work experience in several countries and fluency in three languages, Andras was finally able to leave the taxing conditions of hospitality work and entered the Hong Kong branch of a leading technology multinational. His geographical mobility now spans three continents and seven countries, his organisational mobility several positions and industries. Andras' "worklife pathways" in Asia and probably elsewhere in the world are bound to continue as our Skype conversation and follow-up emails revealed. How we can understand the life paths young Europeans forge in Asia and what this means for both their sense of self and the movement of skilled labour in times of a changing global power balance are the issues I wish to explore in this dissertation.

1. Introduction

1.1 Approaching Generation Erasmus' Mobilities

"Europe is my home and I don't think that will change.

Europe as a place to be – I am not sure…"

(Sandra, Singapore)

At a time when few days pass without headlines on mass *im*migration into Europe such a statement seems misplaced. But the young European woman who confided these words was very aware of their meaning. And she is not the only one. Over the past four years, I have followed a group of young Europeans who moved to work in Asia's global cities Singapore and Tokyo. This is a dissertation on them, a numerically small but theoretically significant mobility phenomenon of young tertiary educated Europeans in Asia. Their presence in Asian global cities heralds one of the potential outcomes of the pursuit of middle-class life paths in a world of changing power structures.

In this dissertation, I use the concept of 'Generation Erasmus' to introduce a new mobility phenomenon of young highly educated Europeans' migration beyond Europe. These young adults, part of the so-called millennial generation, embark on their overseas work experience with an idealized, sometimes orientalist image in mind and hunger for adventure. Being highly educated and fairly well off they seem to have all options in life. However, amidst rising precariousness and insecurities in the post-Lehman European Union (hereafter EU) and their longing for professional challenges and individual biographies we see a restless generation. Their middle-class families and Brussels bureaucrats' Europeanisation policies raised them to embrace mobility,

tolerance and cosmopolitan ideals. These young adults aim high and feel urged to compete for the numerous chances lying ahead and to avoid constraints on their local labour markets. After exploratory stints as travellers, students, or interns in Europe, Asia and elsewhere, they increasingly engage in strategic practices to continue their life abroad, forming part of the world's skilled migrant population.

These young Europeans use geographical mobility as a tool to access professional jobs and build a career that offers a middle-class lifestyle abroad and as such upward – or at least not downward – social mobility. However, these young adults are not the ideal careerists or neoliberal selves who live for the job or form part of the world's business elite. The modest outcome of their cases is striking: a middle-class life with family, friends and jobs which happens to unfold 10,000 kilometres away from their places of birth. What is at stake here, I suggest, is a new form of individualism which is put forward by a generation that considers mobility as at least an option, if not a normal way of life.

Before I explain the objective of this dissertation, I wish to make a note on the context and my approach to doing this research. The lens I adopt and the arguments I present throughout the chapters below have emerged from my experience in the field. During my first personal encounters with Asia – especially, Singapore, Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Tokyo – as a tourist, undergraduate student, and trainee in a private company, I noticed the presence of young Westerners who live and work in these Asian cities.[3] More than that, overhearing conversations and discerning accents, I noticed that many of these migrants were not native English speakers but rather seemed to come from different corners of Europe. Being myself from a European country and

[3] I broadly define the West in this study as Europe, the United States and Canada and Australia/New Zealand. Chapter two discusses the racial aspect of the label Westerner.

new to Asia, my knowledge was limited to the recent colonial and postcolonial history, as well as Asia as it is portrayed by Eurocentric or Western-centric media.

From my first ventures into two different scholarly fields with focus on Asia, migration and international human resources, I had not heard of independent young Europeans' migration to Asia. What I knew from my previous training was that an expatriate assignment at the age of the people I met on the streets of Tokyo or Singapore was highly unlikely and so I assumed that they had forged their journey to Asia via different routes. This gap between scholarship and media representation on one side and my own local observations on the other side aroused my interest. It also explains why one will search in vain for comprehensive statistics on this population. As to my knowledge, they do not exist which leaves one with assembling statistical information piecemeal, by referring to ethnographers' and demographers' estimations as well as numbers on specific populations compiled by journalists.

I will explain my approach to the field and sampling procedures in chapter three but here I wish to briefly provide an overview of what has been brought together by ethnographic studies and journalistic work on the phenomenon at stake. One of the few but extensive research projects on Westerners in an Asian global city is Farrer's forthcoming book on Shanghai. The author speaks of a "population of roughly 90,000 Western expatriates living in Shanghai at the time of the 2010 census, whose most common countries of nationality were the USA (24,358), France (8,238), Germany (8,023), Canada (7,306), Australia (6,165), and the UK (5,591) (2019:5)." The numbers, compared with that of Shanghai's total foreign resident population of 170,000, demonstrate that almost half of the foreigners in the Chinese city are Westerners. This roughly matches the statement of another online article published in *The World of*

Chinese.com (Koshoibekova 2014) according to which Americans (34 per cent) and Europeans (28 per cent) make up about 60 per cent of the foreign population in China.

In Tokyo, where fairly detailed statistics on the foreign resident population as of 2017 are published, the European population consisted of roughly 75,000 whereas Europeans and North Americans taken together accounted for approximately 146,000 (Ministry of Justice 2017a).[4] I will look into the composition of this population in more detail later (see chapter five) but here I wish to refer to a few more sources which give us some idea of the phenomenon in focus. As for Singapore, we know that approximately 12 per cent or 198,000 of the total non-resident population in Singapore in 2017 were so-called skilled migrants (National Population and Talent Division Singapore 2018). Their countries of origin used to be mainly Western countries, especially Britain, and Japan, though recent years have shown an influx of skilled migrants from Asia (Coe and Kelly 2000; Yang, Yang, and Zhan 2017).

An Irish Times article on young French fleeing their country quotes the minister delegate for the French overseas at the time, Ms. Conway-Mouret, when writing that "French graduates are moving in especially large numbers to Asia, where they often enjoy greater responsibility and higher salaries than in France. The average age of the 3,000 French in Kuala Lumpur is 29" (Marlow 2013). Insightful, albeit based on a micro-study of young Londoners in Beijing, is also Knowles (2015), who cites an estimate of a foreign population of 500,000 in the Chinese capital of who only 5,000 are from the UK and consequently, even less make up the young British featured in her

[4] Throughout the dissertation, the numbers on Europeans in Japan consist of Europeans from all over Europe and not only the EU. The numbers for the non-EU Europeans who are included do however in proportion roughly reflect those of the EU citizen population. This is especially true for the statistics of visa categories presented in chapter five. There, too, the number for Russians who are, among the non-EU Europeans, the by far largest group in numerical terms, proportionally reflects that of the EU population.

research. That said, we can see that if assembled, the population of young Europeans across Asian global cities might be on the rise and as a total number is likely to consist of several tens of thousands of young people.

As surveying the scarce resources on the phenomenon shows, one arrives at best at some very rough estimates of either independently moving European youth or Western skilled migrants in some of the metropolitan centres of Asia, but they always remain mutually exclusive. This, however, should not constrain the objective of this dissertation. My purpose is to study the meaning of the migration phenomenon at stake and how it enhances our understanding of how a part of the European millennial generation constructs their life narrative in the globalized world.

Having entered graduate school in Japan and thus being "on-site" I decided to devote my graduate training to this type of largely unrecognised new form of migration. Inspired by Howard Becker to "[develop] concepts [. . .] in a continuous dialogue with empirical data" (1998:109), I started from a 'blank sheet' and allowed my attention to be drawn to poorly researched dynamics I found in the field. Soon, distinctive characteristics shared by the people I encountered crystallized. These eventually prompted me to frame this as a dissertation on young European migrants who I call Generation Erasmus. As I will elaborate in chapter three, common traits that I found among these European youth are shared cultural capital, attitudes and orientations, internalized by the distinctive way of growing up as the millennial generation of an enlarging European Union. Based on this ethnographic approach, I suggest that the generational perspective opens up intriguing research avenues for a study on the mobile "worklife pathways" of the privileged yet at the same time precarious European youth (Krings et al. 2013a:89).

The dissertation is rooted in migration scholarship and inspired by the mobilities turn. It is interested in how mobilities research can inform us about new ways of managing the self in a globalized world. As such, it is not merely a study on migration per se as it is a study on young adults' responses to globalisation through "chosen biographies" (Beck 1994:15). With focus on EU citizens, and an arguably specific group within them, I will demonstrate how these youth's decisions about where and how to lead their lives are shaped by global processes and how these processes diminish distinctions between the young European adults in focus and their middle-class peers around the globe. In the conclusion, I assess the implications of my findings and discuss how the newly gained insights can enhance our understanding of managing a life characterised by mobility and multiple identities in a globalized world.

1.2 The "Worklife Pathway" Perspective

Now, how to make sense of the different dimensions that seem to influence the mobility phenomenon at stake? There is Europe as the cradle of democracy, the birthplace of Enlightenment and the venue for workers' fight for rights and social protection. But there is also the Europe of imperialism and colonialism, the nest of two World Wars full of atrocities and a continent whose economic and political role in the global world order has slowly declined since the second half of the 20th century. Then there is Asia with its at least as turbulent history, producer of some of the world's earliest great civilisations but also as a colonial subject and alienated as periphery in Western dependency discourse. Lately, however, Asia is more often addressed as the rising global power

under China's lead. In their midst, young adults in an enlarged European Union search for orientation and some turn to Asia as a route to design their own biographies.

A study of migrants' socio-economic background in the sending countries (Europe) and their positioning in their home societies, for instance in terms of class, can reveal a lot about the outcomes of their migration. Only by assessing both sides of the migration continuum are we to understand these migrants' choice of the Asian global cities and their career expectations and life strategies. That said, the EU consists of 28 member states with great differences in culture, language, even living standard and the labour market – between each other but also internally.

In order to make the case for a generation of its own, I am drawing from recent scholarly advances in research on Europeanisation, European mobilities and cosmopolitanism. I propose to define this youth as a distinctive generation which has adopted a European, if not global, standpoint on issues of career, the labour market and mobility (Jensen 2015). While these young Europeans seldom renounce identification with their home country they direct employment strategies and plans for the future along a European and gradually along a global scale. Thus, I call the young migrants Generation Erasmus, without denying internal differences within the group. At times, my data pointed to particularities of the home country labour markets or the migration channels through which the Europeans moved. I thus examine to what extent such differences between Europeans countries matter in migrants' employment strategies and socialising patterns abroad.

I suggest that there are two salient realms in which these migrants move and construct meaning. These are work and social world which constitute interrelated processes rather than static separate spheres of life. Work and non-work, referred to as

private life, leisure or the like, are often treated as dichotomies (Krings et al. 2013b). I argue instead that standing alone, none of the two dimensions is convincing enough to explain Generation Erasmus' mobilities. Their pathways are product of forging a life made up of and woven together through work, leisure and socialising practices. In an analytical move, I adopt Krings et al.'s (2013b) concept of "worklife pathways" as a useful tool for understanding this new form of young adults' a-typical mobilities.

Krings et al. (2013a; 2013b) developed the "worklife pathway" concept in their research on Polish migration to Ireland post-2004, the year when Poland entered the European Union. The authors place their study in the emerging mobilities literature, drawing from Urry and colleagues' postulation to acknowledge a "'new mobilities' paradigm" in today's increasingly interconnected world (Sheller and Urry 2006:208). Krings et al. (2013b) coined the "worklife pathways" concept to examine "new mobilities" of young Europeans in the European Union. The authors suggest that, "in the light of a greater emphasis on movement, it might be analytically more appropriate to treat contemporary forms of migration as a subcategory of mobility (ibid:8)."

Crediting the authors, I use the term mobility for the phenomenon in focus. I do not deny that these Europeans are migrants, and that their moves could be called migration as well (which is why I sometimes use movement or migration interchangeably). What the concept *mobility* does however confer more strongly than *migration* is the temporary, circular, repeated, vague, contingent, and crisscross aspects of the kinds of movements on which this dissertation focuses. Krings et al.'s (2013b) main argument is that motivations for migration and the ongoing process of being a migrant are not merely driven by aspects of work. While undeniably playing a significant role, "economic motives" (ibid:21) are just one aspect. "Non-economic"

motives, concomitant features of reflexivity and individualisation (Giddens 1990) or projects of self-realisation (Kennedy 2010:480) are likewise essential. Prominent examples of this are lifestyle migration (Benson and O'Reilly 2009), transnational urbanism (Conradson and Latham 2005) and choosing "creative" cities for work in innovative industries or the arts (Florida 2002).

The interrelatedness of work and life spheres lies at the heart of understanding the mobility phenomenon in focus here. More than that, Krings et al. (2013b) propose a nuanced understanding of "economic motives" in the "worklife pathways" concept. Economic motives mean more than just salary or linear intra-company career advancement. They include intrinsic meanings of work such as creativity, self-development and flexibility among others (ibid:22). In short, "worklife pathways refer to individuals' professional and personal life journeys (ibid:22)." The concept is a tool that enables us to unravel the complexity of contemporary migrants' migratory decision makings, migrants' perceptions of their migration experience and their subsequent practices, strategies and goals. As the term implies, the concept pays attention to (repeated) movement and does not draw artificial lines between the different dimensions of the migration experience.

Now, why – and how – to operationalise this concept for European migration to Asia? Krings et al. (2013b) point to differences in people's "worklife pathways" depending on their motivations, networks and skill sets. According to the authors, intra-European migrants share the freedom to move which enables them to flexibly cross geographical and organisational boundaries without the need for a visa. This is obviously different in Europeans' migration to Asia. Nevertheless, I argue that the concept is suitable to theorize the migration phenomenon in focus.

I contend that Generation Erasmus, having internalized the rhetoric of flexibility, mobility, and myriad opportunities, *perceive* the Asian destination countries as another potential place to work and live. Despite Singapore's and Japan's tight immigration regulations, this generation rationalises along a logic of the necessity and opportunity of self-actualization and are able to manoeuvre the foreign labour market and immigration regulations to a considerable degree. This ability is contingent upon their "motility" (Kaufmann, Bergman, and Joye 2004:750), a concept I introduce in chapter five.

1.3 Objectives and Structure of the Dissertation

Given the regional rather than national scale and the lack of both comparable and reliable emigration statistics, the size of their population in Asia is unknown.[5] Certainly, Europeans' total number in Asia is small compared to many other ethnic migrant groups.

However, studying young independent European migrants in Asian global cities makes us aware of economic and social changes across the globe, of recent developments tied to the globalisation of labour markets and with it to the emergence of new anchors and social networks by which people construct both their life paths and their identities. In such a context, young European citizens weigh their options. They consider not only the next bigger city, or their home country's capital city as an opportunity for building a middle-class life which satisfies their cosmopolitan and transnational aspirations. Nor do they limit themselves to the EU territory. The fact that there is an outflow of young Europeans beyond the EU hints at a redefinition of taken-

[5] See Nowok, Kupiszewska, and Poulain (2006) for a detailed discussion of the shortcomings of available international migration statistics.

for-granted life paths and a contestation of old power structures. Young adults who embark on overseas "worklife pathways" are intrigued by the idea of life trajectories different from the conventional ones which older generations and their peers in Europe are pursuing.

The young people I studied represent a cohort that, given their middle-class background in developed countries, have until recently barely been considered as having incentives to permanently leave their home countries. Western graduates' overseas sojourns have been theorised as "rites of passage" (Haverig 2011) or as a form of extended travel with links to consequential mobility (Frändberg 2014). Even nowadays, it is only a minority of young Europeans who follow the pathways I examine below. However, as I illustrate in chapter four, the practice of migration is no longer an extreme exception or the rejection of hegemonic middle-class values. Rather, the young adults pursue pathways which are, though framed by a rhetoric of individualisation, in line with European middle-class ideals. Furthermore, among those who leave an increasing number are 'ordinary' people who might stumble into their migratory pathway rather than exerting a meticulously planned move.

The following chapter reviews the scholarship on atypical migration and European migration to Asia. I conclude that a logic of self-management is useful to understand young educated Europeans' "worklife pathways" to Asia. Chapter three outlines the research design, methods and access to the field and discusses my positionality as a researcher in the fieldwork and writing process.

Chapter four to eight deal with the main questions that guided my research. In chapter four, I portray Generation Erasmus and examine their motivations for moving to Asia as they emerged in the context of the enlarging EU. Through four ideal types, I

explore what sparks the idea of Asia as a destination and migration to Singapore and Tokyo in particular. The chapter illuminates how the idea of migration translates into action and demonstrates the salience of contingency. By doing so it pays attention to the networks, knowledge and institutions that are involved in the steps that lead to migratory decision making.

Chapter five turns to Generation Erasmus' employment conditions in Asia. I briefly outline the development of the labour market in Singapore and Japan and provide an overview of the legal and institutional framework for skilled migration in both destinations. Based on this, I identify the channels through which Generation Erasmus move. The analysis detects the role of these Europeans' distinctive motility, or potential to move, for initiating migration and accessing jobs. Mapping migrants' occupational profiles I propose a causal relationship between each of the four migration motivations and the type of firm and employment conditions migrants enter.

In chapter six, I engage the meaning of work and career. By migrants' employment practices and strategies, I explore the link between pre-employment expectations and the way employment trajectories unfold. I ask if migrants are able to pursue what they deem a career and how they negotiate adverse conditions. How does the work experience shape their hopes, plans and perception of the future? In my discussion, I identify social categories like race and gender to affect Generation Erasmus' work experiences in the Asian global cities.

In chapter seven, I assume that work and life cannot be separated. Depicting migrants' social world in Asia, I delve into their daily life and socialising behaviour. Who are their peers, who do they confide in, who do they consciously avoid? How do place and friendships affect migrants' perception of life in the host society? Through the

concept of boundary making I tackle issues of bonding and alienation and ask in which way inter-ethnic relations in relation to intra-ethnic relations shape Generation Erasmus' social world. This angle allows me to address salient notions of race and ethnicity but also to look beyond these social categories and to incorporate gender, class, and generation into my analysis.

Finally, romantic relationships influence how migrants develop feelings of home and belonging and construct their identity. This is the focus of chapter eight. I first discern different forms of romantic relationships (or lack thereof) and then connect migrants' emotional and intimate experiences to the issue of mobility. The chapter serves as a direct transition to the conclusion where I zoom out and consider the broader implications of my findings. After discussing the interlinkages of migration motivations, employment conditions and experiences, social world and romantic relationships, I reflect on the meaning of European millennials' mobilities in different socio-cultural contexts.

This migration phenomenon is embedded in young adults' pursuit of a self-governing middle-class life in a world marked by precariousness and social change. I conclude that the "worklife pathways" to Asia might enable migrants to construct a coherent narrative of their multiple identities as European millennials, citizens of the world and middle-class professionals and by this has the potential to challenge old ethnic boundary making practices to some extent. Yet, the mobile self does not come without sacrifice. While this migration phenomenon has opened up new pathways of middle-class reproduction its consequences for the home countries and individuals themselves are questionable.

2. In Pursuit of what is Lacking: New Mobility Patterns

2.1 Atypical Migration

In 1993, Castles and Miller coined our times the *Age of Migration*. Movement has always been part of human existence but rapid social change in the late 20th century late modernity has triggered new social processes, waves of new movement and, which is even more important, an increased awareness of these developments across the globe. Media and technology allow people around the world to witness such changes, something unthinkable just a few decades earlier. There is a variety of ways to react to or even participate in these phenomena of movement while they are unfolding. In this study, I only look at the educated middle-classes. They choose to become actors – or choose to not do so – by commenting on online blogs on an event that concerns them on the other side of the globe, by maintaining transnational alumni networks with peers from their study time abroad, by moving abroad for a professional opportunity or because of romantic issues. Rightly, one can argue, these examples do not represent conventional forms of migration. Castles and Miller, too, concentrate on the more well-known forms of movements – refugees, economic migration, and ethnic migrant minorities, to name just a few – and devote little space to discuss new forms of movement.

The point here is that migration and what we understand behind the term is changing. This study is a modest attempt to contribute to the understanding of new contemporary movements and their embeddedness in the globalising world of the 21st

century. It only looks at a small, particular group of individuals on the move. However, such new forms of movements have tremendously increased in scope and scale since the first edition of the *Age of Migration*, and knowledge about them has enhanced our understanding of people's, labour markets' and state authorities' diverse, creative and shifting responses to the globalising world.

2.1.1 Lifestyle and Neoliberal Self-Management in Transnational Lives

Different authors have argued for a proliferation of the forms and varieties of movement around the globe. While the majority of people on the move continue to flee adverse conditions in their home countries – war, environmental disasters, political persecution and the like – there is also a rising number of migrants who *choose* to move. Choice, however, does not preclude constraints, anxieties, or personal dilemmas. Often, "free movers" (Favell 2008b:247) have been considered privileged and have been juxtaposed with the above distressed movers. However, such oversimplification obscures social changes on the way and downplays precarious employment, emotional insecurities and unfulfilled expectations which a growing number of the educated middle class are facing. Ignoring those who choose to move is thus to ignore fundamental changes under the condition of reflexive modernity (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994). It obstructs deeper understanding of how people construct new life paths in the 21st century.

In this light, scholarship on new forms of movement, "atypical migration" (Favell 2014:xiii) or "extraordinary movements" (Favell and Recchi 2009:7) – new forms of educated, middle-class labour migration within the EU – has flourished. Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst in *Globalization and Belonging* (2005:45) speak of "'elective

belonging'" among some social groups in Europe. Upper middle classes, the authors suggest, have more agency to choose to engage in practices in different territories, an argument which has found support from empirical studies by mobility researchers in Europe (Mau 2010; Fligstein 2008).

Intra-European mobility is characterized by cross-border commuting, circular, back-and-forth and temporary labour migration (Ralph 2015; Mullohand and Ryan 2014; Kennedy 2010; Frändberg 2014; Krings et al. 2013b). While difficulties of labour market access and waves of youth migration after the 2008 Lehman shock are one side of the coin (e.g. Lafleur and Stanek 2017), authors stress the need to acknowledge non-economic factors (Krings et al. 2013a) such as lifestyle considerations (O'Reilly 2007), love (Trundle 2009), language acquisition (Burrell 2010), and "self-realisation" (Kennedy 2010:472). Nevertheless, Andreotti, Le Gals and Moreno Fuentes (2010:2) argue that even upper middle-class managers in European cities use "partial exit-strategies" at best and do not become fully de-territorialized. For this study, it will be worth examining if the young and non-managerial Europeans' practices of belonging and engagement with the local align or contrast with that of the upper middle classes in Europe.

An important new field of inquiry has opened through the lens of lifestyle migration. Generally speaking, lifestyle migrants are middle-class and educated but they exchange structured everyday life in their developed home countries – and sometimes stable employment – for the freedom of living abroad under rather unstable or even precarious circumstances. Benson and O'Reilly (2009:608) define lifestyle migration as "the decision to migrate based on their belief that there is a more fulfilling way of life available to them elsewhere." At the core of the phenomenon lies the assumption that

one can build a satisfactory life elsewhere by pursuing a “counter-hegemonic practice and lifestyle (ibid:609-10).”

Developed from a European perspective but lately adopted by academics around the globe, lifestyle migration scholars argue that lifestyle and leisure considerations have prompted a range of new forms of movement. Conceptually, the focus lies on the motivations for migration and thus research on lifestyle migrants encompasses a heterogeneous group of people such as retirement migration (e.g. Ono 2009; Toyota and Ono 2012; Green 2014; Casado-Diaz 2009), seasonal or climate-related movements (Lundström 2014; O’Reilly 2000), global nomadism (D’Andrea 2006), working holiday makers (Haverig and Roberts 2011; Wilson, Fisher, and Moore 2009; Kawashima 2010), cultural migration (Fujita 2009; Sooudi 2008; Debnár 2016) and romantically (Lundström 2014; Trundle 2009) or sexually motivated movement (Hirano 2014; Paquin 2014). Student or educational migration, although seldom labelled lifestyle migration, has in fact often similar motivations (Szelenyi 2008; Liu-Farrer 2011a; King and Raghuram 2012).

International students have long been ignored in migration research because they do not have a working visa. Recently, scholars have pointed to the close linkage between international students and migration, as students stay on after graduation and directly enter the host country labour market (e.g. Soong 2015; Liu-Farrer 2011a; Szelenyi 2008). They activate the networks and the resources they accumulated during their sojourns as students. Given their age and lack of work experience, these young migrants usually find themselves in the middle of the occupational strata and, depending on the socio-cultural and economic context of the host labour market, in certain occupational niches (Liu-Farrer 2011b; Soong 2015).

Other research has stressed the role of global cities in lifestyle migration, especially for young migrants (Sooudi 2008, 2014; Tseng 2011; Fujita 2009; Haverig 2011; Griffiths and Maile 2014; Ho 2011) who seek adventure and experimentation in the dynamic hubs or, with a clear professional focus, among the "creative class" (Florida 2002). In Sooudi's (2008:97) words on her young Japanese informants in New York, these lifestyle migrants have a "desire for salvation—from a mediocre life, and potential regret for abandoned, unexplored selves, different possible identities that could have been lived."[6] The term "mediocre" might be key to understanding particularly the young and well-educated migrants from developed countries who choose to relocate in order to find that something which frees them from the mediocre, or mundane, an aspect I will take up again below. Lifestyle migration, then, embodies the idea of freedom from social pressures and competitive labour markets. More often than not, lifestyle migrants drop out of what they perceive as an overly stressful life in their highly developed home countries or an anticipated standard life course whose meaning they question.

Lifestyle migration's assumption of a better life elsewhere has a critical component. It foregrounds that these middle-class movers lack something in their countries or cities of origin. In this respect, Scott (2006) has talked about city dwellers' search for peace, authenticity and nature in Europe's idyllic rural settings. Similar forms of international counterurbanisation (Buller and Hoggart 1994) point to the significance of this phenomenon beyond the migration discourse but for the role which place, nature

[6] Sooudi's 2014 book is a creative ethnographic study of Japanese lifestyle migrants' transnational practices in New York, sparked by their desire to experience the authentic global and in their eyes most Western city of all. While the ideas of this book and its methodological approach have inspired this study, I use Sooudi's 2008 doctoral dissertation when citing the author verbatim since she phrases migrants' desires only then in the above used important words.

and the longing for authenticity play (Osbaldiston 2012, 2014; Benson 2010; 2011; Korpela 2010).[7] What some commentators write off as luxury problems is attributed to lack of orientation by others.

Globalisation scholars argue that the institutions that defined and structured modern life have become vague (Giddens 1991; Beck 1994; Bauman 1998). Beck (1994) sees in individualisation a direct product of reflexive modernity; an era that, along with unfolding globalisation and its social, economic and political changes, has replaced modernity in late 20th century. Modern institutions, which used to guide citizens of industrialized countries through their lives, have lost validity. Among others, the erosion of the social contract of stable employment and dependable pension schemes in many social welfare states, the disruption of the institution of family as we knew it, the increasing demand for flexibility, constant upgrading of one's skills and competitiveness for jobs (Sennett 1998; 2006) and as a result of these, the rise in precarious living conditions among the established middle classes (Hayes 2014) all serve to threaten and sometimes even to uproot people. While social welfare states are more applicable to Western societies, the meaning and constellation of the family as well as the nature of modern workplaces and employment have shifted throughout industrialized countries, with Japan as an instructive example (Kawashima 2017; Roberts 2016; Matsutani 2015; Nakano 2015). In Post-Mao China, too, we see "new practices of professional career planning" (Hoffmann 2008:176). Young employees "believe in the idea of career mobility as a source of professional and social growth" (ibid) and by this display similar attitudes to the ones I found among the young Europeans in Singapore and Tokyo.

[7] See also Gosnell and Abrams (2009) on the related concept of amenity migration.

In this respect, Beck (1994) refers to “chosen biography” as a new attitude towards life as a project. Featherstone (1991:86) detects a “no rule, only choices slogan of the ever-renewable lifestyle.” He proposes to understand lifestyle as a “life project” which allows people to reflexively “display their individuality e.g. through experiences and practises”, rather than “unreflexively adopting a lifestyle through tradition” (ibid:86). Individualisation brought freedom, greater opportunities, and choice. For the individuals this means the ability to actively steer their lives. This, however, requires the individual to take responsibility for success and failure. In a neoliberal logic, such rhetoric has led to a constant search for the better, a celebration of creativity, novelty and flexibility (Sennett 1998; Lane 2011; McGuigan 2014). New attitudes not only towards managing the self (Beck 1992) but also towards work have proliferated. Entrepreneurialism and start-ups are keywords (McGuigan 2014) and new work styles such as remote work and the “boundaryless career” (Arthur 1994) feature high.

The access to mobility, or potential of becoming mobile which is called motility (Flamm and Kaufmann 2006), is a form or privilege and thus only open to a few. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to equal mobilities with “frequent-flying, fast-line, global elites” (Favell et al. 2008:2). As Favell (2008b) notes, educated movers are a heterogeneous group in terms of occupational industry, age, gender and job position and should therefore not, from the outset, be assumed to be privileged or unconstrained by national policies, the job market or visa regulations (see also Baas 2017). Rather, lack of security and precarious employment cause a notion of temporariness in migrants’ lives. They often maintain a security net in their home countries, such as property, a pension scheme or even their health insurance which they regard as a back-up plan or as a facilitator for their future return (Favell 2008a; Lundström 2014).

For such middling transnationals (Conradson and Latham 2005a), place and locality continue to be important. Conradson and Latham (ibid:228) are critical of recently popular terms like Castells' (1996) "space of flows" or Bauman's (1999) "liquid modernity" which, without much empirical grounding, postulate a borderless fluid world void of meanings of place. Contributions in a special issue on middling transnationalism reveal how migrants, through their everyday practices, negotiate friendship networks, their national identity and kinship in their transnational life-worlds (Voigt-Graf 2005; Friesen et al. 2005; Conradson and Latham 2005b).

Despite the insightful arguments that the research mentioned and quoted above has produced, it suffers from either an overemphasis on travel and leisure or an essential understanding of lifestyle in a binary sense as everything 'non-work related'. In a similar vein, Benson and O'Reilly (2016:21) recently proposed that the role of lifestyle in lifestyle migration should be reconsidered to "illustrate that the concept of lifestyle migration does not preclude the possibility of economic factors." Giddens (1991:5-6), as early as in the 1990s, claimed that lifestyle patterns do not only arise from material affluence and decisions for specific actions but are also reactions to "material constraints" and "rejection." Thus, much of the research on lifestyle migration insufficiently discusses how migrants manoeuvre closed labour markets or other structural barriers which deny them to continue or foster their professional career.

The priority of lifestyle and leisure issues in lifestyle migration on the one hand and social integration and friendship networks in middling migration on the other hand obstruct a more systematic analysis of career and employment issues. Furthermore, neither approach sufficiently accounts for the "multi-transitional manifestations of [lifestyle] mobility (Cohen, Duncan and Thulemark 2015:156). A research design that

studies locality and emplacement or the more conventional focus of lifestyle migration on movement between home and host country hardly enhances our understanding of repeated, non-linear moves as feature of many contemporary forms of mobility.

2.1.2 Conceptualising Mobility as "Worklife Pathways"

Recent studies have tackled the lacunae of research between the 'poles' of economic motivations and lifestyle motivations (Ralph 2015; Mulholland and Ryan 2014; Ryan 2015; Kõu, van Dijk, and Bailey 2015; Kennedy 2010; Haverig 2011; Frändberg 2014). Based on a mobilities perspective (Sheller and Urry 2006), the studies investigate both employment-related and employment-unrelated motivations for moving. They recognise repeated or circular movements rather than theorising migration as a one-off event which leads to a status of permanence or immobility in the host country.

Hannam, Sheller and Urry (2006:1) famously argued for a "mobility turn" which highlights mobilities and movement rather than settlement, boundaries and national frameworks as defining features of the rapidly globalising world around the turn of the century. The mobility perspective allows for a more adequate theorisation of the vague terms "lifestyle" and "career" which are not given, static and uncontested (Krings et al. 2013a; 2013b). While the studies recognise migrants' education, qualifications, class position, ethnicity and country of origin, the mobility perspective directs attention to meanings imbued in career and lifestyle in the light of migrants' contextual and situational experience. Such research demonstrates how "free movers"' (Favell 2008a) priorities shift to exercising their right of mobility in the European free movement space. For instance, a conventional career which entails geographical movement might turn

into an overseas experience with a greater emphasis on culture or romantic issues, or the reverse (Krings et al. 2013b).

In this respect, Krings et al. (2013b) propose to conceptualize migrants' movements as "worklife pathways." In their research on Polish migration to Ireland post-2004, the year when Poland entered the European Union, the authors suggest that, "in the light of a greater emphasis on movement, it might be analytically more appropriate to treat contemporary forms of migration as a subcategory of mobility (ibid:8)." Their main argument is that motivations for migration and the ongoing process of being a migrant are not merely driven by aspects of work. While undeniably playing a significant role, "economic motives" (ibid:21) are just one aspect among others. They are complemented by "non-economic" motives which are concomitant features of reflexivity and individualisation (Giddens 1991) or projects of self-realisation (Kennedy 2010).

While lifestyle migration (Benson and O'Reilly 2009) or research on middling migration (Conradson and Latham 2005a) put forward similar arguments, Krings et al.'s (2013a; 2013b) concept enables us to explore how the economic and non-economic motives are firstly not contradictory but complementary. Secondly, they show how these motives shift over time and are contingent on the context.

Besides the emphasis on the interrelatedness of work and life spheres, the nuanced understanding of "economic motives" in the "worklife pathways" concept is illuminative. Economic motives mean more than just salary or linear intra-company career advancement. They include intrinsic aspects such as creativity, self-development and flexibility (Krings et al. 2013b:22) as well as expansion of professional networks, the desire for international work experience and better working conditions (Doherty,

Dickmann and Mills 2008; Khoo, Hugo, and McDonald 2008; Guth and Gill 2008; Harvey 2011). In short, “worklife pathways refer to individuals’ professional and personal life journeys (Krings et al. 2013b:22).” The concept thus serves as a tool for unpacking the complexity of contemporary migrants’ migratory decision makings, migrants’ perception of their migration experience and their subsequent practices, strategies and goals.

The authors strengthen their thesis by matching the “worklife pathways” with another concept that stresses the multiple dimensions of migratory pathways. That is, the “boundaryless career”, coined by Arthur (1994). The term “career” deserves clarification since it is often associated with an organisational career that involves upward mobility or career advancement (Arthur and Rousseau 1996:5). However, Krings et al. (2013b) distinguish such a meaning of a linear, in-house career from careers in contemporary societies. The former definition of career developed at a time of industrialisation and long-term employment with one employer. With reference to changing employment contexts in the 21st century, the authors contend that “what defines a career is the sequential and therefore cumulative work experience of the individual over time, not any assumed hierarchy of positions through which there is progression (ibid:18).” I agree with this definition of career as more suitable to theorise contemporary work, especially since it recognises different potential dimensions of mobilities.

With the “boundaryless career”, then, Krings et al. (2013b:18-20) refer to the boundaries the European migrants cross; these are geographical (national), organisational (firms) and even industry-specific (from one occupational industry to another) boundaries. While European migrants pursue different “worklife pathways”

depending on their motivations, networks and skill sets, they share the right to freely move within the European free movement space. This enables them to flexibly cross geographical and organisational boundaries without the need for a visa, as Favell's "Eurostars" demonstrate (2008a).

The EU's borderless zones (Mulholland and Ryan 2014) have significantly facilitated such movement, and cross-border commuting has proliferated (Ralph 2015; Gottholmseder and Theurl 2007; Huber and Nowotny 2013; Van der Klis and Karsten 2009). While these new forms of mobility involve repeated, circular and frequent movements, Ralph (2015) points to the complex interdependencies of both upward *and* downward social mobility and spatial mobilities. Social inequalities, glass ceiling and wage differentials remain just a few of the obstacles, even in the so-called borderless zone of the EU (Black et al. 2008; Recchi 2015; Csedő 2008).

This is obviously different in Europeans' migration to Asia. Nevertheless, further below I will argue that the concept is suitable to theorise the migration phenomenon in focus. Generation Erasmus, having internalised the rhetoric of flexibility, mobility and myriad opportunities, perceive the Asian destination countries as another potential place to work and live, though more challenging to enter than the EU. As I will show in the next chapters, despite struggles to obtain a visa or to be recognised as a professional, they often find ways to overcome such barriers and if not, they move to another Asian (and sometimes altogether different) country. Generation Erasmus rationalise along a neoliberal, self-governing logic in order to manoeuvre the foreign labour markets and immigration regimes. This, importantly, is contingent upon their cultural and symbolic capital which directs the discussion towards Asia. In the following section, I review influential work on Westerners, Europeans, and explicitly white people in Asia and

discern arguments that might be useful for understanding or might be challenged by the young Europeans' presence in Singapore and Tokyo.

2.2. European Migration to Asia

What does Europeanness mean in Asia? With this question, I do not imply that all Europeans define themselves over their regional rather than national or local or any other identity. However, there is a dominant notion of Westerners and Europeans in Asia as well as a persisting orientalising discourse of Asians in Europe and the U.S. (Said 1978; Yu 2001). Without these we cannot understand Generation Erasmus' migration to Asian cities. No matter how the young Europeans think of Asia, Asians and their own positioning in Asia subjectively, the major discourse of Asia among Europeans in Asia as well as Asians' dominant views of Europeans will undeniably leave their mark on the migrants. To unpack the meaning and origins of such discourse, one has to turn to history.

2.2.1 Colonial Legacies: Behind the Expatriate Label

European presence in Asia took on different forms but two issues stand out. These are colonialism and in relation to it the notion of whiteness. Colonialism, imperialism and white supremacy have shaped modernity to such an extent that until today power relations and racial tensions determine our everyday lives. Whiteness, in the past as today, functions as an "invisible knapsack" (McIntosh 1989). It is deeply imbedded in the institutional structures which organize everyday life and confers unearned power,

authority, and respectability to its bearers. Many whites do not acknowledge this, others reject and challenge the privileges of whiteness. More often than not white people avoid the issues of race for which both multiculturalism and neoliberalism have provided them with a convenient 'liberal' narrative.[8] Critical whiteness studies attempt to deconstruct the colour-blindness of whiteness but in doing so have they been accused of reproducing the very-same distinctions (Chen 2017; Satzewich and Liodakis 2010).

Race, here mainly addressed in relation to white race, affects people's experiences depending on the social context differently (Proudford and Nkomo 2006; Fechter 2016; Leonard 2010). Whiteness continues to be associated with power in Asian societies, but its significance and influence have altered and diversified, especially since the dawn of globalisation. Europeans in Asia, then, constituted a prototypical example of (white) colonialists.

India was under the British crown, as were tiny but strategically important centres of trade and infrastructure in the region, among them Singapore. The bulk of Southeast Asia was divided between Dutch, Spanish and French (and later US and to a very limited extent German and Portuguese) supremacy. Japan was the rising Asian power in the region and for a long time the only one (excluding Thailand which, though not officially colonized, was regarded as neutral territory by the British) to defy Western colonial power. In 1853 however, the "black ships" and with them US landing in Japan ended Japanese hegemony on the continent (Krieger 2003).

[8]Scholars have argued that multiculturalism has encouraged avoidance rather than acknowledgement of white privilege and racial inequality. Platt (1992) for instance argued that multiculturalism conceptualises race as universal and thus does not allow for a racial analysis of structural inequality. Neoliberalism, for its part, blames failure on the individual and has been used as an argument to downplay or negate the persistence of structural (racial) inequality (Robbins 2009).

Over the Meiji period and the early twentieth century, Japan adopted a complex, ambiguous position towards the West and white people. Ching (2006) and Iida (1997) have discussed how Japan in the process of modernisation attempted to distinguish itself from an 'inferior' Asia while at the same time perceiving itself as inferior in relation to Western hegemonic powers. As a result, an ambivalent Japanese identity emerged. In the post-war decades, surveys found that Westerners are the preferred foreign ethnicity in Japan. Nevertheless, according to a survey cited by Debnár (2016), Japanese citizens, asked to hierarchically classify themselves in comparison to other ethnicities, more often than not feel superior rather than inferior when they compare themselves to Westerners.

In Singapore and other postcolonial Southeast Asian states, Europeans and white people occupied the top of the social hierarchy for a long time. At the same time, and similar to Japan, whites were also seen as non-citizens. This is despite the fact that Europeans have constituted a significant minority among the category "Other" among Singaporean citizens in the second half of the 20th century. While in colonial Singapore whiteness had primarily signalled political power and a temporary sojourn in the country for administrative duties, in post-colonial Singapore white people appeared in forms of corporate managers, again mostly on a temporary basis. Their presence thus did not break the continuity of privilege and power: The business elite replaced the colonialists and reproduced their forebears' lives by settling in segregated, luxurious expatriate communities (e.g. Meier 2006; Beaverstock 2011).

It is necessary to look at the term "expatriate" here more closely. An expatriate is understood as an employee on a home-country contract who is sent abroad for a previously determined period of time on a corporate assignment. The contract usually

specifies re-integration into the parent company after his or her return. Highly paid and receiving all kinds of benefits, expatriates are often associated with an elite or privileged status (e.g. Andresen, Bergdolt and Margenfeldt 2013; Colic-Peiscer 2010). Scholars find that the limited duration of the assignment, usually 2 - 3 years, discourages many expatriates to invest time into studying the host country language or socialising with locals (Peltokorpi and Froese 2011; Whitehill 1991; Ford and Honeycutt 1992).

Examining the geographical direction of expatriate assignments foregrounds postcolonial legacies. Cohen (1977:77) claimed that "expatriates in the post-colonial world are less and less merely private persons abroad […] Their organisational attachments are a major influence on their behaviour, and on their ecological, institutional and social accommodation abroad." More recent studies confirm this (e.g. Findlay et al 1996; Beaverstock 2005). Beaverstock (2002; 2011) illustrates in his research on British expatriates in Singapore that expatriate managers mostly socialise with the host-country's international expatriate community where they can communicate in English and share similar living conditions.

In sum, scholars illustrate how an affluent lifestyle, concerns over status, networking opportunities and a similar cultural background allow and induce expatriates to socialise in international communities of similar living standard. This lifestyle shelters them from many hardships other foreigners encounter and therefore enables them to fully concentrate on their job. At the same time, it denies deeper involvement with the host society (e.g. ibid; Yeoh and Khoo 1998; Yeoh and Willis 2005; Lundström 2014; Meier 2006; Fechter and Walsh 2010; Cohen 1977; Peltokorpi and Froese 2009).

The brief outline on expatriates demonstrates that they differ substantially from the subjects of this study. Generation Erasmus do not have elite status, financial benefits and are not on a definite assignment abroad on a home-country contract. More importantly, however, the label “expatriate” is not neutral and more than “post-colonial”, it is racially imbued. A special issue of the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies (2010) engages with expatriates’ postcolonial identities in cities like Dubai and Hong Kong. Coles and Walsh (2010) for instance argue that religious differences between the Emirati locals in Dubai and British expatriates act as a barrier for socialising, especially after 9/11 and Britain’s recent immigration history. Leonard (2010) attributes the societal divisions to the interlinkages of race and colonialism rather than religion. In her study on Caucasian Westerners in Hong Kong she concisely supposes that “all white expatriates are to some extent positioned by the legacy of empire” (ibid:1260).

Such studies point to the underlying association of “expatriate” with “white” and “Western.” They confirm the segregation of Western (and white) expatriate communities and demonstrate that even in the 21st century race still matters. Importantly, segregation and alienation are two-way processes. Research on Westerners in Asia confirm this. In expatriate studies, given the business perspective, the notion of knowledge transfer is inherent. What Said (1978) coined Orientalism almost half a century ago is still very much relevant to the contemporary Western perception of Asia and Asians. Western expatriates use the rhetoric of Asia as a late developing region and thus the need to implement business development top-down. Similar notions also surface in expatriates’ accounts on their interactions with and notions of Asians. They portray Asian societies as more traditional, exotic, sometimes religious than what they see as the opposite, their Western background and its roots in Enlightenment, democracy and individualism (e.g.

Lundström 2014). This can lead to both, a hegemonic attitude as well as one of admiration and fascination. In either case, such orientalist discourse leads to an othering and the construction of boundaries that prove hard to overcome.

Al Ariss (2013) seizes the problem of terminology. He critiques the binary distinction between the somehow elite and racialised term "expatriate" and the stigmatised term "migrant." Andresen et al. (2013) add insights from an international business perspective, a field that has often enough dissociated its focus phenomenon expatriates from the more sociological and political term migrants. The authors investigate the underlying assumptions that have led to the black-and-white distinction between the two. They find that among the more tangible criteria of distinction are the question of citizenship of the host country, the motivation for relocation and the disciplinary perspective. The authors identify the concept of expatriation as looking at the crossing of borders in an organisational context, whereas the concept of migration focuses on the more general context of crossing geographical borders. Therefore, the former is mainly studied by economists and scholars of international human resource management, targeting highly educated people who are sent abroad as managers or specialists by their companies (Findlay et al. 1996). In contrast, migration research is often equalled to studying less educated or poor people who see the need to relocate rather than the opportunity to choose (Andresen et al. 2013).

2.2.2 Intersectional Approaches to Western Migrants in Asia

The literature on Westerners' presence in postcolonial Asia underlines the need to carefully reflect on the different terms and to question the uncritical adoption of the

label "expatriate" in order not to fall into slippages that mark racial, cultural or class-based notions of demarcation. Despite such calls the association of white people abroad with the term "expatriates" and non-whites abroad with the label "migrants" sticks. Even in non-postcolonial contexts, whites have "odd feeling[s]" when they are labelled migrants (Lundström 2014:149).

It is therefore welcoming to see recent studies on Europeans or Westerners in Asia referring to their subjects as "migrants" (e.g. Collins 2016; Lan 2011; Tzeng 2010). Globalisation has changed movements in the context of both home and host country and scholars recognise a more heterogeneous group of moving subjects from Western countries to Asia. Also, the image of foreign business people has changed in Singapore, Hong Kong and Chinese first tier cities in recent years. With policies to welcome 'global talent' (Goh 2009), Singapore has attracted a more diverse group of foreign professionals with a rising share of ethnic Asians. Moreover, China's rapidly growing influence on world business and Singapore's close ties to the People's Republic of China have unsettled white people's undisputed status in these Asian countries (e.g. Ye and Kelly 2011; Farrer 2018).

In this respect, research on the intersections of gender, sexuality, race and class are significant for their attempt to explain how such complexities have caused dominance to endure (Twine and Gallagher 2008; Leek and Kimmel 2015). Several qualitative studies highlight the continuity of racial privilege but also, disputing the very same, its loss and contestation. Farrer (2011) for example argues the continuing dominance of global whiteness by his study of "ethnosexual encounters" between whites, Chinese Americans and Chinese in Shanghai nightclubs. He finds a competition between racialised masculinities, where white men's "economic and national status" (Farrer 2011:756)

grants them popularity with local women. And yet, only a minority of women are attracted to white men. Those who can afford the exclusive VIP areas in Chinese clubs and enjoy the highest status are the newly rich young Chinese men. This is a powerful account of the local implications of a changing global power balance.

Debnár (2015a; 2015b; 2016) offers another. His examination of non-managerial white Europeans in Japan points to a loss of privilege. Many white migrants end up in precarious or unpromising careers. Only a few "immigrant niches" such as teaching English – a low-status, unstable and decreasingly well-paid occupation – offer relatively easy access to jobs, a finding that positions the white migrants on a similar level as other immigrant groups. While Debnár is clear about these Europeans' positive discrimination in many non-occupational aspects of life, he also problematises such a questionable privilege. Some of the migrants want to settle in Japan but their continued Othering by Japanese society nourishes disappointment and ambivalence.

More complex even is white women's position in Asia (Fechter 2016; Lundström 2014; Leonard 2010; Napier and Taylor 2002). Studying Euro-American women in Indonesia, Fechter (2016) portrays these women's ambiguous empowerment: They enjoy a certain status as well-paid corporate employees but their femininity is challenged by a perceived reduced sexual desirability among their male foreign counterparts. The author claims that orientalist discourses "feminise both Asian men and women" (Fechter 2016:69) and at the same time cast masculine qualities on these Western women in Indonesia.[9] Similar arguments have been put forward by Lan (2011) on Taiwan and Kelsky (2001) on Japanese women and white men.

[9] See also Cheng (1999) on a discussion of "Marginalized Masculinities and Hegemonic Masculinity."

Here, Lundström's (2014) comparative study of Swedish women in Spain, the US and Singapore is illuminating. The women's whiteness is contextual and situational with different meanings in each country. While the women are upper-class in both the US and Singapore, and in the latter case live in typical affluent expatriate communities, whiteness is not hegemonic in Singapore. Lundström strikingly illustrates how the Swedish do not represent normative whiteness in this Southeast Asian context, as this status is reserved to Eurasians (ibid:120). White Swedish women, on the contrary, are "deviant" (ibid:116) and do not consider themselves beautiful or attractive, a finding that echoes Lan's (2011) and Fechter's (2016) arguments.

From a slightly different view but with insights of high value in terms of the migrant group in focus, Knowles (2015) portrays young British migrants who swap London with Beijing. These youth, displaced by dim job opportunities and incremental living costs in London forge their way to unstable, less comfortable but temporarily more satisfying lives in the idealised *hutongs*, the residential area of Beijing's old and narrow back streets. Here, too, the postcolonial still matters. Migrants' narratives are full of orientalist imaginations: the *hutongs* as nostalgic symbols of Chinese tradition and culture and the old way of life. Whiteness is a subjective as well as objective marker which entails that they live "beside rather than in [the Chinese community]" (ibid:10). However, these highly educated but very young group of independent migrants are insecure and anxious and have to navigate border controls as other migrants do. This stands in contrast to the "transnational capitalist class" (Sklair 2001) who is often thought of as white and privileged. It rather supposes, in line with the idea of this dissertation, that the new European generation of a globalised world emigrates

from a very different situation and maybe with points of view quite different from their forebears.

With reference to such recent contributions from migration studies, I decided to adopt the inclusive term migrants for the subjects of this dissertation. I do however use the term (young) Europeans interchangeably since I argue that they represent a group which, although internally diverse, can be conceptualised along a few common parameters. Race, though most of my informants are in fact Caucasian, is not part of these determinants nor was it a requirement for recruitment.

In focus of this dissertation are rather migrants' upbringing and socialisation as middle-class EU millennials, as outlined above and explained in more detail in chapter four. Before graduation from university, the young adults either experienced mobility themselves or internalised it as something normative. This shapes their rationale when they weigh their options on the enlarged EU labour market.

Undeniably, none of the available terms can be employed neutrally. My reasoning for the use of the term migrants is the baseline distinction of them crossing national (and other) borders – primarily for work, not leisure - as opposed to those who do not. This is what drew my attention to them as a migrant group. On the contrary, I did not set out to study a postcolonial phenomenon, or write a dissertation embedded in critical whiteness studies, which would have been a possible, yet different approach to this study. This is not to say I ignore or reject the significance of race or post-colonialism. As above literature shows, both concepts do matter, and using the literature review as a theoretical grounding scholarship helps me to analyse participants' narratives. However, as I will argue in the last section of this chapter, my perspective, coming from a generational

migration phenomenon that is rooted in new forms of mobility, enables me to ask new questions and look at the social phenomenon at stake from a fresh perspective.

On a second note, most of my informants did not mention either of the two terms expatriate or migrant. In Singapore, “expatriate” has become fairly common among ‘skilled’ visa holders, including non-Caucasians, and a few interviewees referred to themselves as such. More often, however, informants described their workplace and their reasons for living abroad rather than applying a distinct categorical term for themselves and their way of living. They seemed to avoid the two stigmatised terms expatriates and migrants. This avoidance, I suggest, is an important sign of their ambiguous feelings about labels and race and an issue I will return to throughout the dissertation.

2.3 A Corrective to the Post-colonial Lens

How do the two bodies of literature – atypical migration with its innovative conceptualisation of mobility as “worklife pathways” on the one hand and the changing notion of whiteness and the West in European migration patterns to Asia – contribute to this study? My thesis is that bringing together these different theoretical strands allows for a new perspective on the migration phenomenon at stake. Sooudi (2008:97) contends that Japanese lifestyle migrants’ “desire for salvation - from a mediocre life” brought them to New York. I suggest that individualisation theory and its derivative concept of the “chosen biography” (Beck 1994) can illuminate the mechanisms which produced an attitude towards actively shaping and altering one’s life path.

The demolition, critique and redefinition of many of the social institutions that defined and stabilised life in modernity has increased people's reflexivity and awareness of new risks. It was individualisation and choice that came with reflexive modernity. Choice causes insecurity. Reflexive individuals are responsible for their actions regardless the outcome. Reflexive individuals, then, manage life like a project, including all consequences of success and failure (Beck 1992).

In a neoliberal logic, such rhetoric has led to a constant search for the better, making efforts and sacrifices, a celebration of creativity, novelty, and flexibility. New attitudes not only towards managing oneself but also towards work have proliferated. Entrepreneurialism and start-ups are keywords, and new work styles such as remote work and the "boundaryless career" (Arthur 1994) feature prominently. In sum, the more self-initiative the better. It is not surprising then that one of the many outcomes of such "chosen biographies" (Beck 1994) – and one of the potential answers to (the need or attraction of) distinguishing oneself, improving one's life, and constructing one's own unique personal life project – is migration. Subsumed under the collective term "lifestyle migrants", an impressive number of new studies has depicted middle-class, highly educated, often young movers. While they choose to migrate this is not merely out of leisure considerations or because they reject capitalism.

A Eurocentric approach, using concepts developed within and for the situation in Europe or the West cannot adequately explain the situation in Asia. It risks, as Beck (2016) notes, to simply reproduce Western hegemonic ideas and to fall into methodological nationalist frames (or regionalist, for this matter). It is, however, important to acknowledge recent developments in Europe in order to understand the roots of the young Europeans' migration to Asia. In chapter four, I elaborate on social,

economic and political changes as they were unfolding in the European Union along with this youth's childhood and socialisation by European institutions. This approach enables me to link their upbringing to the motivations to move to Asia and to identify commonalities and variances within the group.

While the West went through a time of questioning many of those values and institutions that had defined its leading role in the past, reflexive modernity took a different form in East Asia. From various angles authors studied features of "compressed modernity" in Southeast Asian and East Asian countries (Chang 2010). Chang and Song argue (2010) that individualisation took place without individualism in Korea. Zhang, Yeoh, and Ramdas (2017:7) depict neoliberal "self-fashioning" as a strategy and attitude of a flexible skilled workforce in Singapore and both Ong (2008) and Hoffmann (2008) demonstrate how highly educated Chinese' reflexive practices of managing the professional self do not undermine but emerge along with socialist authoritarianism.

Soysal (2015) suggests that a transnational perspective has the potential to unravel changing practices, social and political transformations in East Asian societies. She argues that it is necessary not to treat East and West as binary and as global and national respectively as it has been done all too often. In an edited volume, Soysal and colleagues unravel such transformations from a range of perspectives. For instance, Nakano (2015) demonstrates how women in East Asian cities contest some of the gendered and marital social norms. Specifically on migration, Skrentny and Lee (2015:131) claim that "East Asian states do not succeed in preserving some presumed ethnic homogeneity" (as in the case of Japan and South Korea), "nor does their particular mix of ethnicities remain unchallenged" (as in the case of Singapore and

Taiwan). As such, it is necessary to acknowledge "the individualization of life-course strategies" (Soysal 2015:9) as it takes place in both European and Asian countries as well as in the transnational spaces in-between.[10] What do unfolding individualisation tendencies in the West but also their Asian equivalents tell us about new possible life projects? Liu-Farrer and Yeoh (2018:6) speak of a "flourishing of new patterns of migration" in the Asian context. Exercising mobility and independence, for instance in the course of a move to Asia, could open up new ways for managing the self. With the help of the comparative case of Singapore and Tokyo, this study will attempt to illuminate the context-dependent outcomes of such mobility.

Beck (2016) suggests that an increasing number of those who are young and middle-class, which matches the Europeans of this dissertation, are more likely to be self-reflexive and adopt a "cosmopolitan vision," because they face global risks such as poverty even though they are highly educated. Cosmopolitanism expresses an orientation of "willingness to engage with the Other" (Hannerz 1990:239), which involves plural others and therefore not just one specific alien idea or people. Vertovec and Cohen's (2002:13) definition of cosmopolitanism as a practice which involves the "personal ability to make one's way into other cultures, through listening, looking, intuiting and reflecting" (Vertovec and Cohen 2002:13) might be helpful to explain these European migrants' dispositions. In Young, Diep and Drabble's (2006:1688) words, a cosmopolitan can be thought of as someone with a "set of competences or skills based on an ability to engage with otherness." This should however not detract from the alienation of the cosmopolitan experience. As Hannerz (1996) points out,

[10] While I use British English in this dissertation, many of the disciplinary terms are more commonly used in American English. When I quote directly, quotes are in the original spelling as used by the author. Thus, some inconsistencies may arise throughout the dissertation. Furthermore, Singapore and Japan differ in their use of American and British English and thus I adopted context-specific terms at times.

“there may be a feeling of detachment, perhaps irritation with those committed to the local common sense and unaware of its arbitrariness (ibid:110).”

The young Europeans in focus here, being reflexive of global changes around the world, might feel pressure to distinguish themselves, to live up to the cosmopolitan, mobile, unique or creative ideal along which they have been raised and have received higher education. Asia, then, could be both a path to ‘glory’ and an escape, a way to differentiate oneself from the masses but also a way to escape others’ judgement, for instance concerning employment in the familiar European labour market and being an adult in contemporary Western societies. The young Europeans who migrate to Asia seem to fit into this discourse on individualisation and the “chosen” biography as they do on the neoliberal management of the self. How do they consider, imagine, plan and rationalise their mobility decisions and practices?

At the point of raising such questions, one needs to recognise the context of the destination countries. After all, motivations and reasons for migratory decisions have their origin in a range of factors embedded in both the countries of origin and the destination countries, including economic factors, quality of life, but also images, cultural appeals, and the like (e.g. Fujita 2009; Knowles 2015; Nagatomo 2014).

Given European powers’ imperialist endeavours, the colonial history and artificial distinctions of East and West in an orientalist fashion, it is clear that postcolonial history does matter. Europeans, in their geographical mobility to Asia, enter a realm where postcolonial power structures persist and where their nationality, ethnicity, race and class matter in different ways than they do in Europe. As I discussed above, authors have rightly addressed the varying meanings and enactments of whiteness in postcolonial settings. Such research has contributed insights of tremendous value to our

understanding of the production and perpetuation of inequalities as well as circumstances in which race is contested by contextual and situational intersections with other social categories.

This unravels the complexity of the power structures these young Europeans enter in the Asian global cities. While they hold Western passports and most of them are white, two critical components of (historically) conferred status, power and privilege, they are also young, inexperienced in the job, and have limited social and economic capital. How do these complexities play out in the migratory decision making, the process of moving and settling in, but also over time as migrants in the host society? I hold the point that in the light of reflexive modernity and the need to "choose" and "manage the self", a mobility perspective, operationalised by the "worklife pathway" concept, helps to understand the empirical phenomenon I observed.

To put it differently, while I recognise race and inherent power structures, I do not adopt a racial lens to analyse my data. A number of insightful studies have done so and I do not wish to pose the same questions and again to provide a similar discussion (e.g. Fechter 2016; Lundström 2014; Lan 2011; Leonard 2010; Tzeng 2010). Nor do I ignore the significance of the context, Asian global cities, or study this group with the hegemonic claim to apply theories developed in or for Europe in the 'periphery' as it is all too often done (Calhoun 2010). Rather, I follow Beck who postulates that to research the global we have to adopt an approach of "reflexive cosmopolitanization" (2016:260). A cosmopolitan sociology, then, attends to the risks in contemporary societies across the globe without denying or overlooking the differences between (East) Asian and European risk society.

What does this mean for young Europeans' migration to Asia in the realm of the social, cultural, political and economic transformations in both Europe and Asia in 21st century? Over the course of the following chapters, I suggest that the distinctive characteristics of the particular group have led these youth to adopt mobility as a tool, and increasingly as part of their identity, to respond to and navigate life in reflexive modernity. Asia, and its global cities in particular, constitute the place where realising oneself, one's life project, seems possible. They offer the labour market conditions, living standard, and socio-cultural contexts to distinguish oneself. At the same time Asia allows these youth to be different but does so without the need to exit from a career and the ideals of their middle-class upbringing and higher education.

Once migrants have started to put down roots, to build networks and to work on their career, the complexities of this mobility appear. Their expectations and goals, their professional and cosmopolitan aspirations and their national, ethnic, racial, class and gender identities clash and again, the perspective through which to understand their practices and strategies is one of mobility. In the following chapter I introduce the research design of this dissertation and explain how I operationalise the mobility perspective with its grounding in "worklife pathways" and the project of the self.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design: The Multi-sited Ethnography

In this subchapter, I explain my focus on Asia and, within it, on the global cities Singapore and Tokyo. While I postulate that the migration flows depicted in this study might be part of a larger phenomenon of a generational migration trend in the 21st century, the geographical component – Asia from the perspective of European migrants – and the particularities of the two destinations are necessary for the understanding of the phenomenon in focus. Recent literature on skilled migration in Europe and from Europe to Asia illustrates the emergence of unconventional migration flows to the Asian continent. Yet, it also demonstrates how little we know about these flows, especially about the younger and independent movers.

Furthermore, since most studies examine just a single location, they often generate the picture of a linear movement: Migration from one country to one other country, with the outcome of either settlement or, supposedly more typical for the case of skilled Europeans, return to their home country. The asset of choosing two migration destinations, and taking into account the movement to, from and between these and other (Asian) destinations, enables us to understand the phenomenon as a more complex and less straight-forward, or singular, form of movement. The multi-method ethnographic approach of this study enabled me to map movement patterns including certain *directions* of movement, among them intra-Asian inter-city mobilities.

The question remains why Asia, and why Singapore and Tokyo. Chapter four provides an in-depth analysis of Europeans' imaginations of, touchpoint to and eventual motivation for moving to Asia. Here, it suffices to point to a shared *European*

perspective among the migrants. The destinations appeal to the young Europeans in a similar way. Those cities' attractiveness, as I show below, lies in the images of an 'exotic' far-away continent and, at the same time, favourable conditions for migration. Singapore and Tokyo might well represent other aspiring global Asian cities which form part of the net that spans Asia and links them to other nodes around the globe. Other qualitative studies and my data illustrate the flow of Europeans to not only Singapore and Tokyo but also other centres in Asia and beyond. Shanghai and Hong Kong are often mentioned in the same context, but Dubai, Taipei and Beijing are among the other destinations that have received a temporary influx of young, highly educated but independently-moving European migrants (e.g. Lan 2011; Knowles 2015; Leonard 2010; Tzeng 2010; Stanley 2013; Collins 2016).

I suggest that a comparative research design can best reveal the process of Europeans' physical mobility across Asia. Furthermore, this approach allows to identify common patterns and links between the destination cities. Firstly, images of places (Urry and Larsen 2011) are salient when it comes to potential migrants' destinations. Later, (un)met expectations in the new host country inform migrants' plans and influence their long-term trajectories. At that time, the bonds migrants develop to people and places and networks and established routes *between* these places again affect their decisions and plans towards future mobility. Last but most important, the comparison highlights the significance of place and by this the problems Japan as an 'immigrant country' in the making faces with incorporating skilled migrants in its labour market.

The mobility perspective thus enables the researcher to discern variances among the Europeans. Different localities appeal to the young migrants in different ways. The approach captures the generational migration phenomenon as part of broader social

processes, that is, as a phenomenon of young Europeans' individualisation in the increasingly precarious post-Lehman shock era. As the cases of Singapore and Tokyo reveal, individualisation and the quest for more rewarding life paths becomes possible for everyone in different socio-cultural and economic contexts. The methodological choice thus directs the focus of the study: The dissertation does not concentrate on migrants' integration in the host society but aims at understanding a phenomenon that is difficult to grasp because it cannot be situated in one migration destination only. Neither is it enough to only look at the linkages between country of origin and country of destination. Rather, we can understand Asia through the role it plays in these Europeans' eyes: as a continent geographically and culturally distant from their origins, and thus, as counterpart to 'familiar' Europe (see chapter four).

Singapore and Tokyo represent almost two opposite poles in terms of composition of society and immigration history. Singapore is a young immigrant country which recognises four major ethnic groups and presents itself as multicultural, multiracial, multilingual and multi-religious. Immigration is intertwined with the city-state's history and given its lack of natural resources labour migration is one of the main pillars of the national economy (Velayutham 2007). Since its independence from Britain, the country has struggled to define its nation and create a national identity. People, including my informants, often call Singapore a city-state, a term which underlines the tiny state's standing in the world. At the same time, however, it contributes to the image of Singapore as an attractive cosmopolitan city, particularly in comparison to Japan, which has a stronger national character. Tokyo is the capital of Japan, rich in history, and Japan, a country that has for long denied – and still denies – immigration (Roberts 2018). Japan has often claimed homogeneity of its population. Furthermore, there is its 200-

year history of seclusion from other countries as well as its pride of being the first developed country in Asia and the only Eastern power until recently. This fostered a strong national consciousness but also difficulties with dealing with anything "foreign" (e.g. Iida 1997; Ching 2007).

Despite these differences, Singapore and Tokyo have something in common if we look at the two cities from an outsider, particularly form a European perspective. In brief and elaborated in chapter four, Europe has a history of othering Asia in both negative and positive terms. The European civilisation traces its roots to the Greek and Roman empires and later developed a narrative of Enlightenment and democratic values. Imperialism and colonialism stabilised European domination. With the horrors of the World Wars in the back of their minds, post-war European leaders advocated Europeanisation and human rights but the Eurocentric perspective, especially on the periphery, has stuck.

One of the keywords in this discourse - positively coined but not unquestionable - is exoticism. Exotic Asia, like different, unfamiliar and unknown Asia, has always attracted Europe and Europeans like a magnet. Singapore is tropical and multicultural and Tokyo allegedly more homogeneous but both are often portrayed as inherently different from Europe (Said 1978; Barthes 1983; Clifford 1997; Werbner and Modood 1997). Arguably, Singapore and Japan adopted European institutional models and use of European languages in various spheres of life.[11] However, this has neither led to

[11] Singapore, as a former British colony, has adopted numerous British bureaucratic structures as well as English as one of its four official languages (e.g. Turnbull 2009; Velayutham 2007). Japan has drawn from Western civilisation for its own modernisation (Iida 1997). Examples range from its first modern constitution, medicine and military as well as the high arts, especially classical music (e.g. Jansen 2000; Beasley 1995).

replacing their own official language by European languages nor have they predominantly adopted European religions or value systems.

In the aim of nation building, Singaporean and Japanese statesmen have sought to differentiate themselves from Western countries and stressed their "Asian" or "Confucian" roots.[12] As a matter of fact, traditions, religion, familial relationships and the like are practiced quite differently than in Western (Christian) civilisation. From a European perspective, then, Singaporean and Japanese social and cultural everyday life appear to be 'unfamiliar.' Asia as a construct of 'traditional' versus 'sophisticated', which is particular prominent in Europe's image of Japan, attracts Europeans' attention even nowadays.

What makes cities like Singapore and Tokyo stand out then is what Europeans consider to be an intriguing contradiction. In Eurocentric eyes, the cities' features of the supposedly 'traditional' Other co-exist with an (often referred to as Western) capitalist system, sophisticated labour market, strong economy, cutting-edge institutions, technology and infrastructure, and architecture, subcultures and arts projects that from a European perspective look futuristic or peculiar (e.g. Barthes 1983; Iwabuchi 2002; Chang 2000). While we need to question the cause of such othering, the continuance of the orientalising discourse among highly educated, European millennials requires to analyse how such preconceptions affect their lives in Asia.

From an economic point of view, cities like Singapore and Tokyo appeal with their strong economies. Drawing from both official statistics on competitiveness, regional significance and living standard, Tokyo, followed by Hong Kong and Singapore, are frequently mentioned as the leading Asian cities (Poreisz and Ramhap

[12] For a discussion on Asian values and the capitalist development in Singapore see Wee (2007). On Japan and its position within Asia and vis-à-vis the West, see Ching (2006).

2014:6; Sassen 1991). While Tokyo and Hong Kong are referred to as the traditional economic centres in Asia, Singapore has more recently gained attention as an emerging financial and global hub (Poreisz and Ramhap 2014:13).

Despite its newcomer image, Singapore, next to South Korea, is the only Asian country that has a Free Trade Agreement with the European Union in place and there are more than 11,000 European companies in Singapore (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore 2016). Recently, the European Union established one of its Enterprise Europe Networks (EEN) in Singapore which declares its aim to "promote and assist businesses, technology and research and development partnerships between Singapore and European companies" (Enterprise Europe Network Singapore 2016). While expanding its services to several Asian cities, the EEN does not have an office in Hong Kong. Moreover, concerns over Hong Kong's growing dependence on mainland China and its socio-political stability have become louder (Financial Times 2017), whereas Singapore is regarded as a politically neutral – and thus more reliable – gateway to Asia (ibid; Tang and Bache 2015).

Another aspect to consider is Singapore's and Tokyo's widely praised quality of life. Both cities have significantly less pollution and more green spaces than most other financial hubs, especially rising Chinese cities, as well as Hong Kong (e.g. ibid; Poreisz and Ramhap 2014; Hu and Zhou 2013). These are important factors for prospective migrants, and as my data analysis shows, young Europeans put high emphasis on environmental and health issues in their migratory decisions. Thus, while Hong Kong, Singapore and Tokyo are, followed by others, the attractive cities in terms of economic performance and centrality in the region, many Europeans might consider Singapore, similar to Tokyo, as one of the most appealing destinations in terms of lifestyle, safety,

political stability and, in the light of expansion of interregional trade, employment opportunities.

Finally, Singapore and Tokyo are always listed among the top in rankings on 'Global City Competitiveness'. Typical indicators for their competitiveness are economic strength, human capital, institutional effectiveness, financial maturity, global appeal, physical capital, social and cultural character and environment and natural hazards (Florida 2012; Hu, Blakely, and Zhou 2013). In sum, these aspects render the two cities suitable and *accessible* cases to study European skilled migration to Asia – despite Asian 'global cities'' internal differences and the two cities marking opposite poles – under the overarching frame of a regionally defined migratory phenomenon.

3.2 Methods Application: Field Work and Analysis

My methodological and theoretical approach to this study was informed by grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Grounded theory was first proposed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 with the aim to overcome preconceptions and construct theory by a constant conversation with data. I am referring to grounded theory here in the way I approached the field and organized data collection alongside analysis. As outlined by later developments and refinements of Glaser′s and Strauss′ original work, this cyclical method of data gathering, coding, integration and re-current periods of field work allows the researcher to develop her own theory which is firmly grounded in the original data (Weiss 1994; Marvasti 2004; Strauss 1987). As such, it helps to avoid the hasty adoption of grand theories without their proper fit or at the cost of failing to

integrate new concepts that could potentially develop the theoretical understanding of the phenomenon at stake (Strauss 1987:13-14).

Grounded theory thus encourages researchers to be creative and consider bold angles to a topic that might have become deadlocked by one dominant, and possibly limiting, theoretical focus. Given the fact that theory is developed in the research process rather than issuing the initial hypotheses, grounded theory is sometimes misunderstood and charged with a lack of structure and thus questionable explanatory power (Strauss 1987:8). It is therefore important to stress the solid framework that guided the data collection, analysis and writing process.

I entered the field with my observation that there existed a migratory phenomenon of young Europeans in Asian cities that has barely been documented. I was inspired by Sooudi's (2014) ethnographic approach. The author embedded her ethnographic field work with the larger frame of Japanese modernity, which enabled her to uncover step-by-step how Japanese lifestyle migrants' in New York follow cultural logics that need to be understood within Japanese nation-building processes.

In the case of the Europeans in Asia, the fact that the migrants in focus of my study were young and worked on local contracts in the Asian host societies led me to assume that they might have very different motivations to migrate and probably different (work) migratory experiences than their senior counterparts, the Western (and among them European) business expatriates and diplomates who up till then dominated the research on Westerners in Asia. This assumption guided my early field work and raised a broad range of questions. While being aware of the potential significance of "traditional variable[s] such as age, sex, class, race" (Strauss 1987:32) for European emigration the grounded approach allowed me to stay open for other less obvious

variables. Over time this method bore fruits as the continued data collection, follow-ups and multi-sited ethnographic observations enabled me to generate the thesis of a new trend of millennial labour mobility.

In fact, the data brought to the fore the significance of mobility which I had initially not considered, probably because it had not been used in the study of Western migration to Asia. From earlier studies on Westerners in Asia, which broadly followed a postcolonial approach, I expected to find issues of settlement, return or lifestyle migration as a causal explanation of these Europeans' postcolonial identity formation in Asia. However, my ongoing field work and simultaneous analysis pointed to the role which mobility started to play along migrants' evolving pathways abroad. More than that, the data did not negate obvious issues like race, ethnicity and gender. I rather agree with Wimmer (2009:244) to treat these variables as "*explanandum*, as a variable outcome of specific processes to be analytically uncovered and empirically specified." This enabled me to identify, over the course of recurrent data acquisition, open coding and later theoretical coding, another missing link in understanding these migrants' dispositions: the key concept of the millennial generation.

My main method were qualitative, semi-structured interviews. In contrast to the statistical value of data gained by quantitative methods, qualitative interviews allow the researcher to obtain information of more "depth" and "density" (Weiss 1994:3). This is a strong method if one wants to analyse data for the meaning of people's practices and rationales and enables us to better understand processes. I adopted a life history approach in order to allow for rich accounts and gain a detailed insight on informants' backgrounds, their experiences and changing life plans. Hence, I asked interviewees to briefly describe their upbringing, their household and education and to later become

more specific about their study choices and earlier mobility experiences. I then turned to issues of migratory decision making, the process of moving and settling in and the work experience as well as life in general in the host society. After the first interviews I had an idea of several major issues which I sorted and coded with the help of the qualitative software programme NVIVO 11.

With these concepts in mind I re-entered the field and found that newly acquired data pointed to the need of more selective codes. In a sequential process each finding and concept added on and helped to determine the next steps. I added questions, probed on the meanings behind fleetingly mentioned comments and labels and arrived at higher level concepts which allowed for theoretical sampling (Corbin and Strauss 2008:57). This dynamic research method turned into a cyclical process and brought to light complex causation and threads between concepts which a theoretically informed or linear approach is unlikely to generate (ibid; Weiss 1994).

The issues of gender and race are suitable to demonstrate the utility of such cyclical approach. As the literature review in chapter two demonstrated, European migration to Asia is overwhelmingly framed as "white migration", and more often as male than female migration. Lundström's (2014) study of whiteness in Swedish women's migration or Debnár's (2015a; 2016) research on whiteness and cosmopolitanism of Europeans in Japan are recent examples of innovative approaches to deconstruct the stereotypical image of Europeans in Asia.

Lundström (2014), in her comparison of three field sites U.S., Singapore and Spain, is deeply interested in how whiteness is contextually perpetuated, transformed or contested. The comparative angle allows to offset the simplistic argument of whiteness as privilege and offers a more nuanced understanding of its changing meanings

depending on the varying socio-cultural, historical and class factors in each country. However, as Lundström (2014: 2) approached the field with the objective to study "how extensions of whiteness are played out in Swedish transnational migration", she does not allow for other potential interpretations of these women migrants' experiences and reflexivity. Had I chosen to design my study along this more common line of postcolonialism and race, I would most likely not have noted the identity-shaping role of mobility for the European millennial generation.

Debnár (2014), on the other hand, starting out from an inductive approach, is conscious of whiteness but also migrants' middling position affecting their experiences in Japan. Interested in Europeans' integration in the host country, his diversion from his initial method and his move to an exponential discriminatory-sampling strategy enabled him to reject whiteness as a universal category. In fact, migrants' experiences partly diverge depending on for instance gender or the European region they originate from. As such, his methodological choice allowed for a more informed analysis of integration-related aspects.

My objective for this dissertation is somewhat different from that of the two cited studies. It is neither a theoretically driven study of whiteness in contemporary contexts (see Lundström) nor one of a European 'diaspora in Japan' which includes Europeans across ages and generations but framed by one country context (see Debnár). Following my informants' trajectories over a time of up to four years and across two field sites allowed me to contextualize and position the phenomenon as not migration per se – thus as linear or one-off event – but a mobility trend with multiple and diverse outcomes.

As that, the chapters could be read separately and inform about specific issues in the migratory process such as the motivations for moving, the access to and mobility

within the labour market, and the social networks and bonding strategies. However, read in their entirety, I aim at establishing theoretical mini-theories at the end of each chapter (Corbin and Strauss 2008) which allow to link them to a coherent mobility theory. Each chapter thus serves as piece of a puzzle, or step towards constructing the complete picture of this novel migration pattern and is necessary for arriving at a more general conclusion. I postulate that what can be observed here is the social phenomenon of middle-class millennials' – and specifically Generation Erasmus' – mobile life projects, an attempt to construct a meaningful and successful life narrative in a globalised world.

3.3 Positionality of the Researcher and Access to the Field

As a Caucasian, European young woman of middle-class background my personal profile plays an important role in my research. I grew up and experienced first-hand encounters with Singapore and Tokyo similarly to my informants. On the basis of informants' assumed mutual understanding of the conditions that shaped our shared context, conversations often evolved naturally. Furthermore, fluency in English among all of my informants considerably facilitated the research but also established an additional element of ease when interviews unfolded. Few of the participants, including myself, are native English speakers. However, European higher education and frequent travel within and beyond Europe renders English the undisputed world language and most European university graduates speak English on an intermediate level or above. Thus, speaking English to another non-native speaker, particularly someone from a shared European background, further helped me building rapport to my informants.

On the other hand, the similar background and (assumed) understanding might have impacted the subjectivity of the study, as my identity as perceived by the informants could have triggered certain topics to be raised at all or on the contrary only be implied, with the belief that sharing the same thoughts on the topic would render it unnecessary to voice them out. All narratives therefore have to be read with this notion in mind and should not be taken as complete, fully objective or representative (Weiss 1994).

Access to the people I sought to study was difficult in that they had moved independently. Company-assigned expatriates can more easily be found via expatriate clubs, as members of Chambers of Commerce or by contacting European multinationals in Asia (e.g. Findlay et al. 1996; Beaverstock 2011; Lundström 2014). However, the population I was interested in is more hidden, their existence in Asia less stable and seldom do they appear in any emigration statistics in their home countries (Nowok et al. 2006).

To find these people, I was inspired by Favell's (2008a) research on the "Eurostars", Europeans who move independently crisscross the free movement space of the EU. As Favell contends, "due to the temporary, often highly mobile modes of living across borders", to study these people you "have to do it ethno-graphically, and you have to construct your population one by one (ibid:12-13 [ebook])." Favell proceeds by first constructing a sampling frame at which he arrives from "using "subjective" on-the-ground investigation, then match this to all the different, juxtaposed "objective" representations of the population available." (ibid:12-13 [ebook]). Only then did he start interviewing, using a snowball method and later specifically sampling for those types of people who he could not access by his initial approach.

In the case of non-expatriate Europeans in Asia, such “objective representations” are even harder to retrieve than in the case of the Eurostars. Thus, the roughly 80 people who were initially part of my research cannot be held representative of European millennials in Asia. After the first set of interviews, open coding and local integration, two key categories however started to emerge, that of the millennial generation and the significance of mobility. Moving on to theoretical sampling then allowed me to frame that sub-group of the European migrant population in major Asian cities whose story the dissertation would tell: independently moving European citizens in their early career stage. This led me to concentrate on 70 core informants (see appendices I and II) whose narratives capture the range and diversity within European millennials’ labour migration pattern to Asia in the 2010s.

That said, I wish to caution against an essentialist reading of “Europeans.” As explained, this dissertation does not intend to simplistically represent Europeans as a homogeneous group or essentialise Europeans as a category of analysis. Rather, it attends to a generational group which is distinctive in its upbringing in the growing European Union. At the example of this heterogenous group, the study demonstrates how despite sometimes considerable differences in these young adults’ upbringing and domestic labour market situation, mobility emerges as a guiding narrative for constructing individual lifepaths. For some, it even becomes part of their identity.

On ground of the above outlined objectives, I deliberately excluded a few groups of young Europeans in Asia. One firm criterion that I set up for this research is the frame of the European Union and participants to be millennials with EU citizenship. As such, when turning to these millennials in Asia, I did not include Europeans outside of the EU territory or outside of the European Economic Area. This method did not only

exclude Swiss citizens – whose numbers in Asia are supposedly very small – but also female Russian entertainers and Russian women married to Japanese men who constitute a considerable subgroup among the Europeans registered in Japan (Varvara 2012). Given that Russia is a huge country which spans from East Europe to Central Asia, opinions differ if Russians should be counted as Europeans. For this study, however, the base criteria of them not having grown up with the freedom of movement in the gradually enlarging EU (or becoming EU citizens through their country's accession to the EU later on) led me to exclude their case.

A second group I did intentionally not include in this study are Europeans on spouse visa who are financially dependent on their spouse. This decision certainly excludes a range of people and needs to be seen as a limitation in terms of the significance of the sample. However, this project is interested in the meanings of European millennials' labour migration to Asia and how the work experience affects their further occupational trajectories. I therefore defined full-time work as a requirement for recruiting informants expecting that full-time work and part time jobs or unemployment considerably affect people's daily practices and strategies and future plans. As already mentioned, I followed a life course approach and acknowledged changes in people's rationales and plans over different life stages. This meant that I eventually included a few informants who had initially worked full-time and had only recently moved to part-time or self-employment because of small children.

Finally, I also decided to exclude academics from my sample. Scholars argue that mobility not only between institutions but often countries as well as the necessity to nurture an extra-organisational network are characteristics of the academic career (Richardson and McKenna 2002; Fries-Britt 2000, Welch 2007). I thus assumed that

academics' migration motivations were somewhat different from the group of what I found were mostly employees in the private sector. In order to control this assumption, I conducted an interview with a British scholar during my first field trip to Singapore. His narrative confirmed that in his field and with regards to post-doctoral fellowships his current institute was one of the few options world-wide and his entire career up to this stage had been dependent on geographical mobility. In order to sharpen my focus and concentrate on a more coherent group of professionals in the private sector I ultimately excluded this academic from the core informant group.

Qualitative research on a population that is hard to access often relies on a snowball sampling method. While snowballing is a proven method of reaching out to potential interviewees, it runs the risk of producing a highly biased picture due to its limitation to a very specific group of people (David and Sutton 2011). I thus ventured from multiple nodes into the field which meant that in all but two cases, the same gatekeeper introduced me to only one or two informants. I complemented this sampling method by approaching people at events which I visited with or without having any prior contacts. Such events included barbeque parties, dinners or home parties to which I was invited as well as official networking events in Singapore and job-hunting fairs, cultural festivals advertised in English (and thus directed at foreigners) and sports circle activities in Tokyo.

During the fieldwork, I never hid my identity as a researcher but introduced myself as a doctoral student who was doing field work on European migrants. Sometimes, people were interested in my research and inquired further. In these cases, I would explain my research design in more detail and in no instance did anyone raise objections against my role as a researcher at the respective event. In the end, the

described multiple access points and qualitative methods enabled me to study a fairly heterogeneous group whose characteristics I outline in the last part of this chapter.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with a total of 79 informants but concentrate on the data obtained from 70 core interviewees in my analysis. As explained, with a sharpening focus on the main themes of the dissertation, some interviewees turned out not to fit the sample. For instance, I learned only during the interview that a few participants worked only on an internship contract without staying for full employment in Asia or to significantly divert from the generational group in terms of life stage. As to the latter, I interviewed a woman with middle-school aged children whose daily life revolved around quite different issues than the rest of the group which led me to finally exclude her from the core informants. Nevertheless, I understand her example, similar to that of the academic interviewee, as “deviant cases” (Silverman 2005:132) which helped me to narrow down my sample and to develop the core issues of the dissertation. I stopped recruiting new informants when I reached theoretical saturation (Strauss 1987:31). As such, the number of 70 informants is a result of the flexibility of my grounded approach rather than a fixed target number.

Follow-up interviews became a substantial part of my method. The second interview generally took longer and I noticed that informants opened up more. These follow-ups provided me with crucial information on how informants’ perceptions towards living abroad and their plans changed over time and allowed me to conceptualise these Europeans’ migration as ongoing mobility. More than that, however, many informants spoke more frankly when we met the second time and thus the longitudinal approach considerably enhanced the quality of the data. In total, I conducted more than 100 in-depth interviews. This meant that I interviewed about half

of the interviewees twice with the second interview taking place after roughly two to three years, depending on the interviewee's availability. While I was not able to formally re-interview all of my informants, email, social media and casual meet-ups helped me to stay in contact and follow up informally with all but six of the 70 participants.

The interviews took place in public places such as cafes, parks or restaurants. In some cases, participants asked me to come to their workplaces or to their homes. The interviews lasted between 60 to 150 minutes and I recorded and transcribed them upon permission. Interviewees unanimously sympathised with my research and my plans to publish the findings. This also facilitated follow-ups since informants were generally supportive of my ongoing research or, as I sensed at times, needed someone to listen to their complicated trajectories. Many were thus willing to repeatedly share insights and updated me on changes at work, family life or place of residence. I use pseudonyms for all my informants and made all efforts to give a true view of their situation. That said, I sometimes altered the national affiliation of informant's firms or used a regional rather than national category if their anonymity could not be guaranteed otherwise.

Additionally, I applied strategies from online ethnography whose methods, strengths and weaknesses have recently been discussed in qualitative research.[13] Social online networks like facebook, LinkedIn and Internations did not only help me to establish initial contact with potential informants and make myself familiar with this population's networking and leisure activities but were especially valuable for follow-ups. The online method gave me a richer insight into informants' lives than possible by more conventional methods: Pictures, posts and reactions to comments on their online

[13] See for instance Figaredo et al. (2007) on the respective special issue.

profiles or blogs – while read critically as constructed representations of the self (Charmaz 2014) – revealed not only life events but also emotions and performative practices which contributed to my more nuanced understanding of informants' migration experiences.

My ethnographic approach meant that I physically experienced what it meant to be a 'foreign talent' in both cities. In Japan, I gained insights into work conditions from the perspective of a young European employee when I interned in the German Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Tokyo for half a year. While I completed the internship before starting my graduate research, the experiences I made allowed me to later develop a better understanding of informants' narratives and their experiences with transcultural workplaces in Japan. The German Chamber, a partly German government-funded, partly privately functioning corporation, employs mainly Japanese nationals who are in most cases proficient in German and/or English as well as a few German nationals. I was placed in a Japanese-only team, an experience which helped me when analysing migrants' – particularly women's – experiences in more rigid Japanese workplaces (see chapter six).

The fact that I chose a shared apartment and not a hotel as accommodation for my two field trips to Singapore opened up further fruitful encounters: The majority of my flat mates were young foreign professionals and therefore part of the interest group, and by living door to door to these people and having short conversations on a regular basis, I developed a clearer picture of their weekly schedules, their habits as well as witnessed some of their daily struggles and sorrows.

Another case worth to note was the chance to experience a foreign professional's situation in terms of immigration regulations and visa issuance: Due to myself holding a

position as research assistant at Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore, during the time of my first stay in Singapore in 2015, I obtained a Training Employment Pass. This necessitated some of the same application procedures at the Ministry of Manpower (hereafter MoM) as the Employment Pass (EP), the visa my informants in Singapore almost anonymously hold.[14] Hence, I requested an appointment at the MoM and can therefore now evaluate participants' legal situation and their treatment by government authorities as 'foreign talents' more thoroughly.

In Tokyo, I also had the opportunity to co-organize two focus groups on the workplace experience in Japan.[15] The group discussions included foreigners from different national and ethnic backgrounds (U.S., Latin America, Africa, Europe) and a female-only focus group with five women (Japanese and foreign) respectively. The discussions revealed the significance of intersections such as sex, gender, cultural background, ethnicity or language proficiency which I will discuss in detail in chapter six.

As informants in Singapore neither spoke about struggles at work and concerns over career development with the same intensity or frequency as informants in Japan nor suggested gender to matter much at the workplace, I did not conduct focus groups in

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[14] Three informants have meanwhile exchanged their EP with permanent residency (PR).

[15] The two focus groups were part of a research project on organisational logics and cultural practices at Japanese workplaces, supported by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, on which the author collaborated with the principal investigator Gracia Liu-Farrer. The first group discussion with five foreign employees from different national and ethnic backgrounds (U.S., Latin America, Africa, Europe) took place in fall 2015. The objective was to understand the large numbers of dropouts of foreign employees in Japanese firms (including foreigners), which my own qualitative interviews strongly supported. The discussion circled around foreigners' met and unmet expectations towards working in Japanese firms and accentuated not only employers' and employees' opposite expectations regarding employment and career development but also several patterns of how the young migrants reacted to the dilemma.
The second group was a female-only focus group with five women (Japanese and foreign) in 2016. My previous one-on-one interviews had revealed the gendered nature of Japanese workplaces and the project aimed at detecting deeper lying issues of female employees' experiences in male-dominated white-collar workplaces in Japan (Brinton 1993; Ueno 2013; Yamaguchi 2013; Nemoto 2016; Ho 2018). By inviting both Japanese and foreign (mostly European) women we aimed at identifying the significance of intersections such as sex, gender, cultural background, ethnicity or language proficiency.

Singapore. Rather, as explained below, I more thoroughly investigated the visa situation which more often concerned my informants in Singapore and, through my ethnographic field work, explored social relations and issues of ethnicity which repeatedly surfaced in migrants' accounts.

3.4 Selection Criteria and Profile of the Group

The 70 informants are evenly distributed over both field sites (Singapore 35, Japan 35). In both cities, men slightly outweigh women with altogether 37 men and 33 women and a male/female ratio of 19/16 in Singapore and 18/17 in Tokyo respectively. In the Japanese case, where detailed statistics on the foreign resident population are available, this ratio roughly reflects the even more uneven numbers in reality with men outweighing women for most of the EU countries (Ministry of Justice 2017c). While Singapore lacks official statistics on the foreign resident population, scholarship and public media suggest that European men in Singapore usually work full-time and are, in case they have a family, the main breadwinners. Scholarship on Europeans in China (Pieke 2012; Farrer 2011) and Hong Kong (Leonard 2010) find a similar imbalance in the sex ratio and depict women more often as trailing spouses than breadwinners. European women are generally portrayed as dependents and in fairly passive roles (e.g. Beaverstock 2011; Lundström 2014; Yeoh and Khoo 1998). Due to the scarce statistics, I addressed officials of all EU member countries' embassies in Singapore. The Portuguese and Belgium embassy, the only ones with records available, relayed that male nationals outnumbered female nationals in the city-state.

The above-mentioned recent studies on Europeans in various Asian destinations, while not able to entirely represent the European population and its demographics, also argue for changing trends in the characteristics of the European migrant population in Asia in general: Contemporary European migrants in major Asian cities tend to be younger, often recent graduates who independently search for jobs and end up working on local contracts. As such, they are middling migrants rather than necessarily the business elite or affluent diplomates (see also Knowles 2015; Hof 2018; Farrer 2018).

Instead of drawing strict age boundaries, my grounded approach, as explained above, hinted at the significance of the life stage and, even more, of the generation. This valuable finding encouraged me to adopt the generation as a unit of analysis, though not as a strict sampling criterion. With an age range from 22 - 38, migrants' life stage at the time of the first interview consequently varied. That said, as they are roughly born between 1980 and the early 1990s, they are part of the millennial generation (see chapter four) and the majority was between 25 and 35 years old when I first met them.

Generally speaking, participants were what I define as "young adults" at the time of the first interview: only roughly half of the informants were in a long-term romantic relationship and for the few with a family the children were still toddlers and thus too young to affect decisions regarding schooling or the like in the host society. Rather, one of the most important topics in participants' narratives was work and rationales towards building a career. Even those in their early to mid-thirties were still in an early career stage, moulding their professional identity and yet to reach a point of mid-career stability.

The first interviews, particularly those with South or East European informants, confirmed considerable differences within the European millennial generation. King et

al. (2016:18) called this a "different geo-economic and cultural positioning (within Europe)." While my early field work strongly pointed to the generation as a significant category for understanding these young Europeans, my insights were initially limited to Western and Southern Europeans' narratives. Thus, I sought to include Europeans from more diverse geographical areas such as Scandinavia and Eastern Europe. Comparing their narratives with those of the Western European millennials allowed to discern differences but also to identify commonalities concerning mobility patterns, social networks and identity issues as migrants in Asia.

Wimmer (2009:244), in his writing about ethnicity in immigrant societies, made a case for the danger of using ethnicity as a selection method. He instead proposes a boundary-making paradigm which "takes ethnicity as an *explanandum*, as a variable outcome of specific processes to be analytically uncovered and empirically specified (ibid)." Acknowledging his claim, I purposely excluded ethnicity *as criterion for recruitment*. Nevertheless, in the first rounds of interviews, I happened not to talk to any non-Caucasians. Thus, similar as to my theoretical sampling strategies for including Eastern Europeans and Scandinavians, I actively tried to interview at least a few non-Caucasians in the consecutive interviews. These strategies also helped me to diminish a recruitment bias on grounds of my personal networks. As a German who had studied English and French in secondary education and who had been on short-term exchange programmes or study trips to the UK and France, I was often introduced to Western-Europeans, especially French and Germans, although I did not intend to.

Interestingly, I met very few British migrants but other Europeans instead who had studied or worked in the UK. This might explain why there are no English teachers among my informants. A few studies drew attention to English teaching as an

occupational niche for native speakers who struggle to secure employment in Japan (e.g. Nagy 2017; Appleby 2014). However, my informants with neither Japanese language proficiency nor training in a sought-after field, found other jobs than English teaching. Such employment includes occupations in which the Europeans are able to work in English but do not necessarily need to be native speakers.

For instance, there are numerous head hunter firms in Japan of which a considerable part attend to foreigners (Froese and Peltokorpi 2011). Several of my informants did not only find their jobs via such head hunters but themselves worked for a limited time in recruitment companies which specialize on foreigners. While some of these informants were fluent in Japanese and the job offered a welcome change in terms of organisational management, other informants did not speak Japanese. For them, English speaking recruitment agencies were one of the few accessible occupations in Japan. With more foreigners in Japan and more firms willing to use English as working language, this seems to be a growing trend. At the same time, Nagy (2017) suggests that English teaching is no longer considered a well-paid job. For the generation in focus of this study, their narratives reveal that they try to distance themselves from the stigmatized image of the English teacher, probably a reason that pushed them into head hunting and recruitment which is more easily accepted as "professional" employment or in informants' words "doing business."

In total, participants come from eighteen EU (in one case, European but non-EU) countries.[16] I was able to interview six migrants of mixed (and thus *visibly* different)

[16] Informants' nationalities include Romanian, Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Baltic (not further specified in order to protect informants' anonymity), Greek, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Dutch, Belgian, French, German, British, Irish, Finnish, Swedish and Icelandic. Although Iceland is not a member of the European Union, it is a member of the Schengen Agreement that grants citizens of its 26 member states the same right of free movement as EU citizens and a member of the European Economic Area (Schengen Visa Info 2017).

ethnic background. Three of them have one Asian parent, two have Arabic features and one informant has an African parent. Their narratives as well as those of other “minority voices” like those of Europeans of the peripheral EU member states or homosexuals enabled me to understand the significance of ethnicity and race better and demarcate ethnicity from other influential factors such as culture, class, education system, generation and life stage. Neither can ethnicity alone account for Generation Erasmus’ mobility patterns in Asia nor can we ignore ethnic and racial issues. The situation is more complicated. The more data from interviews with millennials I gathered the more clearly I identified the context in which these youth grew up next to the life stage as an influential factor for migratory decisions.

4. Generation Erasmus' Migration Motivations

In chapter one, I introduced the subject of the dissertation and used Andras' story to document how personal and professional trajectories unfold in Asia. Specifically, Asian global cities are the places where Europeans choose to spend their early adulthood and hope to establish a professional identity. The young adults share European roots and their childhood in an enlarging European Union, two aspects which affect their later migratory decisions.

When talking about Europe in this context, I am referring to the enlarged territory of the European Union (hereafter EU) and the surrounding countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, as these countries are part of the European Economic Area and their citizens enjoy the same rights of free movement as EU citizens (European Commission 2013).[17] In the EU declaration on "What does it mean to be a European citizen?" the first among four bullet points which describe a citizen's rights reads "the right to freely move around the European Union and settle anywhere within its territory" (ibid:4). This grants European citizens (hereafter Europeans) not only the right to stay and work in any member country but also makes working visa obsolete.

In this dissertation, I use the concept of 'Generation Erasmus' to propose a new mobility phenomenon. I argue that one distinctive group within the so-called millennial generation pursues active career and lifestyle strategies through geographical mobility.

[17] The European Union consists of 28 member countries which are, by year of entry and beginning with the founding member states: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, United Kingdom, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Austria, Finland, Sweden, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia. Although the Brexit vote on 2016 decided that the United Kingdom would exit the union, at the time of writing this dissertation the United Kingdom "remains a full member of the EU and rights and obligations continue to fully apply in and to the UK (European Union 2017)." Furthermore, I do not include migrants from Switzerland in this study since the country, while part of the Schengen area, is neither part of the EU nor of the European Economic Area and has always been very clear about its wish to remain independent of the EU.

These young adults are highly educated but equally insecure; they embrace mobility, flexibility and cosmopolitan ideals, are eager to work hard and anticipate numerous opportunities ahead. Yet, they are restless because of the very same opportunities. Raised to aim high and equipped with the necessary degrees, they feel urged to compete for the numerous chances lying ahead and to avoid constraints on their local labour markets. The key to understanding Generation Erasmus lies in their distinctive characteristics which I outline in the first half of this chapter. Based on the group's traits, I then examine migration motivations in the second half. With the help of four ideal types, I seek to illustrate communalities and variances within the group and propose that despite all differences the concept of Asia – from a European perspective – plays a significant role in this migration phenomenon.

4.1 Generation Erasmus

Sociologist Mannheim (1928/1952) argued for the significance of events in a generation's formative years. The shared experience, to which scholars later added "mediated experience" (Edmunds and Turner 2005:566) would shape transition to adulthood and result in specific traits that allow to distinguish generational cohorts from one another. The Europeans of this study are part of a generation often referred to as millennials, the first generation who grew up with internet and later smartphones as taken-for-granted.

Millennials are vaguely understood as born between 1980 and the mid 1990s (Chirimbu, Vasilescu, and Barbu-Chirimbu 2011) or as having turned adult in the 2000s (e.g. Ng, Lyons and Schweitzer 2012; Howe and Strauss 1991). At the time of writing

this dissertation they are thus roughly in their mid 20s - late 30s. Millennials are associated with affinity for new technologies and connectedness all over the world (e.g. Edmunds and Turner 2005; Pew Research Center 2010). Their shared experience of traumatic events such as 9/11 prompted Edmunds and Turner (2005) to define them as a global generation. The authors contend that millennials' global connections are multifaceted and complex rather than previous generations' linear connection from the US to the periphery. Finally, the millennials struggle for a career in post-Lehman Shock labour markets (De Genova and Tazzioli 2016; Eichhorst, Hinte, and Rinne 2013).[18] Millennials are generally found to pursue further education (e.g. Eisner 2005; Dafflon 2008) and to postpone the markers of "full" adulthood such as moving out from their parents' house, marriage and children (Eisenstadt and Turner 2015:869).

Millennials in the EU have something in common most of their peers around the globe could only dream of: Brought up in countries of high living standard and good education systems, the range of palpable opportunities and the freedom to choose is overwhelming. Their options are not limited to the nation state but framed by the spatially, culturally and economically diverse territory of the EU (e.g. Kuhn 2016; Recchi 2015; Ralph 2015; Favell 2008a). More than that, European millennials have witnessed the successive enlargement of the European Union, especially the most recent entries by ten East European countries in 2004 and another two in 2007. While the notion of a possible European identity was for long only associated with Western Europe, the incremental inclusion of ex-socialist countries has enlarged membership to the West thoroughly (European Commission 2002). Nowadays, even ordinary citizens

[18] The filing for bankruptcy by the investment bank Leman Brothers in October 2008 was the beginning of the global financial crisis of the late 2000s, often called Lehman shock. Its economic implications for the Eurozone and the European Union have been particularly severe and have thus been referred to as the European (Financial) Crisis.

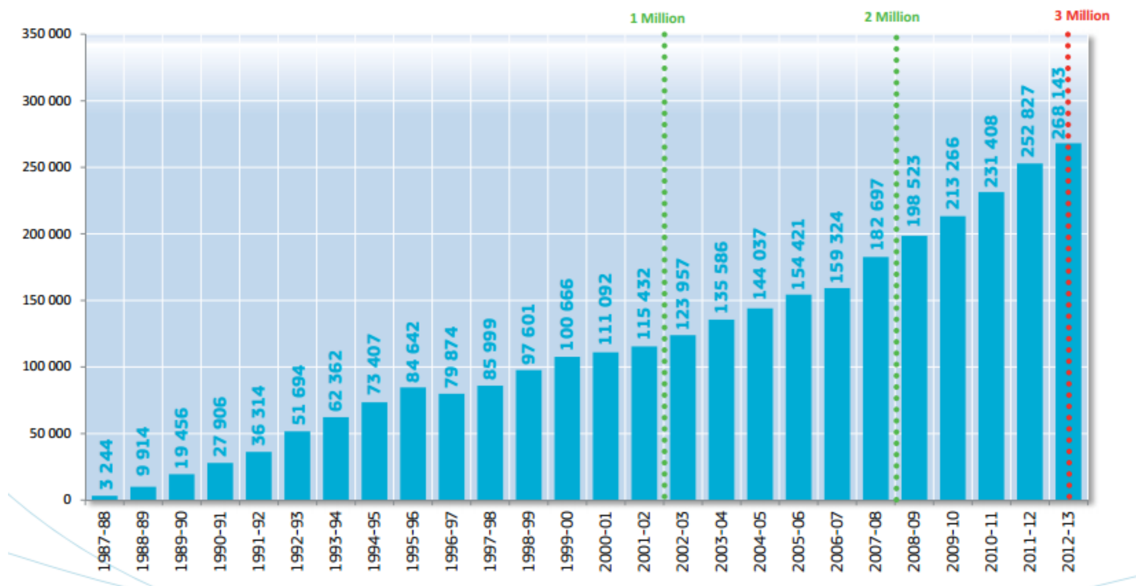
cross national borders frequently (Kuhn 2016) and work-related movement, especially from the "young" member countries to the more established Western countries, is common (e.g. Recchi 2015; Ralph 2015).

Picht (2004) was the first to adopt the term "Generation Erasmus" and applied it to the European millennial generation. He depicts how European students perceive the 2004 accession. These students feel European and yet, they struggle to explain what this means. An amalgam of enthusiasm for the European idea and insecurity surfaces across regions. Particularly students educated in European politics and those who have already experienced educational mobility are critical of the potential success of Europeanisation (ibid). I demonstrate below how, more than ten years later, some of these youth, nowadays young professionals with 3 - 10 years of work experience, have left the continent.

Since Picht's reflections, the term Generation Erasmus has entered public discourse via politics, scholarship and public press. The Erasmus programme was founded by the European Union in 1987 and has since, with its "focus on skills development for employability and active citizenship" (European Commission 2015), supported young Europeans in their studies and internships abroad. Erasmus offers a constantly growing number of study abroad opportunities all over Europe and has thereby promoted study abroad to higher education for the masses. Figure 1 illustrates the constant growth in numbers since the introduction of Erasmus in 1987, with close to 300,000 students being abroad in 2013. In the same year, the total of participating students since the programme's introduction reached the bench mark record of three million. Participating countries, too, have diversified and numbered 34 in 2014,

including besides the 28 EU members also Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey and most recently the Republic of Macedonia.

Figure 1: Growth in Erasmus student mobility 1987-2013



Source: European Commission 2014.

As pillar of the internationalisation of European higher education, roughly five per cent of all European graduates in 2014 were former Erasmus students and the Commission is aiming for 20 per cent by 2020. The total number of all Erasmus students so far is impressive, with 3.3 million students having studied or interned within European borders for an average period of six months (ibid). Importantly, many Erasmus students receive grants for monthly living expenses and as EU citizens do not have to deal with visa issues.

Generation Erasmus has been the focus of publications by the German Academic Exchange Service, short DAAD (2007), market studies (e.g. Wilson 2011) or

sociological and educational research (Cichelli 2013; edited volume by Feyen and Krzaklewska 2013). Scholars have examined the implications of European youth's heightened mobility for later employment (Wilson 2011; King and Ruiz-Gelices 2003), their appropriation of online social media for identity construction (Roguski 2013) and the linkage between educational mobility and identification as a European citizen (Van Mol 2013; Ambrosi 2013; Striebeck 2013; Wilson 2011).

The feasibility of a European, or post-national society is highly contested (e.g. Hajer 2000; Favell and Nebe 2009; Jensen and Richardson 2004). Against the background of debates around 'Europeanness' and the union's Europeanisation policies, Van Mol (2013), similar to Wilson (2011), suggests that students who participate in an overseas exchange programme are already more "European" – that is, support European integration and identify among other identifications as European – *before* they participate in Erasmus. Thus, not increased mobility is driving Europeanisation but Europhile individuals take part in and so promote mobility within the union.

Cicchelli (2013) somewhat challenges above positive voices on the outcomes of the Erasmus experience. In his chapter of the edited volume *Critical Perspectives on International Education*, he argues that the young self-proclaimed cosmopolitan European youth who embark on a semester abroad in the EU often end up socialising with other Erasmus students. Their initial "thirst for unfamiliar life styles" (ibid:206), thus, entails that they are "meeting with other limiting European cultures" (ibid:207) rather than socialising with the locals more thoroughly.

Despite the crucial contributions of above studies, their focus has been limited to students who actually participated (and sometimes on those who decided not to do so) in Erasmus exchange programmes. Few scholars have, despite using the term, looked at

other forms of this generation's mobility than Erasmus (Murphy-Lejeune 2002; Bagnoli 2009; Frändberg 2014) and even fewer have studied this youth's migration beyond the confines of the union borders (for an exception, see Knowles 2015 and Hof 2018). Jensen (2015) on the other hand demonstrates that researching young educated Europeans' European orientations does not require to study them abroad. The author finds middle-class Danish students in Denmark to exhibit a range of more or less cosmopolitan orientations. These young Danes' local, national and global worldviews evidence how the European home can make people comfortable to be both their country's nationals and global citizens.

As the subjects of above studies, the Europeans of this dissertation, too, were used to family travel in European neighbour countries. A few were sent to relatives or host families in other European countries during the school holidays as their parents valued foreign language acquisition and cultural exchange. More exceptional, two participants grew up moving with their diplomate parents around the globe. Another example of intercontinental mobility before university is that of Boris, a Czech interviewee who explained that "everyone in eastern Europe wanted to go to the US. The education system is much better than in Europe, I still think so." He worked hard and was admitted to a scholarship programme for high school and later undergraduate studies in the US.

The majority of the young Europeans first experienced extended spatial mobility in their university years. Roughly a third of my informants participated in an Erasmus exchange programme. Others embarked on an internship in another European country or enrolled in graduate school abroad. Cases include several students who went to London, Edinburgh, Paris, Barcelona or Brussels; that is, either English-speaking destinations or

global cities. Parey and Waldinger (2007) find that studying abroad increases the probability of working abroad in one's early career by 15 to 20 per cent. They demonstrate that of the former Erasmus students who work in a foreign country after graduation, two thirds work in a European country – which leaves a small but significant number of one third of former Erasmus students who find employment abroad to emigrate from Europe.

Unfortunately, emigration statistics are hard to obtain even within Europe (Nowak et al. 2006; Poullain 2008; Eurostat 2018). As stated earlier, comprehensive statistics (classifying for regions of origin, age, gender and the like) of contemporary European emigration to Asia do, to my knowledge, not exist. However, both qualitative scholarship and newspaper reports support my thesis of a recent trend of skilled European emigration (Moutet 2013; Korpela 2010; Knowles 2015; Fechter 2016; Coconut Daily 2015; Marlow 2013).

As discussed, the majority of my informants temporarily lived overseas before migrating to Asia for work. The establishment of European wide university exchange programmes did not only make study abroad respectable, it positioned the overseas experience and associated foreign language proficiency as highly valued skill set on the curriculum vitae. Today, foreign language proficiency beyond English and extended experience abroad are highly regarded qualifications on the job market (Aramburu 2015; Morgan McKinley 2013; Conboye 2013; Ralphs 2015).

Several of my informants admitted that lacking the overseas experience comes close to personal deficiency among the highly educated European middle class. Referring to statistics, we know that "Erasmus is *not* a 'program for everyone'" (Feyen and Krzaklewska 2013:10), but young students who are surrounded by 'leavers' regard

extended mobility as the norm. In particular, returnees' stories stir up the desire to move among the stayers.

Berna's mobility history shows how her first consideration to participate in an exchange programme triggered a series of later events which led to her repeated and gradually longer sojourns abroad. "When I started university in Italy I was in a kind of student house, it had lots of activities and promoted students to Erasmus. So I always saw the older students who went abroad. So somehow, I thought it was something nice to do, not something impossible or strange." Her older brother went abroad with Erasmus, too and probably was another influential factor. Berna, who studied mathematics in a small North Italian city, eventually went to Berlin as an Erasmus undergraduate student. She enjoyed living abroad and studying the German language but also admitted that there was a more practical benefit when she remarked that "staying abroad could be useful for my future career."

Once in a foreign country, Berna found out about plenty of feasibilities for studying abroad in the EU, including a wide range of scholarship programmes. She eventually entered a graduate school in Paris which a friend had recommended to her and studied financial mathematics. Growing more confident with the French language, Berna completed a six-month internship in a French bank as part of the master programme. This did not only offer her first work experience in her field of specialisation but introduced her to her future employer with who she would later move to Tokyo.

Even economically constrained Europeans found ways to become mobile. For less affluent students like the Baltic logistics major Olaf, Erasmus was no option but ironically, studying overseas in Japan, a country known for its high living standard and

high tuition fees, turned out to be financially feasible. I will return to his case in chapter five when examining the channels through which Generation Erasmus access the Asian labour markets.

Now, why such a strong urge to go abroad? Why Asian global cities if most other destinations would have been closer, living costs lower and cultural differences probably less pronounced? Generation Erasmus want something different. Deborah's comment leaves no doubt about the attraction of the unfamiliar and the 'edgy' factor of studying something or somewhere different than her peers who chose foreign languages like Spanish, French or German.

> The UK or US would have been the norm. At least in Greece we grow up with that Harvard etc. dream. […] I'm coming from a middle-class family. So we had money to travel but nothing fancy. These kind of middle-class families, in our age, it's typical that they go abroad at least to Germany or UK to study and travel at least a year, it's nothing very different, kind of normal. (Deborah, Greek in Singapore)

While the world in which Generation Erasmus grew up ceased to offer security and stability, this globalised world also appeals, in informants' words, with an unprecedented range of "great opportunities" or "fascinating experiences." A Northern European informant had worked in his home country for several years before he embarked on a new life in Japan. His answer to my question what attracted him to both China and Japan at that time captured the essence of most of the migrants' pre-migration impression of Asia. "When you're 20 everything in Europe looks and feels the same. In Asia everything is always different. Chinese and Japanese were just the most obvious [languages], I didn't think of other countries at that time."

It is not surprising then that one of the many outcomes of "chosen biographies" (Beck 1994) – and one of the potential answers to the need or attraction of distinguishing oneself – is migration. To really distinguish oneself then is not to move within the EU, or even the West as many informants referred to the US, Canada or Australia when contemplating other options, but beyond. New emigration patterns of European young adults to destinations around the globe seem to confirm such arguments (Korpela 2009; Debnár 2016; Knowles 2015).

Generation Erasmus have been told for years how mobility benefits the career and the self. More than that, however, we need to understand their global mobility and the diversifying destinations they choose in the economic, political and socio-cultural context. This is an enlarged European Union which after prosperous years and an optimistic look into the future has recently come under serious attack. To put the current situation when writing this thesis between 2015 - 2018 into perspective, millennials in Europe grew up witnessing a series of decisive events: The union's enlargement along with the hopes and struggles pinned down to the European project, the impacts of the Lehman shock which unfolded in economic recession, high rates of unemployment and an imposed austerity policy in several member states and, most recently, the continent's so far biggest refugee crisis.

Since Generation Erasmus are equipped with substantial cultural capital (tertiary degrees, 'intercultural' experience, foreign language proficiency, etc.) and sometimes social capital after a previous stint abroad, the move to Asia is exciting rather than daunting. The final decision, then, is less *if* to move but *where* to move. Asia offers what the chosen biography asks for: it is different. Generation Erasmus' choices are complex

and cannot simply be explained by artificial distinctions between labour migration or lifestyle migration, or economic versus non-economic motivations.

4.2 Motivations for Moving

In order to capture Generation Erasmus' motivations for migration I constructed four ideal types of movers from my interview data. They are by no means comprehensive and in reality, these motivations often overlap. Nevertheless, I suggest that ideal types are helpful to carve out these migrants' main characteristics and at the same time to clearly discern variations within the group (Weiss 1994). Table 1 lists the major demographic and socio-economic characteristics of each type, grouped as university major, pre-employment overseas stint, age range upon first migration, work experience when moving, single/liaised when moving, and destination city. I explain these characteristics at the example of one case per type in the sub-chapters that follow.

Based on table 1, I identified the major differences yet also certain overlaps between the four motivational types. I map these in Figure 2, which serves as a conceptual map that delineates proximate motivations per type. By the 3-level structure and the hierarchical relationship between primary/general motivation and secondary/specific motivation I emphasize that there are two broader and more general motivations that come as a primary ('career advancement' on the side of the 'economic factors' and 'cultural fondness' on the side of the 'non-economic factors'). They materialize in three more specific motivations 'fleeing un(der)employment/unattractive job conditions', 'creative, dynamic, international workplaces', and 'cultural experience/climate') which are all interdependent.

Table 1: Types of movers and their main features

Type	University major	Pre-employment overseas stint	Age range upon 1st migration	Work exp. when moving	Single/ liaised when moving	Destination city
Lifestyle migrants	humanities social sciences	intra-European, extended travel Asia	late 20s-mid 30s	some years work experience	long-term partner or married	both, more often SG
Cultural enthusiasts	Japanese studies (major or minor)	students/ interns in Tokyo or elsewhere in JP	20- mid 20s	no work experience	single	Tokyo
Global professionals	various	multiple, intra- and inter-EU	mid - late 20s	no or little work experience	single, or move indep. from partner	both, more often SG
Economic refugees	human./social sciences, architecture	none, or like global professionals	mid - late 20s	no or little work experience	single or married	SG

Note: SG for Singapore, JP for Japan, US for United States, EU for European Union

The starting point vertically, or context, for all types, is their upbringing in the enlarged EU as a free-movement space which they decide to leave. While on level 1, two of the ideal types are primarily motivated by economic considerations (economic refugees, global professionals) and two more by non-economic considerations (lifestyle migrants, cultural enthusiasts) we can see on level 2 that the broken down secondary motivations also blur the clear-cut lines of level 1. For instance, 'creative, dynamic, and international workplaces' as a secondary motivation to migrate is more or less a mix, or an amalgam of both economic and non-economic considerations. Level 3 then sorts these motivations that are related to each other to varying degrees into the four ideal types. This last level demonstrates how each type exhibits several secondary/specific motivations. Yet, they can either be strongly (indicated by ▬) or weakly (indicated by -----) present in the respective type. The figure thus visualizes that each type has one

strongly present specific motivation, but with minor significance, also exhibits one or several weak motivations.

Figure 2: Explanatory 3-level typology of motivations for moving

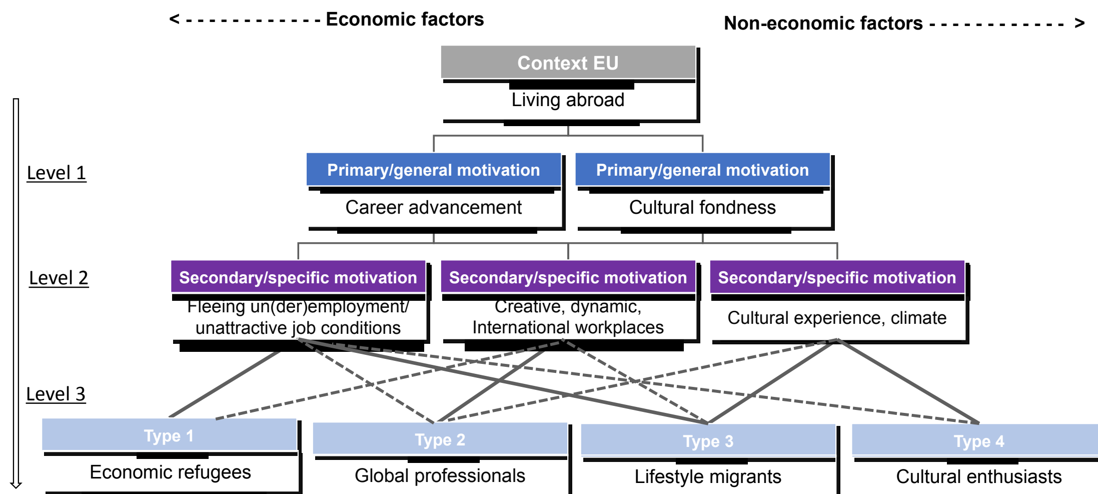


Figure and ideas by the author.

Sam Scott (2006), in his discussion of the social morphology of skilled migration in Europe, distinguishes six types of British skilled migrants in Paris. Scott argues for both the diversity within the migrant group and their middling position in the world city which situates them somewhere between the elite and the 'underclass' (Scott 2006:1125). His findings somewhat resemble Europeans' motivations to move to Asia and thus point to a more generalisable phenomenon of the young, highly educated and mobility-affine European middle class.

My typology confirms not only the diversity within this group but also the significance of lifestyle, cultural factors, appeal of world cities and mobility as a way of (middle-class) distinction *and* reproduction. It does however extend Scott's typology as it unravels the interdependence of these motivations. Mobility to culturally,

geographically and socially distant Asian cities is a product of our times and of Generation Erasmus. The young adults seize opportunities which they do not find in the EU through mobile "worklife pathways" beyond Europe. I return to this point in the conclusion of this chapter. There I demonstrate how despite great variance in the group concerning initial motivations to move, the types can be subsumed under the collecting idea of pursuing mobile "worklife pathways" which cannot be understood by either-or, economic or non-economic factors.

4.2.1 Lifestyle Migrants

Many young Europeans moved to Asia because they dreamt of the "Asian experience" as one informant put it. This fascination with the region came up in many interviews so I started to explore what was behind this dream of Asia. What I found was that European media, the travel industry and popular culture have created a stereotype of Asia – to be precise, on South-, Southeast and East Asia, as a world full of exotic objects and beliefs. The orientalisation of Asia as "exotic" (Said 1987) dates back to European colonialism, missionaries and travel writing and later the neo-colonial re-fashioning of voluntary leaving home as "sophisticated" travel (Clifford 1997:65). Even nowadays, European media, the travel industry, and ultimately, European (as other Western) tourists reproduce the stereotypical images of Asia as a world full of exotic objects and mysterious beliefs (Hendry 2000; Hall 1979; Richards and Wilson 2003). While contemporary orientalist projection appears in an overwhelmingly positive light it also reinforces the binary construction of East versus West and is thus a major source for Generation Erasmus' fascination for Asia.

Many *lifestyle migrants* had previously travelled Asia, often as a couple. This triggered their desire to "come back and do something here in the region" as Hubert put it. The German, together with his wife, consequently started to look for positions in Asia. Other Europeans told me how literature on the Asian continent, friends' travel narratives, or television programmes about the region sparked their interest. Their narratives sketch an image of Asia as a place with exotic traditions and a diversity of cultures which they partly derived from media as the following quote by Rico, a Portuguese, illustrates.

> I guess my expectation [of Japan] was… I don't know, the mix between all the manga, anime, weird television shows that I saw in my country. But at the same time, I was expecting to find a very deep Japan, very traditional very you know like samurai style. I had a very weird image of Japan. I was expecting to find those both radical [sides].

In their expectations and excitement of encountering the 'other', the *lifestyle migrants* prioritize the Asian experience over stability or quick money. Thus, they interrupted their careers in Europe and embarked on an "adventure", which mostly meant a new job with different tasks and thus a dropping out from a possibly more straight-forward career progression in their home country. Although many managed to negotiate a position in the local (Singaporean or Japanese) branch of their firm, the job also came with a local contract and thus rarely equated to the job security at home.

Hubert and his wife are a case in point. The couple were still in their twenties and he had already started to work full-time when she graduated from university and they toured Southeast Asia for several months.

> We spent one month in Nepal, one month in Indonesia, one month in Vietnam and Cambodia, [...] we were I guess roughly four months away, a bit of SG, Bangkok, Thailand, all these places. And we kind of liked it so

> much that we [...] said ‘Ok, we have to come back and do something here in the region.’ And this was when we had this idea, ‘Asia is quite nice’. We both had this vague vision that we wanted to work abroad and not only be there as a tourist. I had never studied abroad and was mostly in Germany. For her it was similar. So we said ‘OK, travelling is all fine, [...] but in one way or another we wanted to work and do some sort of job-.’ It was totally vague what kind of job.

The couple agreed that as long as either of them found stable employment, no matter if in his profession or not, the other one could follow – even if this meant selling coffee, as Hubert jokingly added. Hubert discussed their plans with his boss and owner of the small family business for which he had worked since he was a student. The owner, who trusted Hubert and knew his skills, was enthusiastic about the idea to expand the company business beyond Europe. Hubert explored potential locations for a market venture in Asia. The decision fell on Singapore which seemed most promising “regarding language, lawyers, banks, authorities – simply, business-friendly indices.” Hubert’s wife, too, was successful in transferring within her company, a huge firm in the health sector. In her case, however, negotiations were tedious and she finally worked under a contract that did not offer prospects for career progression.

The couple’s case illustrates the background that characterizes the *lifestyle migrants* and the motivations to move to Singapore or Tokyo. Hubert and his wife grew up in a small city in middle-class households and enrolled in a university close to home. Until graduation, life seemed to develop similarly to that of their peers. The natural next step would be a permanent job, a house and a family. Yet, the holiday encounter with Asia left such a deep impression that the couple changed their minds, seeking a break from the life that tacitly lay ahead. More exciting, in Hubert’s eyes, was a stint in

Southeast Asia where "[you have] the best weather all year round, can travel, go diving in Bali, all no problem, all these things are really good."

This does not, however, mean the *lifestyle migrants* turn life in Europe down for good; they rather decide to give themselves a few years for an exciting experience. They assume they could regret if they did not try living in Asia for some years at this life stage when they are flexible without children or other commitments. For Hubert, too, the fact that he "had never been abroad" was a main motivation for initiating the move.

Many *lifestyle migrants* initially regard life in Asia as something temporary. However, as Hubert's example demonstrates, they leave the actual length of their stay to the developments on-site. In Singapore, high requirements for professional work visa (see chapter five), and in Japan, the necessity to speak fluent Japanese are constraints for the *lifestyle migrants*. Thus, many *lifestyle migrants* inquire about the possibility to move overseas within their firm. This facilitates bureaucratic issues such as visa matters and appeals by its relative ease for accessing a full-time job in the host city. Lifestyle migrants' positions in Asia are slightly less attractive, at least from a European point of view. They are not permanent but contracted positions with local work conditions, but the European migrants accept these jobs in exchange for the adventure.[19]

Staying within the same European firm appears to be a relatively risk-free way of moving to Asia. The common rationale was one of "if it doesn't work out you can always go home." The *lifestyle migrants* regard Europe as a fix point to which they will

[19] Local, i.e. Singaporean and Japanese, contracts usually come with fewer annual holidays than what is standard in most EU countries. Other conditions, such as health insurance, are also generally less attractive than in Europe. For instance, informants in both cities told me about approximately 15 - 20 days of paid holiday a year. This is already more than the stipulated minimum amount – for full-time employees, excluding national holidays – of 7 days in Singapore (MoM 2018a) and 10 days in Japan (ILO 2018). A few reported to be "lucky" that their European companies, despite their local contracts in Asia, granted them holidays according to the headquarter regulations which, on basis of EU law, stipulates a minimum of 20 days of paid leave per year (EUR-Lex 2003). Some European countries however lie well above, for example France with 25 days of paid annual leave.

return and where, if necessary, the welfare state and their families provide a safety net. Hubert and his wife epitomise the main characteristics of this type: First, the Asian experience is important enough to put life in Europe on a hold for an indefinite time. The couple sold parts of their belongings before their departure and left Germany despite their awareness that their move to Asia might disrupt a more straight-forward career advancement at home. However, at this point of their lives, the adventure in Asia became a priority to the *lifestyle migrants*.

Secondly, they see the move as a sojourn, a joint adventure; one that will become *one* of many sections, or pathways, of their partnership – and which is thus temporary. The couple's decision to marry just before migration further underlines their attitude towards the endeavour. The Asian adventure, thus, becomes a relationship project. For its sake, they possibly forgo a promotion or risk working in a mundane job for the years abroad. Yet, they do not turn their backs against Europe. They enjoy travelling, new friendships and daily discoveries of the unfamiliar. Likewise, they are aware of their sojourns being definite, and among many couples, including Hubert and his wife, discussions circle around a more settled life, for some with children, somewhere in Europe.

In contrast to economic migrants and thanks to their resources (for instance, tertiary degrees, middle-class families), these young migrants choose to move because they can and want to. They state that they want to focus on lifestyle rather than career progression (Benson and O'Reilly 2009). A job in a high-wage country, in a European-affiliated company, using the English language seems to open up an avenue to both: respectable employment, which does not significantly harm, maybe even decorate their resumes as it testifies their capability and confidence to work overseas. At the same time,

it allows them to explore a different culture and enjoy Southeast Asia's tropical climate – "indefinite holidays in Asia", as Bettina, another young German woman, summed it up.

Yet, there is also a less invigorating component to *lifestyle migrants'* motivation to move. They want a "break" from Europe and its rather rigid promotion structures while they are "still young enough" as the French woman Florence remarked. They worry about their prospects of career advancement and count on their migration as an eye catcher on the curriculum vitae (hereafter CV). An overseas sojourn is for them both a sign of individualisation and a challenge that fosters personal growth and confidence. In Hubert's words "I find it for me personally good, exciting, interesting. … you need to go [overseas] yourself, I guess it's hard to learn these things if I stayed in Germany." Migrants are proud to add these experiences to their personal stories; on their CVs they stick out exactly because they are just one phase among other more conventional routes.

To conclude, even though some *lifestyle migrants* consider less qualified jobs ("selling coffee"), eventually they all search until they find employment that requires university degrees. Thus, they try to maintain positions in their field of education or professional specialisation. In fact, their job situation is a consequence of two factors. One is the restrictive immigration policies in Asian global cities. Prospective migrants need to prove their high qualifications in 'professional' occupations. In Singapore, to which most *lifestyle migrants* flock, the skilled visa is the EP. It is however not issued for low-skilled jobs like "selling coffee." In order to keep up a middle-class living standard, the young Europeans need to qualify for an EP which in turn requires them to work in their profession.

My data demonstrates that both partners identify themselves as professionals. Although Hubert's wife struggled to negotiate a position in the Singaporean subsidiary of her firm she persevered and finally succeeded. Thus, despite being faced with career stagnation rather than advancement, it at least enabled her to work in her field and not settle for any other job or become a housewife, which Hubert's salary would probably have allowed. Generation Erasmus' dispositions and aspirations, as outlined in the first part of this chapter, can be traced to their childhood and youth in Europe as children of middle-class families. Not only have they been raised by parents who emphasised the value of higher education, but also did the rights attached to their EU citizenship, Europeanisation policies such as Erasmus and earlier mobility experiences nurture the desire for something beyond Europe, but also for being competitive and able to pursue professional jobs.

More specifically, the *lifestyle migrants* see themselves returning to their home countries, and thus, to their domestic labour markets one day. The overseas experience allows for some leeway. Ultimately, however, they strive to maintain a professional, secure, middle-class lifestyle. While they are interested in different parts of the Asian region they only seriously consider Asia's more developed global cities such as Tokyo, Hong Kong, Singapore and a few even 'Middle Eastern' Dubai. Ending up in Tokyo or Singapore is not always their first or only destination desired as the discussion has shown. Singapore, however, appears to be more accessible in terms of language and, in some instances, ease of setting up a business. Consequently, the majority of informants in this group eventually migrate to Singapore.

4.2.2 Cultural Enthusiasts

The *cultural enthusiasts,* as the *lifestyle migrants,* move for their personal interest in a certain place. The difference, at first glance, simply seems to lie in the *lifestyle migrants'* general fantasies about Asia as a region and, in the case of the *cultural enthusiasts*, a love for the country Japan, its people and its language. Yet, the two types differ profoundly. The *cultural enthusiasts*' interest in Japan goes deeper and has motivated many young Europeans to devote years to language study. Many stay in Japan as students or interns and directly start working there afterwards. Hence, they do not enter the country on a professional visa but stay on after graduation and simply change their visa category. Their cases demonstrate the blurred line between international students and labour migrants.

Among young Europeans in Tokyo I found that the majority is in the country for some sort of (pop)cultural or linguistic interest.[20] All interns in the company where I conducted my internship had studied the Japanese language. They applied for the internship in order to spend more time in the country they liked and to explore options for a full-time job in Japan. This is true for many of the 35 interviewees in Japan. More than half of them graduated from Japanese studies majors or minors at university while some others studied the language on a private basis or in language schools later. For a better understanding of the *cultural enthusiasts*' motivations, I examine their childhood and investigate when and how the course for their fondness of Japan was set.

Japanese culture has long been a subject of interest in the West (Befu 2001). In the 19th century, world fairs in Europe and America portrayed Japan as it was imagined by

[20] Japan's popularity throughout the world, mostly in terms of soft power, is not limited to European, or Western, consumers only (Goldstein-Gidoni 2005). See for instance Iwabuchi (2002) on "Cool Japan", the establishment of Japanese study programmes and Japan-related media programmes around the world.

the West, displaying representations of the exotic, mysterious Orient (Hotta-Lister 1999; Benedict 1994). For the Europeans of this study, who grew up in the Europe of the 1990s, the first contact to Japan was often by Japanese pop iconology which found its way into European media at the time (Iwabuchi 2002; Napier 2007).

According to informants from both Western and Eastern European countries, serials like Sailor Moon, Pokémon and Dragon ball were among the most popular animated television series when they were elementary or junior high school students. Many *cultural enthusiasts* discovered their passion for the country through their first contact with Japanese popular culture. Japanese anime spread across Europe from the 1990s and Japanese manga have since been easy to spot in book shelves for children and young adults. For others, Japanese traditional culture like tea ceremony or calligraphy and the Japanese language caught their attention. With their consumption they gradually developed a more general interest in Japan, which fascinated them – similar to the *lifestyle migrants* in the broader Asian context – in contrast to familiar Europe.

Olga's interest in Japan arose when she was still a child. The Baltic woman grew up with Japanese cultural artefacts in her home which her mother had received from Japanese business partners.

> You know it's all thanks to my mother who is actually working in a company that has all kinds of businesses with Japanese. [...] When I was a small kid the Japanese business men came to [my home country] and as my mother is quite a top position I just met them, got all the, you know, *omiyage* (souvenirs). And just naturally I got interested in that, I started watching movies, anime, and decided to go to a Japanese language school back at the same university which I eventually got in. I just wanted to get better at it, you know, not like *shumi-teki* (a hobby). So I decided to enter university and

> study Japan studies you know, as a *senmon-ka* (professional). I just loved the Japanese language.

As Olga's narrative shows, as often as it was (popular) culture which drew these Europeans' attention to Japan, they were also fascinated by the Chinese characters of the Japanese language. In 21st century Europe, there are multiple ways to encounter Japanese language. Apart from the above mentioned popular culture (e.g. the globally broadcast and popular TV show "Takeshi's castle", various anime and manga series, computer games such as *Super Mario Bros.)*, universities have increasingly started to offer Japanese study programmes. Even some high schools nowadays include Japanese and Chinese in their list of language options.

Given the *cultural enthusiasts*' fondness for Japan, many took advantage of the great range of student exchange programmes between European and Japanese universities. I discuss the nature of these programmes and their significant influence on students' later job search in Japan in chapter five. Here I wish to stress that the time of being a student in Japan fuelled these youths' interest and consequently the motivation for later moving to Tokyo for work. As international students they had time to travel and make Japanese friends. Olga describes with shining eyes how deeply her first visit to Japan impressed her.

> I loved it, I loved every second of it. And I just had these pink glasses you know like "Everything is so perfect." You know like when at the same time you look at these high glass buildings and you have this *jinja* (Japanese Shinto shrine) around. Like "*kawaii*! (cute)" And all this, you know, Japanese guys [laughing]. All this culture which you had been looking at over the two years studying about it. Yeah, I loved it.

What they experience as a time of freedom and adventure later crystallises into a clearer life plan with the aim to live in Japan. The more these young Europeans learn about the country the more determined they are to improve their Japanese language proficiency. They understand that the domestic labour market is centred on the Japanese language and that even foreign companies employ mostly Japanese staff.

Many of the *cultural enthusiasts* had reached a relatively high Japanese language proficiency upon graduation. Olga considered graduate school in Japan but missed the application deadline and was furthermore uncertain if she could afford the high tuition fees. Contemplating her options, she started to consider employment in Japan seriously – not, as we can see, for the sake of employment, a big career or the like, but as a path to life in Japan. "And afterwards", she recalled, "because I didn't want to go back- Well, I wanted to stay in Japan. So I talked to my boyfriend at that time, he is Japanese also." Olga eventually decided to search for a job since it happened to be the season when companies' job information sessions started across Tokyo.

Having familiarised themselves with Japan, the young Europeans were aware of Japanese corporations' recent welcoming attitude towards foreign employees (see chapter five). Thus, they sensed their opportunities: Working in Japan seemed to offer an extension of the joyful time they previously had experienced in the country. Many described their excitement of finally having the chance to apply everything they had learned. They assumed they would be regarded as *gurōbaru jinzai* (literally: global human resources). This is the key word with which Japanese corporations refer to employees who are able to work in global settings.

Olga, too, was lured by the "global image" which even Japan's traditional (and most prestigious) companies – among them her later employer – have recently

developed. Her quote reveals that this global image was one of the main reasons for her to apply for the company. "You know, they speak about being global and they create this image that [they are] kind of the most global company in the world." Due to Olga's repeated travels to Japan and her time as an exchange student she was experienced enough to know that most foreigners struggled with the language. She saw her chance to fill this niche. On the one hand, she felt capable to work the Japanese way in terms of language and culture. On the other hand, she possessed all the "global" attributes of which the official discourse and companies were talking; that is, English as well as other foreign language proficiency, intercultural knowledge, and experience of living abroad.

Two factors cause the *cultural enthusiasts* to return to Japan after their stints as travellers or students: First, they have fallen in love with the country. Their initial encounter with Japan is carefree, full of adventures, but few responsibilities. Simultaneously, they deepen their understanding of the country and language and extend their networks. Second, they connect with similarly minded people who provide access to institutions and contacts that turn out to be of high value when later trying to find a job.

Ultimately, finding employment in Japan is not only attractive "in order to get the visa", as Olga puts it. Since very few of the *cultural enthusiasts* worked in Europe before, staying in Japan also seems to be easier than returning to their home countries. There, they would have to build new networks and familiarize themselves with the domestic job search system. This, then, clearly demarcates them from the *lifestyle migrants*, who only take a break from work in Europe where they had worked for several years previous to migration to Asia. While the *lifestyle migrants* intend to return

after a few years of adventure and thus opt for jobs with linkages to their home countries in order to maintain their careers, the *cultural enthusiasts* have not experienced full-time work in Europe and do not wish to do so. They strive to build a life in Japan and prepare by investing in the local language and domestic networks. This different focus then is the major difference between the two types. The *lifestyle migrants* keep their home countries as a fix point and anchor whereas the *cultural enthusiasts* orientate themselves increasingly at Japan, its job market and their local friends and spouses.

4.2.3 Global Professionals

In the opening of this thesis I introduced Andras, the Hungarian hospitality manager who I met in Singapore. I used his case for the beginning because he characterises the major type of my informants who I call the *global professionals.* Andras, who had never felt at home in his own country, decided, after several shorter overseas sojourns, to leave his home country permanently at the age of 25. From France (intra-European mobility) to the Maldives (as a gateway to Asia) to Singapore (a hub with more promising career opportunities), Andras slowly worked himself up in the hotel industry. When I met him, he was mid-way through his expensive and time-intensive MBA which meant that he slept for an average of four hours a night. Yet, for Andras it was worth it. Countries like Singapore and Hong Kong – the latter his next city of residence after Singapore – value high education and expertise. Andras' goals in life are bound up with these or similar dynamic labour markets. For him, only global cities offer the kind of jobs which make for a satisfactory life.

Global professionals' motivations to move to Asian cities are multifaceted and lie somewhere between the celebration of life overseas in an international environment, the feeling of oppression, or more often, monotony, in one's local surroundings and the assumption that employment in global cities could boost the early career. Isabelle's story offers a detailed insight into the complexity of *global professionals'* motivations for mobility. The 28-year old French woman has Arabic roots and sticks out from my predominantly Caucasian informants. She started describing how her family situation, among other factors, strongly influenced her migration decisions. Isabelle then went on:

> I got my master degree in law in Paris. As a lawyer in France your prospects internationally wise are limited and I wanted to have a more international career. I really wanted to go overseas and live abroad, and to Asia, but I realised that my degree was mostly not recognised. So I was trying to find a master degree in business with international options. A friend told me about a good university in Australia.

Isabelle's account indicates the multiple dimensions of her mobility decision. Her multi-ethnic and multinational background, earlier mobility experiences, longing for an "international career", and the disappointment with her home country which failed to offer her such international and for her equalling attractive employment conditions in her field. This is why she applied for the Australian university mentioned and, after travelling Southeast Asia for six months, enrolled in a master focusing on employment law. Now being able to compare she felt encouraged to follow her professional aspirations. "I came to Australia and discovered a brand-new culture. After studying in France- It (France) is very elitist, very organised, hierarchical. Very settled so when you want to have a career it's very challenging when you are young. In Aussie, it's very laid back."

Isabelle found a job in Australia after graduation. However, when Australia's economy declined a year later, Isabelle looked out for other options and revived her initial plan of moving to Asia. Having travelled Southeast Asia before, she was fond of the region and excited about the idea of living and working in Asia. When a friend who worked in Singapore told her about the presence of many other young French and the chances to secure a job, Isabelle did not think long.

As she reflected on her determination to make it into Singapore's labour market, Isabelle realised that her multicultural background had helped her. She doubted that "pure Europeans who have only lived in Europe and have never been out of the country" would throw themselves into job search in Singapore on a tourist visa, especially if they were not accompanied by a partner. However, while my data demonstrates that her final assumption is not entirely true, most of the *global professionals* have indeed been mobile before moving to Asia.[21]

What Isabelle is right about is the fact that the ones who had experienced life abroad were confident enough to leave for Asia without a job offer, and often without a partner. Quite a few *global professionals* including Isabelle came to Singapore on a tourist visa. This was less prevalent in Tokyo where the Japanese language barrier is daunting. However, several of my informants in both countries had difficulties to secure employment and in fact, there were a few who sought a job in Singapore but ended up in Tokyo or, more often, the other way round. Others persevered and sometimes received a job offer right before they ran out of money or their tourist visa expired.

The more stories I collected the more obvious it became how the young adults were disappointed with the labour market structures in their home countries. They knew

[21] Several of the *lifestyle migrants* in Singapore had no personal mobility experience before moving to Asia and none has an immigrant background.

from friends or personal experience that moving up in the organisational structure would take a long time or that even securing a permanent job after graduation has become increasingly difficult. In contrast, Asian workplaces did not discourage them from the outset but signalled that they valued their education and their ideas. Singapore has retained one of the leading ranks as attractive destination for foreign talents for years (IMD 2018). My informants are well aware of this image since it made headlines in both business as well as popular media. Moreover, as Isabelle remarked, friends told her of the chances to obtain a job as a foreign, less experienced person.

Isabelle thus expected to find a labour market which welcomed highly educated people who were willing to fight for recognition and a career. She knew of the modest income tax and had heard that no hierarchical structures or a saturated market would limit her early professional development. Also, friends as well as reports on foreign talent in Singapore reassured her that neither socio-cultural nor legal restrictions would deny her as a foreigner, as a woman, or as racial minority access to employment or the chance to grow.[22] Gender, as race, both affect motivations for moving as well as experiences in Asia, as I examine in later chapters. At this point it is enough to say that I met several European women who did not worry about moving as an independent single woman and straight-forwardly stated how much they appreciated the possibility to do so.

To sum up, *global professionals'* most significant characteristic is that they take the world as a framework for their professional trajectory. The way their career unfolds, in turn, directs their mobility and lifestyle decisions. Thus, in contrast to the *lifestyle*

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[22] This is not entirely true. For instance, Indians are discriminated in some professional occupations such as the finance industry. This however has less to do with foreign professionals of Indian ethnicity but is rather related to the fact that Indians are the minority group of Singapore's officially recognised racial minorities. They have experienced a history of discrimination as a minority within their own country (e.g. Ye 2014). Nevertheless, for my informants, even for racially non-Caucasians such as Isabelle, none of her physical traits worked against her.

migrants, they do not intend to experience living in a country that culturally interests them *temporarily*. Instead, *global professionals'* main concern is to work and live in an international environment. The choice of country is of minor importance and the focus is clearly on building an international career and being surrounded by people of diverse national, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The path they pursue to reach this goal is geographical mobility. As Andras' and Isabelle's trajectories before coming to Asia exemplified, the *global professionals* are not looking for a temporary break from Europe in hot or exotic Asia, nor do they commit themselves to a specific country or region.

First and foremost, they are convinced that chances are higher to find an intellectually stimulating work environment and vibrant life abroad than in their home countries. For this sake, they are open to embark on employment opportunities in other parts of the world as long as such opportunities promise interesting and challenging positions. While some start out in Europe (as Andras) or other Western countries (as Isabelle), a considerable number of my interviewees found their first job in other Asian countries, especially China. Others have worked in their home countries for years. At one point, however, they decide that their current job, or maybe even conditions in their home country (or first host-country, to recall Isabelle's case), might not enable them to lead the life they want or to advance in their career at the pace they wish. In general, they leave Europe for an indefinite period of time and both the shape of their life abroad as well as an eventual return is much less clear than in the case of the *lifestyle migrants*.

4.2.4 Economic Refugees

My ethnographic field work made me aware of a growing number of young educated adults who for various reasons do not find life satisfactory in the Europe in its present state. While journalistic accounts have portrayed the fate of many young Europeans who suffer from unemployment, precariousness or flee the very same (e.g. Küchel 2018; Lynn 2016) there is very little written about those who left the continent. One of those who left is Marcos. The Portuguese, 34 years at the time, had grown up in Lisbon in a middle-class family. His father, a director in a huge advertising company, pushed the children to reach out internationally. Marcos, who failed to enter university in Barcelona and thus studied urban architecture in Lisbon, spent 6 months in Japan under a student exchange agreement. He loved the experienced and was somehow disappointed with the settled life he found when he accepted a research position in Portugal after graduation. The position did not keep him long. Knowing about the generous scholarship opportunities provided by the Japanese government, Marcos soon started to prepare the necessary application documents and one year later happily entered a graduate programme in sustainability and architecture in Fukuoka, the biggest city on Japan's southernmost main island Kyushu.

Three years later and equipped with a master degree, Marcos applied for jobs in Japan but had to realise that although he spoke conversational Japanese his proficiency was inadequate for employment. When in March 2011 the Great Tohoku earthquake hit the country and Marcos' family worried about his health, he gave up the job search and returned to Portugal. However, his return fell together with the peak of the European crisis and he could not find a job in his field in Portugal. The following year was

depressing, marked by the frustrations of working outside his discipline and simultaneously tedious job search spanning various industries and European countries:

> It was a bad time in Europe and the world and for an architect. So I was applying for all kinds of jobs in Portugal, even shipping because I could speak a little bit of Japanese and English, Spanish, Portuguese, French so why not use this? And I was a little bit desperate because at that time. I was waking up and still living with my mum- *(sic)*[23]

When architect friends told him about positions in other European countries he widened his job search but still could not secure employment. After ten months Marcos heard about big architecture projects in Singapore. He had one friend in the country and soon decided to buy a flight ticket to Singapore where he eventually found a job.

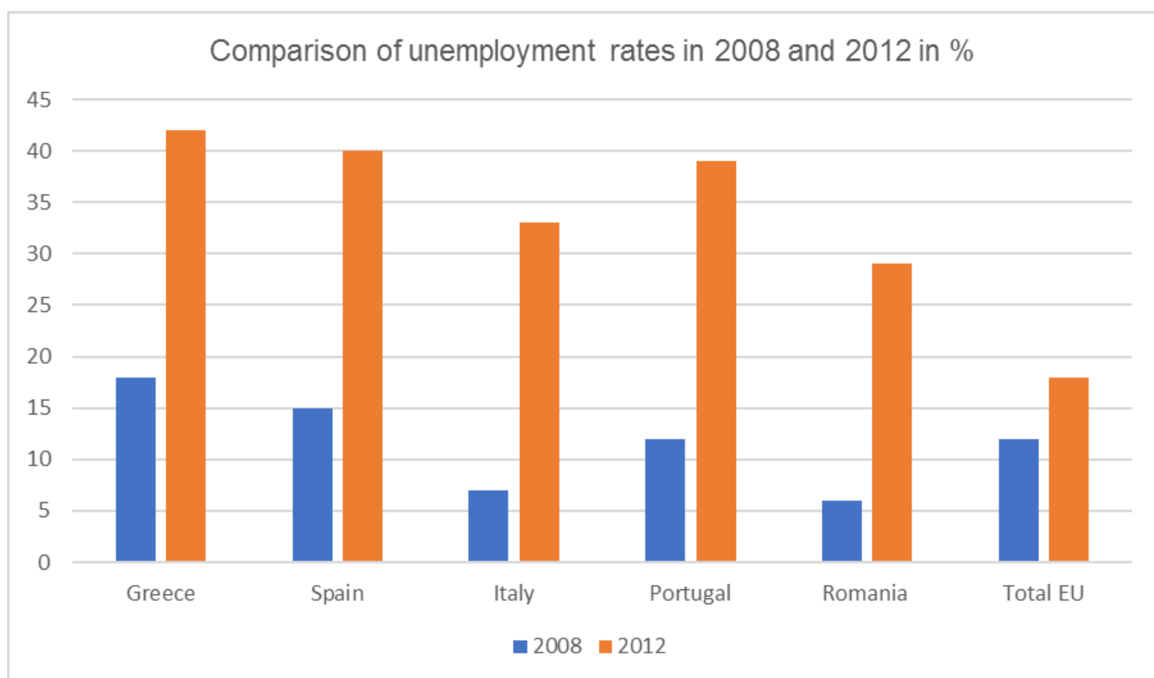
Marcos' case exemplifies the desperation that drove him and others to leave their countries, flying to far-off places and with as strict immigration policies as Singapore. In many ways the *economic refugees*, as I call them, resemble their counterparts from developing countries who flee unemployment and broken economies. While these Europeans enjoyed a higher living standard during their youth, they now feel the consequences of the economic and financial crises which hit the European Union's Mediterranean member states particularly hard.

De Genova and Tazzioli speak of a "crisis talk" where the "multifarious crises" (2016:8) can and should no longer be separated in order to conceptualise their implications on Europeans and non-Europeans. During my fieldwork, I encountered precarious situations mostly with those whose countries were hit hardest by the

[23] Some quotes contain mistakes in grammar or expressions that the informants made. I decided to keep and not correct them as they are my informants' original expressions and best convey their state of mind.

economic crisis such as Italians and Portuguese. Figure 3, based on a study by Eichhorst, Hinte, and Rinne (2013), illustrates the dramatic rise in young academics' unemployment rates in several European countries between 2008 and 2012. While the study is to a certain extent limited due to the authors' definition of youth as age 15 - 24, it clearly conveys how prevalent precariousness is even for the highly educated in several European countries.

Figure 3: Rise in unemployment among young academics in the European Union



Source: Eichhorst, Hinte, Rinne (2013:2)

Academic literature and public media have discussed youth un- and underemployment in Europe. While university graduates in the 1980s and 1990s tried to secure a permanent position right away, Germany's buzz word in 2006, "*Generation Praktikum*" (generation internship), describes an infamous development in several EU

countries in the early 2000s. University graduates increasingly struggle to secure full-time positions but survive on precarious, short-term internship arrangements – or simply temporary employment contracts – over months or even years. Surveys in Germany, on the European level and even voices from the United States present similar results (see Zerahn 2007; Economist 2007; Eichhorst, Hinte, Rinne 2013 in the respective order): Salary is poor and employment conditions precarious which is why the youth tend to stay longer with their parents and view their job prospects very critically.

A study in Germany for example found that 41 per cent of the graduation cohort of 2000 did not find a full-time position immediately but first completed an internship (Grühn and Hecht 2007). Critiques of such claims – in general as on the respective study – however argue that the phenomenon must not be generalised but concerns graduates of humanities rather than engineering or other natural sciences. What is certain is that Generation Erasmus realised during their studies that they would not secure work and experience rising salaries as easily as their parent generation.

Interviewees from Greece, Italy and Portugal all commented on the strained condition of their home country labour markets. Depending on their age and thus time of entering employment as well as their occupational industry, the crisis was not just one out of many but the main factor for their decision to emigrate. Yet, few of the *economic refugees* were cushioned by a financial safety net. Interviewees mentioned that they could have relied on their parents in the worst case. Nevertheless, before doing so, they took on lower qualified jobs as we can see from Marcos' stint in the shipping industry. The *economic refugees* who I met in Singapore knew that the country was one of their few chances to avoid unemployment, precarious underemployment or living off their parents. While their eventual road into employment varied, they drew on any

resource – networking events, online job portals, speculative applications and the like – which could possibly secure them a job.

Marcos' example reveals yet another feature of the European migrants of this study. The young adults are used to being "successful" in their lives. They have graduated from higher educational institutions and some have been awarded scholarships abroad. They are driven to desperation when they cannot secure a decent job. Recognition is important to Generation Erasmus and pride essential for understanding their migratory decisions. Many of my informants admitted that they were grateful to know that they could rely on their parents. Yet, they unanimously saw returning to their parents' house, either temporary after graduation from university or after longer time abroad, as a back-up plan or even the least desirable option. While a few returned temporarily or worked under short-term agreements outside their field, they felt considerable unease. Marcos, for instance, frankly admitted how humiliating he experienced his situation. Thus, both, becoming independent again and finding employment in their profession and not "just any job", were the *economic refugees'* biggest concerns to re-establish their self-esteem.

I found a similar situation to the Mediterranean countries in the Baltic and some Eastern European countries where young people with university degrees literally fled the country. Informants from these regions mentioned constraints when searching for employment or dim prospects for a career at home. Nonetheless, participants from Western European countries, too, complain over struggles to secure decent jobs and dim prospects for professional development in their home countries. What is more, they are less convinced that their home country will pay them sufficient retirement benefits once

they are old. Thus, many oppose the high income and social security taxes that were deducted from their salaries.

In the extreme case of some poorer European countries, the situation pushes *the majority* of the educated youth to leave the country. Those who remain, or those considering a return after having been abroad, perceive their home country as far less attractive as Olaf, a Baltic informant remarked. “Since people are leaving and there [are] no friends to hang out with, whether everybody is in England or friends are in Germany or Sweden- So there is kind of nothing really holding me there.” With no jobs, no decent wage and no friends, some left to Asian cities of whose more promising positions and high quality of life they knew.

This however, made evident by Marcos’ narrative, reveals another characteristic of the *economic refugees*. Most of them had been abroad before they migrated in search for employment. Also, they desired interesting jobs and inspiring surroundings that offered opportunities for career advancement. Thus, no matter how heavy the economic factor weighed, these Europeans’ positive attitude towards challenge and foreign countries played a role in their mobility and partly explains why they moved to an Asian global city and not to any other labour destination.

4.3 Demarcation and Conversion of Types

In this chapter I so far have defined the group of Generation Erasmus, the young European migrants in focus of this study. I proposed that a generational lens is useful to understand their distinctive traits. These young adults’ commonalities are rooted in their upbringing as middle-class citizens in an enlarging EU. Coming of age with the

ubiquitous availability of information technology and online social networking tools and having enjoyed pre-employment mobility in Europe and beyond, shaped their dispositions and aspirations. This allows to conceptualize them as one group, Generation Erasmus. However, they also confronted rising competitiveness on their local labour markets. Despite the group's middle-class background and high education, they struggled to find decent employment.

More than mere economic factors, however, a general sense of insecurity and the urge to choose a meaningful, maybe promising biography in what Beck (1994) called "reflexive modernity" affect Generation Erasmus' perceptions of opportunities in Europe and elsewhere. Van de Velde (2008) suggests that, despite large cultural and structural differences between European regions, young adults across the continent search for the meaning of life in different ways than earlier generations did. Some of them exercise geographical mobility as a means. The author however reminds the reader of the contingency of social class and state intervention models which direct the actions the young adults ultimately take.

Migration becomes a viable option for some of the European millennials, especially when they have been abroad before and have made positive experiences. What attracts them to Asia, then, does not simply refer to lifestyle but to professional opportunities, the chance to distinguish themselves and the chance to escape from a crisis-ridden EU. While these young migrants might easily be misinterpreted à la "free-floating in the cosmopolis" (Colic-Peisker 2010), the portrayal of the four ideal types brought the complexities of their migration motivations to the fore. The typology detects variations in motivations to move and ways into employment overseas. It also

points to the heterogeneous reasons for which different people migrate to different destinations.

In the beginning of this chapter, figure 2 illustrated the main motivations which demarcate the four ideal types. While both *lifestyle migrants* and *cultural enthusiasts* exhibit “culture and climate” as major motivation, the chapter illuminated their profound differences: For the *lifestyle migrants*, their motivation is to go on a (mid-term) adventure very often as a couple, in a place they expect to be culturally different from their Western upbringing. Since they see the adventure as a temporary break from Europe, they maintain their professional and personal connections in their home countries. While they are fascinated by the image they have of Asia, they seldom have a preferred destination in mind. Singapore happens to be most accessible given the linguistic advantage (English as working language) and the fact that bigger European companies often have a regional office in the global city. While the adventure in the culturally unfamiliar place is their primary motivation, career considerations cannot be neglected in the migratory project. The *lifestyle migrants*, despite their intention to return and their consequently staying attached to their home countries and even employers, see the values in the more dynamic and flexible labour markets and growing industries in Asia. They hope to gain from their mobility both in terms of a stimulating international environment as well as in a professional sense regarding stagnating promotional opportunities in their home countries.

In contrast, *cultural enthusiasts* from early on develop a specific fondness of Japan, the Japanese language and traditional or pop culture. At the time of graduation from university many have obtained an intermediate proficiency in Japanese or above and they have spent several months in the country as students or interns. Migration to

Tokyo, then, is not a temporary break from Europe. Actually, the *cultural enthusiasts* regard employment as a means to the end of living in the country of their dreams. Their motivations formed at a time when they had not yet experienced full-time work and family or career concerns. Given both their pre-employment embeddedness in Japan – with local friends, and sometimes a Japanese spouse – and their lack of labour market knowledge and connections in Europe, they seem motivated to stay.

In contrast to the latter, *global professionals*, as their name implies, are not fixed on a specific country in which they plan to stay (*cultural enthusiasts*) or a specific region as a temporary adventure before returning to Europe (*lifestyle migrants*). They seek an international environment where they can interact with people of different backgrounds, ethnicities, cultures and languages. They believe that working abroad is more beneficial to their personal growth and career advancement than staying in familiar surroundings, which they perceive as less challenging and less stimulating but rigid or even oppressive. Since their motivation to migrate is tied to the feasibility of career development and working in diverse international surroundings, they are not loyal to the destination country nor the social environment, as long as it offers interaction with like-minded people.

Finally, the *economic refugees* are the victims of the European economic crisis and the growing precariousness among European youth, including the highly educated. They experienced the feeling of failure which unsettled their self-esteem. Yet, even the *economic refugees* could have found some sort of job in their home countries or in other European countries. Given their earlier overseas experience and their hunger for challenge, they were inclined to rather move farer away from their home countries but

in turn gain more in terms of high living standard, opportunities for professional growth, and, importantly, an internationally minded community of their like.

The categorisation by types revealed the significance of place for migratory decision makings. Images, language, and a country's economic power strongly affect which destination attracts which type of potential movers. Before the young Europeans' first move to Asia, few were indifferent with regards to the destination city. While a big city was for the majority the minimum requirement for migration, many had fairly clear ideas of why they targeted Tokyo or Singapore. As demonstrated, Tokyo first and foremost lured with cultural appeal, including the Japanese language which is commonly known as difficult to study. Singapore, on the contrary, is a substitute for any Asian – and for the *global professionals* any global – city that offers a high living standard, decent employment without a language barrier and the additional advantage of its connectedness to other hubs as well as appealing travel destinations. The discussion so far underlined the differences of the two cities when initially considered by potential European migrants. The final paragraphs of this chapter complicate these findings by pointing to the commonalities of all types regarding migration motivations and anticipate that migrants' mobility motivations approximate over time.

The analysis of migrants' narratives elucidates two characteristics that *all* my informants' display to some degree. These are indicated by the two primary motivations in Figure 2, career advancement and cultural fondness. The young Europeans underwent higher education (often postgraduate), and several obtained degrees from reputable universities. Some worked extensive hours or studied foreign languages in order to secure a job in a country where they hoped for a better life or simply for more

stimulating professional surroundings. They aspired an international career which they perceived hardly possible in their home countries.

The other characteristic is the recurring issue of experiencing an unfamiliar culture through mobility. Mobility is prevalent, for some because of their roots in several countries or their previous migration stints, for others as a common discourse, as the norm, as something to aspire and in the fabric of conferring cosmopolitanism, open-mindedness and access to a brighter, maybe more rewarding or more exciting, future. Overall, the pervasiveness of mobility directed their ambitions and ultimately led to migration.

Each type exhibits its own primary motivation, visualised through a strong (━━) link between the specific motivation in level 2 and the type in level 3. However, weak links (----), as well as the vertical relations between the two primary motivations of level 1 with *all* secondary motivations of level 2, demonstrate each type's complexity and the interdependence of its respective motivations. These interdependencies and all types' origin in the context of the EU and the group I call Generation Erasmus nurtures their desire to live abroad. Abroad, in the case of Generation Erasmus, means emigrating from the EU and thus leaving the familiar. In sum, these types do not represent several migration phenomena but one mobility phenomenon of young Europeans' work-related migration to Asia, and the nature of this work is the focus of the following chapter. The types gradually converge and migrants align in their orientation towards a 'mobile' life, which becomes clearer in the course of the following chapters.

5. Routes into Employment

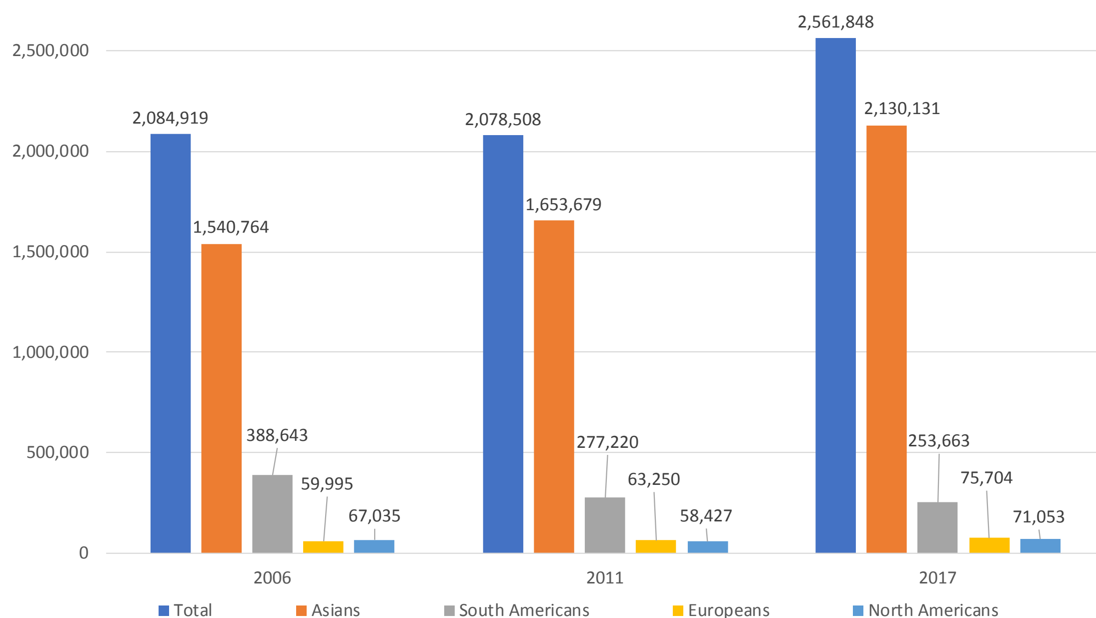
This chapter focusses on Generation Erasmus' routes into jobs and their employment conditions in Asian cities. While the previous chapters unravelled these young Europeans' shared – sometimes orientalised – imagination of 'Asia' as opposed to the familiar West, this chapter underlines variances in East Asian capitalism (Lechevalier 2014) which become significant once 'motivation' to move turns into actual labour migration.

As explained, numbers are particularly hard to obtain and statistics in most cases do not discriminate for generation or age in combination with the visa status and the country of origin or citizenship. This means that even for Japan, where extensive statistics on the foreigner population can be obtained, it is not possible to adequately trace the trend of young European independent movers to Tokyo. Figure 4 shows the increase of the foreign resident population in Japan between 2006 and 2017, broken down by the major regions of origin. Asians are the biggest group by far, followed by South Americans. However, while the number of the latter group has dropped, that of Westerners, especially Europeans, has grown considerably and Europeans have lately outnumbered North Americans in Japan.

As stated above, the recent trend of young Europeans' independent migration to Asian cities, despite its arguably small scale when compared to the larger number of intra-Asian migration, is featured in newspaper articles and media reports (Coconut Daily 2015; Marlow 2013; Zhuang 2018; Qian and Elsinga 2015; Koshoibekova 2014). Qualitative micro-level studies, both in Japan as well as other Asian destinations such as Beijing (Knowles 2015), Shanghai (Farrer 2019; Stanley 2013), Hong Kong (Leonard 2010), Taiwan (Tzeng 2010) and Singapore (Lundström 2014), too, demonstrate that

contemporary migration has diversified including numbers of young Europeans who take up full-time jobs in major Asian cities. These reports give a more accurate understanding of the change in directions of movements from Western labour migration (in contrast to company-assigned expatriation) to Asian countries and the qualitative shift and diversification of the recent young migrant population.

Figure 4: Foreign residents in Japan by region of origin; 2006, 2011, 2017



Source: Created by the author. Calculated based on Ministry of Justice (2006a, 2011a, 2017a).

The first part of this chapter addresses the situation in Singapore and the latter in Japan where the great majority of Generation Erasmus are working in Tokyo. Both parts are organised in the same order. First, I outline the labour market characteristics and take into consideration how the state handles the issue of skilled foreign labour. In the subchapter that follows, I turn to the legal and institutional frameworks that channel the

European migrants into distinct labour market niches. I then outline migrants' access to the labour market and their occupational profiles. This provides grounds for my analysis of the role migrants' resources and ability to mobilise various forms of capital play for the process of migration. Scrutinising Generation Erasmus' access to employment and their distinctive occupational profiles, I advance towards a discussion of the symbolic capital which renders the young Europeans attractive for the globalising labour markets of both host societies.

5.1 Singapore

5.1.1 Characteristics of the Singaporean Labour Market

Singapore became independent from Great Britain in 1965. Tackling the challenge of nation building and economic development in the post-colonial immigrant state, the government embraced an open market economy with free trade and a focus on foreign direct investment (hereafter FDI) (Chia 2015). By the year 2003, 6000 multinational companies (hereafter MNCs) constituted one of the economy's main pillars (Wong, Millar, and Choi 2006:80). Through their presence, the city-state integrated into global production networks and supply chains. Long known as manufacturing export base, Singapore has striven to become a knowledge-based economy and has gradually upgraded to higher value-added industries. Since the 1990s the government has encouraged Singaporean firms to venture abroad and started to strengthen its domestic entrepreneurial sector (Phelps 2007).

Due to the country's dependence on (increasingly highly-educated) human resources and the limited number of its local population – who are in fact immigrants from China, Malaysia and India themselves –, the government has long welcomed foreign labour. Though the unskilled foreign workforce outnumbers skilled foreigners by far, the official rhetoric concentrates on the latter group, the so-called foreign talent. Since the 2000s, when the country expanded research in biotechnology (Wong and Bunnell 2006) and electronic products and targeted healthcare, education (Olds 2007) and creative industries (Chang 2000; Wong, Miller and Choi 2006), the attraction of such foreign talent has become a major political discourse.

Nowadays, Singapore is most notably recognised as a regional service hub for finance, shipping and air transport. Singapore's political, social and macroeconomic stability, transparent legal and regulatory framework, low level of public sector corruption, availability of foreign professionals and workers through a sophisticated immigration system as well as a well-developed physical infrastructure (Chia 2015) have secured the city-state a position among the world leaders of a conducive business environment.

The Asian Economic Crisis of 1997 however slowed economic growth. During the 2008 - 2009 recession again firms had to retrench and suddenly Singaporeans had to fear job loss (Chia 2015). Concerned about the small country's competitiveness in the future, the government had earlier set up the Economic Development Board (hereafter EDB). The EDB launched a range of programmes that targeted local businesses and human resources in order to foster home-grown innovation, entrepreneurship and technological excellence. As part of these initiatives, the EDB set up a Startup Enterprise Development Scheme (SEEDS). In contrast to risk-averse Singaporean

graduates who are supposedly less prone to become entrepreneurs (Chua and Bedford 2016), I demonstrate below that the recent entrepreneurial mood appeals to foreign talent.

At the turn of the century, with the struggle to sustain the high living standard and counter rising social tensions, the issue of foreign professionals has taken centre stage (e.g. Yang, Yang, and Zahn 2017; Koh 2003; Montsion 2012). For long, the government had argued that in the need to upgrade skills foreign talent was indispensable. The climate however changed with the 2009 general election (Yang et al. 2017). Despite the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) retaining its position, their hegemonic rule was challenged and they experienced dramatic losses in votes for the first time since Singapore's independence. Political analysts contributed a great part of the electoral outcome to the government's refusal to change their foreign labour policy because the public had repeatedly demanded a cap on the foreign workforce. Since then, the PAP has put significant restrictions on welcoming foreign talent. The number of foreigners who were granted permanent residence (hereafter PR) has dropped significantly as has the one for naturalisation. Working visa for foreign talents, so-called Employment Passes (hereafter EPs), are often rejected, yet reasons are unclear and the whole immigration system is highly obscure (ibid).

5.1.2 Europeans' Access to the Labour Market

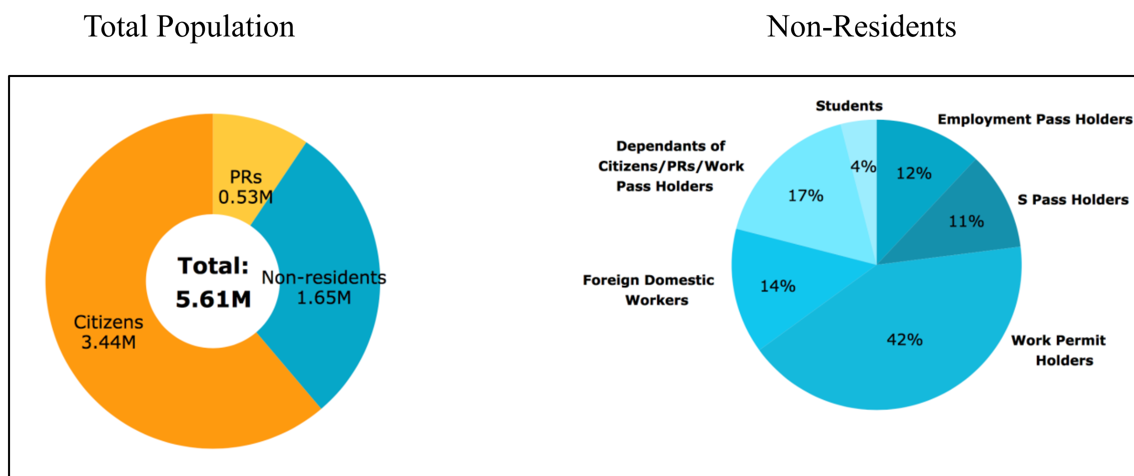
Legal and Institutional Framework for Migration

Singapore's total population was 5.61 million in June 2017 and is classified by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) into three groups: Citizens, numbering 3.44 million,

Permanent Residents (PRs) with a population size of 0.53 million and Non-residents, 1.65 million (figure 5). These Non-residents hold various visa available for dependents, foreign workers and students. Twelve per cent of Non-residents have an Employment Pass (EP), the most widely issued permit for professionals (National Population and Talent Division Singapore 2018). As the government does not disseminate detailed statistics on foreigners, the current number of Europeans among Singapore's foreign workforce is unknown. The last figure available is Coe and Kelly's study (2000:417), which stated that of the 80,000 EP holders in 1998, "Japanese nationals form the largest contingent (approximately 25 per cent of the total), followed by Americans, British, other Europeans and Australians."

Figure 5: Population Singapore

Total Population Non-Residents



Source: National Population and Talent Division. 2018. Retrieved June 24, 2018 (https://www.population.sg/population-trends/demographics).

Singapore provides smooth and quick processing of visa applications. According to the Institute of Management Development (IMD 2018), the country has ranked high in terms of overall competitiveness and consequently in attractiveness for highly skilled

labour for years. Working visa are categorised according to skill level. Most of my informants have the 'skilled' visa, the EP. This status demands a significant level of skill and financial resources or a minimum monthly salary of at least 3,600 Singapore dollars for recent graduates and higher salaries for experienced professionals.[24] Additionally, the applicant needs to have "acceptable qualifications", which the MoM (2018b) defines as "usually a good university degree, professional qualifications or specialist skills." The employer has to apply on behalf of the future employee and the pass is valid, upon its approval, for up to two years for first-time candidates and up to three years thereafter (ibid). Termination of the employment contract – from either side – has to be reported to the immigration authorities and the foreign national only has one month to secure new employment until his current EP expires (Zhang et al. 2017).

Navigating Options of Access to Employment

The Europeans in this study accessed the Singaporean labour market via several patterns. As indicated upon in the previous chapter, some arrived on a tourist visa and searched for a job on-site. Isabelle, the French woman with Arabic background who had started her professional career in Australia, heard about job opportunities in Singapore from a friend.

> I always wanted to come here [Singapore] so I talked to a friend who said "if you want to come you should give it a try. There are so many French here coming every week who try their chance and quite a few find a position." […] I gave everything I had in Aussi away. I was really into coming here. I went on Airbnb and found a job. I was very motivated. I went to all the networking events, met so many people, also people in my industry, career

[24] Approximately 2700 US dollars.

> recruitment, where I wanted to work. I think when you arrive you have to be really targeted, have to know what you want, know the people and know where you fit.

Isabelle's case drives us to the unconventional ways through which a fair number of the Europeans enter Asian global cities. In Singapore many arrive with little or no network and start to build contacts from scratch. "Know[ing] the people" in Isabelle's case meant to use her single French contact in Singapore as a gate keeper to others and as an informational source. For weeks, she attended every event she heard of and built contacts with people in her industry. Also, the presence of a large and networked French community in Singapore helped her to extend her knowledge on the market and receive advice on how to sell herself in job interviews. This requires self-confidence and an outgoing personality as well as at least some savings. Isabelle had worked in Australia before and so could afford accommodation via Airbnb and three months of unemployment.

Others had less financial resources. They found temporary housing with friends and simultaneously concentrated on online job search, meetings with head hunters and every single networking event that took place in the city. Marcos, the Portuguese architect who I introduced as an *economic refugee* above, was one of them as was Lorena, an Italian woman who developed creative strategies to catch potential employers' attention. "I attended two networking events where I printed my personal business cards with details and three main bullet points with my top three skills. And if [you] turned [it had a] QR code with my CV [accessible] through mobile phone. I attended all these meetings so at least people will not forget me."

The above narratives demonstrate that, despite varying motivations for moving, European migrants increasingly access jobs from the non-privileged position of tourist

visa holders who are financially and legally under pressure to secure employment quickly. This finding is significant and compares to the situation in Tokyo where young Europeans, too, compete with local graduates and other highly educated migrants on the job market.

Other informants followed more traditional paths to employment in Asia. Some negotiated an internal transfer with their European firms, yet on a domestic and not an expatriate contract. One of the latter, part of the *lifestyle migrant* type, is Florence, a French lawyer. Florence migrated together with her husband and, while both had wanted to leave France, the decision for Singapore fell when her husband learned about a job with a French company in the city-state. The position was posted through the so-called V.I.E. programme, a French overseas internship scheme which enables EU graduates with limited or no work experience to work on a contracted basis in French firms abroad.[25] Eight of my informants in both cities (roughly ten per cent of the total) exercised their first work-related migration as interns through this so-called V.I.E. scheme. Two of the eight informants are not French but EU citizens. This hints at V.I.E. as a channel for labour migration on a much larger than just the French domestic scale. In fact, it targets at all European citizens of the specified age range. Thanks to a greater supply of internationally-minded and linguistically capable applicants, French

[25] The V.I.E. French International Internship Program was founded in 2001 by the French Ministry of Foreign Trade in order to promote French exports abroad. The French National Service manages the programme which means that interns are considered to be French public employees and receive a monthly allowance (as opposed to a salary). They are exempted from tax and are covered under the French insurance system (Civiweb 2017a). The French state is not only intermediary but is responsible for the interns. European graduates between the age of 18 and 28 are eligible to apply for an overseas working assignment for a period varying between six up to 24 months. Since its establishment, more than 35,000 interns have found limited employment abroad with 4336 companies. While these are also called "internships", being first-time or early career positions for new graduates that do not guarantee transfer, they give young people the chance to find work abroad despite lack of work experience (Ubifrance 2015).

companies can choose from a larger labour pool – the European and not only the French – which in turn benefits the French state.

From the company perspective, too, the programme is advantageous in that the firm does not need to arrange for the visa and can waive the hire of costly expatriates. The homepage promotes the programme under the heading "The benefits of hiring a V.I.E. intern for the company: Flexibility, Simplicity and Financial Benefits." In other words, companies are invited to take advantage of flexible, namely monthly contracted, and relatively cheap but highly educated labour who might gradually replace traditional expatriate assignments (Civiweb 2017b).

For the young Europeans, the V.I.E. offers clear assets: It allows them to embark on an extended work-related overseas "training" while guaranteeing them certain security structures. The system does therefore not only facilitate youth mobility but fuels it beyond EU borders. However, the contract is limited to one or two years and my data shows that a permanent position afterwards is not guaranteed. This influences how young migrants think about their sojourn. Florence and her husband knew that his position was only for two years and Florence suggested that they were likely to return to Europe, maybe even France.

The non-expatriate dispatch of young professionals from developed countries, similar to an internship, yet time-wise and in terms of compensation addressed at full-time employees, is something rather new. Apart from the V.I.E. programme, I met migrants who came via similar channels to Asia. For instance, an independent public entity of the Government of Portugal, which promotes Portuguese businesses abroad, operates an internship programme that sends one hundred graduates to Portuguese firms around the globe every year (aicep Portugal global 2017). Thus it is the Portuguese

equivalent to V.I.E. with the essential difference that it is only open to Portuguese citizens. One of my informants, Nico, was in his words "lucky enough to […] go to Singapore." The programme's striking characteristic is that accepted candidates have to sign the contract without knowing their destination. Nico was assigned to a company in Singapore. Thanks to the connections he had made with Portuguese business owners during the internship, he later managed to find a full-time job in Singapore.

A student visa is another comparatively "easy" form of access to Singapore. Three of my interviewees studied at a Singaporean university, two of them as full-time students for graduate degrees. These latter two did not have much trouble to find employment afterwards as Deborah, a Greek informant who I met in 2015, told me.

> When I first arrived six years ago it was much easier to get a job. I did my master at NUS [National University of Singapore] and I was working there at the research centre. And upon graduation I had the right to apply for the so-called "employment eligibility certificate" or something like that. And this allowed me to have a Long Term Visit Pass for a year to stay in Singapore to find a job. […] In September 2011, they stopped issuing new ones. They changed the policy, it doesn't exist anymore.

As Deborah's account reveals, she graduated at a time when migration regulations were still very tolerant. Another interviewee, John, came as an exchange student for a year and, fond of the idea to start his professional career in Singapore, returned after graduation from his home university in Europe and tried to find a job. He struggled severely, both because he came without a valid visa (in contrast to Deborah) and because at the time he graduated in 2013 immigration regulations had become much stricter than before. Eventually, a friend informed him about a prospective employer and he was offered a job right before running out of money and risking illegality. Another

informant, Caspar, who had graduated from an MBA programme in Singapore was stressed by the importance of having networks. He noted how after graduation he "suddenly [felt] being alone" and that without friends who could help with "basic stuff [like] finding accommodation" he would have run into severe troubles.

In line with student migration to other countries (e.g. Liu-Farrer 2001a; Szelenyi 2008; Beech 2018; Collins 2008), the social networks these students nurture over their time in the host country later enable them, in the form of social capital, to secure employment. More than that, however, I suggest that it is the combined activation and conversion of cultural and social capital which makes Generation Erasmus attractive junior employees for the global labour market.

Giacomo, an Italian structural engineering graduate, suggested that his "Europeanness" was advantageous for his hire in the Kuala Lumpur branch of an architecture company. When I met him after his transfer to the Singaporean headquarter, his narrative on the initial hiring process in the company's Malaysian branch was intriguing as it elucidated that this 'Europeanness' was more than just his citizenship in the EU or his whiteness.

> Giacomo: Also the factor that I am European, that's an advantage that we [Europeans] have or had and I took it.
>
> Me: What do you mean by that?
>
> Giacomo: It's the approach to work, at least in engineering. I wouldn't generalise but probably the ways to approach problems are different [here] than in Europe. [The company owner] had that experience [of studying in Europe] himself and probably was looking for something like that as well. So I think it's a bit of education and mindset. It's probably the only thing left that Europe can sell. *(sic)*

Giacomo suggests that the company owner, himself educated in Europe, values European higher education. The prestige of European educational institutions certainly plays a role here. It is noteworthy that the Iranian company owner is an alumni of Giacomo's alma mater and himself a migrant in Singapore. His decision to hire a fresh graduate from Europe is likely to hail from his trust in Giacomo's qualifications. Such trust then is based on the shared social and institutional network rather than on a belief in accomplishment or prestige based on race or nationality. Importantly, Giacomo was not, in contrast to some others in Singapore and Tokyo, placed in a sales or marketing position where he faced Western clients. Instead, he became member of a team of Malaysian employees who worked on local projects. I return to a discussion of migrants' capital in the end of this chapter, but now I wish to conclude the section on Singapore with an overview of the occupational profiles and company types of the group.

5.1.3 Labour Market Niches and Occupational Profiles

Singapore is a hub for MNCs and for regional headquarters of foreign firms. In particular, its strong role as a financial and logistics centre, as well as recently in biotechnology, software, education and the creative industries have created demand for highly skilled human resources in these fields (Montsion 2012). The young Europeans I met in Singapore represent the growing industries fairly well. However, against the stereotypical image of Westerners being expatriates in MNCs (Lundström 2014; Beaverstock 2011), my field work provides evidence that not only distinguished multinational companies employ these migrants. I identified five company types in which the young Europeans initially work after entering Singapore. Table 2 provides an

outline of these types which are foreign firms, EU or European national government-related businesses, Singaporean firms, Singaporean government-related business, and Singaporean start-ups with the European migrant as business owner.

Table 2: Europeans' initial occupational industries and company types, Singapore

Type of firm, location of HQ	Industry	Number of informants
Foreign firm (HQ: EU, US, Taiwan, China)	Finance, logistics, software, health, manufacturing, hospitality, market research, advertising, architecture, manufacturing, IT, Logistics, design, consulting	21
EU/national gov.-related	Politics and trade; culture, information and events	4
SG firm	Architecture, finance, Human Resources, design, civil engineering, planning, IT	8
SG gov.-related	Civil engineering/infrastructure	1
SG start-up (founder)	Arts	1

HQ: Headquarter

The table lists the occupational industries and the distribution of the European informants (n=35) over the five types. It illustrates that the vast majority (twenty-one) enter employment in Singapore via foreign firms in 'typical' industries such as finance, logistics, architecture, consulting and the like. Most of these companies are headquartered in the EU and the US while a few are based in China and one in Taiwan. The Europeans who work in Asian companies all had worked in China before. While working in these Chinese firms they attained social capital such as trust relationships to Chinese managers, a network in China, and familiarity with organisational structures.

They managed to cultivate these qualities, which rendered them attractive to their Singaporean-based Chinese employers. Insightful is also the role which European and national government-related political and cultural institutions play as first employers (four informants).

Nevertheless, eight informants, or one fourth of the total, were hired by local firms which operate in similar industries as their foreign counterparts. Some of the domestic firms which employ European migrants as well as Singaporean government-related businesses and the domestic start-up founded by one informant, engage in the arts, design, planning and education. Thus, the domestic firms reflect the Singaporean government's recent policies: Promotion of the city-state's cosmopolitan face via emerging flagship industries like innovation and the arts and the rapid expansion of education and by recruitment of highly skilled labour.

5.2. Tokyo

5.2.1 Characteristics of the Japanese Labour Market

Thanks to Japan's post-war decades of economic growth, domestic companies were able to provide permanent employment to their core employees. Cheaper and dispensable labour – mostly women – filled contractual positions as administrative staff and clerks.[26] This created a distinctive labour market and recruitment system whose main

[26] Throughout the booming decades of the post-war years until entering the 'bubble economy' in the late 1980s (Waldenberger 2016), Japanese salaries and along with them living standard rose. When the real estate bubble burst in 1991/1992 Japan was the world's second largest economy after the U.S. Contemporary Japanese economy is marked by its third decade of slow growth which has entailed far-reaching labour market changes especially in terms of hiring and promotion.

characteristics are lifetime-employment, on-the-job training, seniority promotion and pay, in-house careers, and as a consequence, limited inter-organisational mobility (Rebick 2005; Waldenberger 2016). This distinctive political economy had consequences for the 2010s' strained economic situation and for the internationalising work force in Japan.

In Japanese capitalism as it had become established over the decades, socialisation in the company transformed the prototypical white-collar worker, the salary man, into a *shakaijin*, literally 'society person.'[27] It started with the recruitment system, the so-called 'job-hunting' (*shukatsu*) (Dasgupta 2003). This is the period of job search activities which usually begins over a year before university students' graduation.[28] Students are preoccupied with job hunting activities for months. On April 1 of each year, new employees enter the companies and complete a series of in-house or boot camp training sessions before they are assigned to a team (Kosugi 2007).

The idea of this system was to train generalists with utmost loyalty to the company. In order to assure high quality, firms tied their core employees to the company by lifelong employment, the seniority principle which promises salary rise by length of employment and age, and financing schemes for loans. This system valorises general rather than specialised skills and length of stay in the firm. It obstructs job transfer and the possibilities of individual or creative career paths. Under the pressure to

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[27] The white collar Japanese worker is symbolised by the *salary man*, a male Japanese who is committed to his company to long working days and after-work drinking with co-workers and clients (Reskin 1993; Ogasawara 1998).

[28] Students visit prospective employers' information events, register online to submit their resumes, complete a first screening based on formal criteria and sometimes essays. Later follow computer-based tests and then interviews, often in several stages and, towards the end, including group discussions. In average, it takes six to ten months until successful applicants receive their official job offer.

globalise and the need for more flexible labour, this system has been heavily criticised in recent years (Waldenberger 2016).

While the fundamental structure of corporate work in Japan, with the institutionalised job hunting system as part of it, is still in use nowadays, employment conditions have undergone significant changes (Rebick 2005). Many firms had to retrench and although the Japanese employment law continues to obstruct lay off, new employment forms – part time positions and especially dispatch work under easily terminable contracts – have become prominent (Allison 2013). In the light of these developments, scholars argue for a change in the young generation's expectations towards work (e.g. Dasgupta 2013). Roberts (2016) for instance demonstrates how young couples increasingly seek work life balance and more often men are willing to share housework. This was uncommon in previous decades of the traditional male breadwinner model.

Nevertheless, surveys among university students point to the continuous desire to work in the traditional large manufacturing or trading firms – so-called *ōtekigyō* – which represent status and stability (Rikurūto Wākusu Kenkyūjō 2016). Work conditions in these firms continue to leave little room for women aspiring career and still prescribe long work hours (Liu-Farrer and Hof 2018; Holbrow and Nagayoshi 2016). In the anxious economic climate of Japan's "lost decades", young people however focus on the big firms as guarantors of stability. Eventually, despite the desire for work life balance, they orient themselves at quite conservative values regarding gender roles, marriage and the household division of labour (Rikurūto Wākusu Kenkyūjō 2016; Roberts 2011; 2016).

Japanese workplaces have been diversifying not only in terms of an increased participation of women in the labour force. While in 2017, the total foreign work force is with 1.2 per cent still comparatively small, the number marks a continuous increase since 0.8 per cent in 2000 (JILPT 2016).[29] The majority of foreign workers are either long-term residents or low-skilled migrants who entered Japan through one of the various side doors (Roberts 2018).

Against the backdrop of Japan's economic constraints, aging population and workforce decline, the government has half-heartedly joined labour specialists in promoting the recruitment of skilled foreigners – yet refrains from calling them migrants (*imin* in Japanese). Instead, the expression *kōdo jinzai*, a highly technical term whose literal translation is close to "high human capital" or "foreign talent", is the commonly used term (ibid; Keidanren 2016; Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet 2013). Roberts (2018) argued that such naming allows the supporters of immigration to bring large numbers of foreigners into the country as the term *kōdo jinzai* emphasises the benefit of added human capital but obscures the fact that foreign people enter Japanese society.

Japan has repeatedly scored low on its attractiveness for 'global talent' (World Economic Forum 2016b).[30] Scholars attribute this to uncompetitive salaries and the seniority-based promotional system (Oishi 2012), non-transferable skills (Tsukasaki 2008) and the inaccessibility of distinctive industries for a certain ethnic group (Debnár

[29] Compare other OECD countries such as Germany with a ratio of 9.3 per cent or Ireland with 15.3 per cent in 2014 (statista 2018a).

[30] It is important to note that the Japanese government refers to "global human resources" (*gurōbaru jinzai*) as those who "act from (the perspective of) a Japanese identity" (Gurōbaru jinzai ikusei suishin kaigi 2011:7; translated by the author). Thus, while stipulating foreign language skills or intercultural understanding as qualifications, the Japanese definition differs strikingly from other countries such as Singapore which, when promoting global talent, addresses hard qualifications and the assets rather than drawbacks of foreigners' different background and education, and not identity issues (former Prime Minister of Singapore in his 1997 National Day Rally Speech, cited in Pang 2006).

2016) or because the Japanese immigration officers' hesitance to accept foreign degrees as in the case of some Indian IT professionals (D'Costa 2016. Nevertheless, Liu-Farrer (2011b) and Achenbach (2014) claim that Chinese students who graduated from Japanese universities find permanent jobs in transnationally operating small and medium companies (SMEs) and are sometimes rewarded with high responsibility such as business travel from an early stage on.

5.2.2 Europeans' Access to the Labour Market

Legal and Institutional Frameworks for Migration

While there is a range of different visa categories for "skilled" foreigners available in Japan, the young Europeans of this study almost unanimously hold positions as white-collar employees in the private sector. Their visa, with just two exceptions, is the so-called Engineer/Specialist in Humanities/International Services visa ("Specialist visa" hereafter). The employer applies for the foreign employee's visa and has to prove his eligibility. Upon approval, the foreigner receives a resident card and is entitled to work in Japan for a period of one, three or five years. In case of change in his or her employment status, for instance upon lay off or self-driven exit from the company, the foreigner has only a three-month period of time to secure a new job (Immigration Bureau of Japan 2018).

Citizens of the EU make up only a small proportion of foreigners in Japan. Also, Europeans only constituted 10,810 of a total of 161,124 "Specialist" visa holders in Japan in 2016 (roughly 6.7 per cent). While the number of "Specialist" visa holders from Europe has only slightly increased from 9,481 in 2006 to 10,810 in 2017 (Ministry

of Justice 2008; 2017), it is the dominant work visa category of Europeans in Japan.[31] Figure 6 visualises European residents' visa status. The largest group constitutes permanent residents with roughly 20,000 of the approximately 70,000 European residents in Japan.[32] The second largest group – and by far the largest of all work visa statuses – are the "Specialists" who with 10,810 visa holders account for a higher number than all other work visa holders together.[33] Remarkable is also the number of college students, which, as I explain below, has more than doubled within ten years. As my analysis will show, former European foreign exchange and full-time students form part of the potential Japanese labour force, similar as in the case of other national and regional groups.

Debnár, (2016) in his study on Europeans in Japan, argues that the "Specialist" visa category "does not necessarily represent a group of high-skilled workers" (2016:44). In contrast to the immigration regulations, which stipulate applicants for the "Specialist" visa to have professional work experience in the field of their university major or training, many of his European informants work in the language sector or cultural industry, for which they often lack specialised training.

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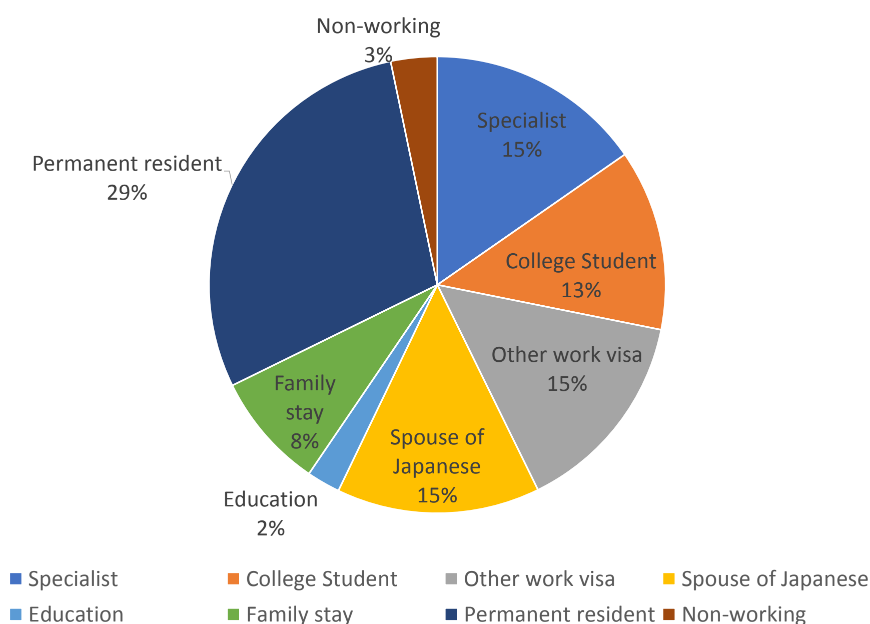
[31] Recently, the status "engineer" was added to this category and its current name is 'Specialist in Humanities/International Services/Engineers.' Thus, statistics for 2006 present numbers for two different visas while reports for 2016 combine the previously separated visa categories.

[32] As stated earlier, the numbers consist of Europeans from all over Europe and not only the EU. These non-EU Europeans' visa categories do however in proportion roughly reflect those of the EU citizen population. This is especially true for Russians who are, among the non-EU Europeans, the by far largest group in numerical terms.

[33] It should be noted that permanent residents and spouses are allowed to work, too. Therefore, the legal categories do not give a comprehensive overview of Europeans' employment situation in Japan. However, the Europeans in focus of this thesis are young and relatively new to Japan and thus yet to become eligible for permanent residency. Moreover, they are either single or if married still hold a work visa and thus do not count to the two largest legal groups.

Figure 6: Major visa categories of European residents in Japan, 2016



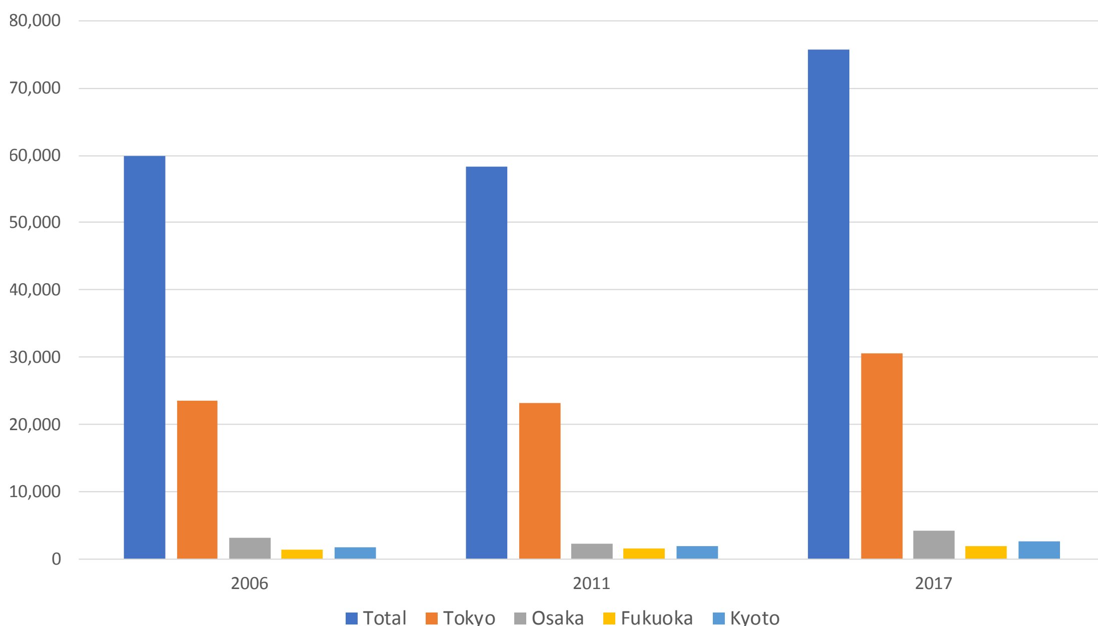
Source: Created by the author. Calculated based on Ministry of Justice (2017).

Firms and cultural institutions which require multilingual or intercultural skills are commonly concentrated in big cities. Figure 7 visualises the number of Europeans in Japan by prefecture of residence in 2006, 2011 and 2017. It demonstrates not only the considerable growth in Europeans' numbers in Japan in total but also that Tokyo has constantly hosted by far the largest number of European residents while other business centres like Osaka and Fukuoka as well as Japan's cultural hub Kyoto host significantly fewer Europeans.

Similar to cases in Singapore, my informants entered the domestic labour market via distinct channels. In Japan, however, more so than in Singapore, a large number of informants had graduated from a domestic university or had spent one or two terms in Japan as exchange students. In the light of the internationalisation of higher education and consequently increasing competitiveness between universities globally, Japan set its

aim to host 300,000 international students by 2020. In 2016, a total number of almost 240,000 foreign students were registered in Japan, an increase of almost 100,000 students since 2010 (JASSO 2017). By nationality, the top ten number of international students in Japan includes only Asian countries. In the interest of this dissertation, I wish to underline that although a much smaller number of Europeans study in Japan their numbers, too, have been constantly and significantly rising from approximately 4000 in 2006 to roughly 10,250 in 2017 (Ministry of Justice 2006a; 2017a).

Figure 7: Europeans by prefecture of residence in Japan, 2006, 2011, 2017



Source: Created by the author. Calculated based on Ministry of Justice (2006b, 2011b, 2017b).

Along with the internationalisation of its universities, the Japanese government has established several generous scholarship programmes. Given the particularities of the Japanese labour market which I illustrated above – the preference for fresh graduates

who are recruited once a year via an institutionalised job hunting (*shukatsu*) system – several of the respective interviewees found their first employment via *shukatsu*.

Navigating Options of Access to Employment

In recent years, some of the so-called "job fairs" have started to focus on attracting foreign graduates. International students are often proficient in several languages and they have gone through Japanese educational institutions (at least partly). As such, they are very attractive for Japanese firms which want to foster their overseas business or strive for a more international company image (Conrad and Meyer-Ohle 2018). 13 of the 35 informants in Japan enrolled as full-time students at Japanese universities (one as an undergraduate, 11 as graduate students and one woman for both undergraduate studies and graduate school) (table 3).

Table 3: Work or study experience in Japan previous to employment (N=35)*

Exchange student	Full time, undergrad.	Full time, graduate	Language school	Internship	Working holiday	Host family (high school)
11	2	11	1	8	1	2

*While 11 of the 35 did not spend any time in Japan pre-employment and thus do not appear in the table, some informants appear in several categories. For instance, one woman spent a year during high school with a host family, later completed an internship and then studied as an exchange student in Japan.

The only self-financed informant could just afford so after having worked full-time for several years. The other 12, as well as another 11 informants who spent between 3 – 12 months as exchange students in Japan, received generous scholarships which provided for their studies in Japan even without financial support from home. The exchange students benefited from bilateral university agreements whereas most of

the full-time students received a Japanese government scholarship and a few others successfully applied for private support.

The European students did not only receive financial support. In university rankings, their universities were all average or above and several studied in Japan's elite private or national universities. This positioned them particularly favourably on the job market and meant that they could rely on a range of "in-house" services and facilities. Their universities offered professional orientation sessions, organised job fairs where employers introduced the employment at their firms and assisted students with filing documents or even with preparation for tests.

Interviewees appreciated the services in place and admitted that they might not have found employment in Japan without such help. Job hunting events which explicitly target at foreigners were for some the decisive factor to secure a job. For instance, Pauline, a Northern European woman with intermediate Japanese proficiency, attended her graduate school's "international job hunting event" which eventually led to a job.

> If you want to do the *shukatsu* it's very convenient. You just go with the mass, you know. And you use all the services that [my university] has, the Career Centre and the seminars that they have, it's very convenient. […] They organise *setsumeikai* (information sessions) inside of the school and that's actually where I met the representative of the company where I am working now. So they had this English-language *setsumeikai* […] and it was very small maybe because it was in English. […] So there were not many students attending. So it was very intimate, with some companies you could actually talk one-on-one with the director of the company so it was really good.

Others admitted that they had attempted *shukatsu* and failed. They had to realise that despite years of studying the Japanese language, they lacked the technical terms and

competence in Chinese characters to succeed in the process. They then turned to other channels into employment, such as personal, often national-based networks or positions posted via the V.I.E. programme. The ones who managed to secure jobs via the Japanese *shukatsu* system were in most cases previously enrolled as full-time graduate students in Japan.

Another institution that is known to channel young foreigners into jobs in the cultural sector in Japan is the JET Programme.[34] It offers two different kinds of positions. One is the ALT (assistant language teacher), which targets native English speakers. While I have encountered many US or Australian ALTs in my time in Japan, I did not meet any European ALTs. The UK and Ireland are the only EU countries with a majority of native English speakers and are therefore the only European countries from which people commonly apply for ALT positions. Furthermore, for those who want to use the Japanese language at work or who do not want to teach, the ALT openings are unattractive.

The other track that JET offers, the CIR (Coordinator of International Relations), appealed to many culturally interested Europeans (who I categorised as *cultural enthusiasts* in chapter four). CIRs' tasks, according to the programme website, include "translation/interpretation for government officials, teaching community or school English classes, and international exchange event planning and implementation" (JET 2015b). The CIRs are dispatched to local government offices and thus very few work in bigger cities. The two CIRs among my interviewees were assigned to smaller cities, too. Both had hoped for Tokyo or another major city. However, given the limited chances to

[34] The Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme was established in 1987 by a collaboration of several Japanese government authorities. The programme website states that it "aims to promote internationalisation in Japan's local communities by helping to improve foreign language education and developing international exchange at the community level (JET 2015a)."

work in the cultural sector as a foreigner in Japan, they accepted offers in rural areas. “I just wanted a job, really,” was how Marc, a 23 year-old British man, explained why he seized the offer in one of the mid-sized cities in sparsely populated Northern Japan.

Similar to the case of Singapore, there are trainee and internship programmes that channel recent European graduates with limited or no work experience into employment with foreign companies. Several of my informants came to Japan via the French V.I.E. programme. In contrast to Singapore, however, two of them are not French nationals. Their placement in French companies in Tokyo might be explained by their specific background. They had majored in mathematics and economics respectively and thus possessed credentials which few of the Japanese studies majors had. This probably made them attractive for their employers, namely financial companies. Furthermore, one of them, the Greek man Alexiou, was fluent in Japanese additionally, while Berna, an Italian woman, was fluent in French. Thus, their language advantage in the Japanese subsidiaries of French companies – where they spoke at least two of the three official working languages fluently – in combination with their qualifications in the field of finance seems to have been decisive for their hire.

I found another common channel into employment with both Japanese and foreign firms. This was recruitment through intermediaries in the IT industry. Head hunters, while unconventional for white-collar positions during times of lifelong employment in Japan, are common in the more dynamic and flexible IT market. Especially prestigious sectors such as Japan’s flagship industry robotics/artificial intelligence (AI) use specialised employment agents to find young and creative developers – among them foreigners to an increasing extent. Stefan, a French man with a PhD degree in AI, first

struggled to find a job due to his limited Japanese proficiency. Once he learned about head hunters from friends and had met a few, he quickly found a job.

> As soon as I contacted [the head hunters] it was easy. I could even state fields of interest, expectation of salary, etc. He proposed me two jobs. I could choose. They were already good so I didn't search further. […] They are used to find foreigners and to working in English, so it eased the whole process. […] If [the job] wasn't good I would just contact job hunters again. Now that I am working I have received several offers, so it is not as difficult anymore [to find something].

Stefan's account indicates that even his deficiency in Japanese did not obstruct his job search. As he later explained in the interview, many employees in his company were foreign. As long as migrants have the technical skills that software companies are looking for, head hunters offer convenient and fast access to decent employment.

5.2.3 Labour Market Niches and Occupational Profiles

As the previous subchapter demonstrated, the way the Japanese capitalism has developed results in particular employment features of the Japanese labour market. These are the status of the employee – permanent employment in many Japanese firms while foreign companies often hire contract workers – as well as the working language. Even in most foreign companies, Japanese is the dominant language although increasingly added by the preferred fluency in both, Japanese and English. Table 4 illustrates my informants' main occupational industries and types of companies when they initially started to work in Japan. I added the two variables "employee status" and

"working language" to the table which otherwise resembles table 2 of the group in Singapore.

Table 4: Europeans' initial occupational industries and company types, Tokyo

Type of firm	**Industry**	**Employee status**	**Working Language**	**Number of informants**
Foreign firm (HQ: EU, US, China)	finance, health, fashion, games market research, recruitment, FMCG*, renewable energies consulting, HR	Mostly contract	JP and English (sometimes English only)	15
Large Japanese firm	Manufacturing, communications, logistics, trade, renewable energies	Permanent	Japanese	9
Japanese SME	IT, Media, education/languages, patent law, HR	Mostly contract, Permanent as exception	English main, second Japanese	7
Japanese gov.-related	Culture and tourism	Contract	Japanese main, 2nd English	3
JP start-up (founder)	arts	Business Owner	English	1

FMCG: fast moving consumer goods, e.g. non-durable consumables such as beverages

With regards to Japan, two aspects are striking. One is my informants' routes into employment: More than half enter the Japanese labour market via Japanese firms. Japanese companies, as in table 4, consist of large Japanese firms (9), SMEs (7),

Japanese government-related businesses (3) and one start-up with the European being the founder (1). The ones in large and established Japanese manufacturing and trading companies all came in through the April 1 intake typical for the institutionalised Japanese recruitment system. Both the recruitment process and the working language are in Japanese and all informants were hired as permanent employees (*seishain*). Then, there are contracted Europeans in the cultural and language industry (JETs, translators, and the like with high Japanese proficiency) and specialists with no or limited Japanese language skills in the IT sector, working in small Japanese companies and often being recruited via head hunters. The latter are either contracted or permanent employees.

On the other end of the spectrum are the remaining 15 informants who are hired by foreign firms which are mostly subsidiaries of established European companies. These firms employ the migrants more often than not as interns or trainees before eventually turning them into permanent employees or terminating their contracts after 1 – 2 years. In such companies, the Europeans work in two or three languages and do not necessarily need to speak Japanese depending on the occupational industry and additional European language skills.

5.3 The Role of Motility

The former chapter discussed Europeans' employment conditions in the two global cities Singapore and Tokyo. I reviewed the structure and recent development of both labour markets and provided an outline of their immigration systems and visa policies for skilled workers. Singapore, which has always relied on foreign labour, has lately tightened its visa requirements. This is especially the case for the EP and PR, which are

the two most common forms of legal status that the European migrants of this study hold. Japan on the contrary, which still denies its status as an immigrant country (Roberts 2018), is reluctant to address migration publicly. In 2017, however, the Japanese government announced its goal of becoming one of the fastest countries for highly skilled migrants to receive PR.[35] The turn in Japan's 'skilled migration' policy is reflected in my data and academic scholarship (e.g. Debnár 2016). Several of my informants received an "Engineers/Specialist in Humanities/International Services" visa although they lacked training or work experience in the sector they entered and simply held a tertiary degree.

My examination of Generation Erasmus' routes into employment in the two labour markets highlights the existence of institutional channels for migrants from Western countries which are insufficiently researched. An exception is the case of student migration as a well-known resource of skilled foreign labour, particularly in the case of Japan (e.g. Liu-Farrer 2011a). Another important player – or intermediary – in young Europeans' migration to Asian global cities is the V.I.E. internship system (and other less well-known programmes) which assigns EU graduates to French companies overseas. The young Europeans are labour migrants in the very sense. At the same time, the system allows them to avoid some of the common insecurities of labour migration. That is, they are exempted from taxes, receive a decent salary calculated on the basis of the country's living costs and receive some logistical support from their companies. Finally, Generation Erasmus find employment in government-related sectors (research

[35] In 2012, a new point-based visa category was introduced to attract "highly skilled foreign professionals" and provides a direct path to permanent residency. However, given the high criteria for academic credentials and professional accomplishments, numbers of applicants for this visa status have so far been low. As a matter of fact, none of the Europeans in this study holds this visa status.

and planning in Singapore, education and culture in Japan) which act as first employers before most of these migrants eventually turn to the private sector (see next chapter).

There is also a considerable number of informants who engage in more 'local' job search activities which are unrelated to European institutions or firms. In Singapore, this means applications via online job portals and introduction to potential employers via networking events, usually from the legal status of a tourist visa holder. In Tokyo, Europeans participate in the institutionalised 'job hunting' system by which Japanese companies recruit university graduates once a year. This means that in contrast to Singapore, Europeans often transit from an international student visa to a working ("specialist") visa. Therefore, European migrants' ways into employment in Singapore and Tokyo are not only highly diverse, with distinctive features in the different political economies of the Singaporean and Japanese labour markets, they are also proof of changing trends. Chapter two discussed how postcolonial structures in Singapore and Japan's modernisation as modelled after Western powers produced Europeans' 'elite' image in these and other Asian countries. This legacy transformed into Europeans' positioning as business elite in Asia in the second half of the 20th century.

My analysis of young Europeans' access to the Singaporean and Japanese labour market in the 21st century reveals a significant change. The young migrants do not enter these Asian cities in elite positions nor as company assigned expatriates. Moreover, they do not exclusively work for European companies. The Europeans seek positions in the host country labour markets through less privileged ways. My informants split into two groups, those whose pathways into Asian labour markets are linked to European institutions in one or the other way and those whose are not. The former clearly benefit from the power structures developed by their forebears. The directions from West to

East are still the same and migration through government-related channels, bilateral university exchange programmes or infrastructures for trainees perpetuates the somewhat privileged access to the host country.

Nevertheless, their status and positioning in Asia clearly differs from that of earlier European migrants in Asia. Generation Erasmus hold junior positions with corresponding salaries. They have local contracts which stipulate working conditions typical of the host country such as less paid holidays than in many European countries. Most important is the fact that they receive limited or no support for housing and the like and so start out from a position similar to independently moving skilled migrants from other parts of the world.

The latter group, those who access their jobs without the help of European institutions or European migration channels, divert even further from the image of the privileged Westerner in Asia. Competing with both local applicants and other educated foreigners, they experience what it means to be at the lower end of power structures. They are anxious if they can secure jobs successfully since this decides over their legality in the country and, without income during the time of their job search, they have to cut back on expenses.

These local job seekers' cases also mark the greatest difference between Singapore and Tokyo: The language barrier on the Japanese labour market means that the young migrants need to invest in the local language in order to raise their chances of finding employment. Basic proficiency is not enough. Only after years of studying at Japanese universities or majoring in the Japanese language abroad have they reached the required level of fluency. This challenges old power dynamics where Europeans in non-Western countries did not have the need to compete against the locals or labour migrants

for jobs: The young Europeans are on more equal footing with other migrants who studied the language from zero. In fact, their narratives reveal that they struggle more than Chinese or Korean migrants whose mother tongue is closer to the Japanese language. In Singapore, on the other hand, such preparation is not needed. This spares the Europeans not only a lot of time but also the uncomfortable moment of feeling stuck, of being disadvantaged because of one's limited vocabulary or poor way of expression. The contrasting cases therefore show how language has important implications not only for migrants' chances to find employment but also for power dynamics between the European migrants, migrants from other countries and local job seekers.

Nevertheless, Generation Erasmus are equipped with both the mindset and the credentials to pursue a professional career. These young Europeans' "motility", or potential for movement (Kaufmann et al. 2004), positions them favourably. They have acquired a diverse set of resources which, combined and converted under specific circumstances, enable them to migrate and find employment in Asia. I hereby mainly refer to social capital – these Europeans' 'international' networks and contacts in the host society, which function as informational resources or even gatekeeper to jobs – as well as cultural capital. To recall my analysis in chapter four, Generation Erasmus cultivated professional dispositions and cosmopolitan aspirations. These are product of their upbringing as millennials in middle-class families in an integrating EU and the confidence they gained in situations of unfamiliarity and in international surroundings thanks to their pre-employment mobility experiences. To this, they added foreign language proficiency (English as normative plus often another foreign language) and degrees from European educational institutions to the set of cultural capital.

As migrants' accounts in this chapter demonstrate, the combined activation of such social and cultural capital helps them to access positions in Asia's globalising labour markets. Sometimes, they are able to convert their social or cultural capital into symbolic capital, as the case of the Italian engineering graduate Giacomo pointed out. His degree from a well-known university and his European higher education gained him his job in Kuala Lumpur which would later lead to a career in Singapore. Giacomo assumed that the company owner, who had graduated from the same Italian university, "was looking for something like that." His suggestion that "education and mindset […] are the only thing[s] left that Europe can sell" point to the symbolic character of his Europeanness.

Underlying Generation Erasmus' mobility to Asia, then, is motility, these young adults' potential to become mobile. Kaufmann et al. (2004:750) contend that we can understand motility as "[i]nterdependent elements relating to *access* to different forms and degrees of mobility, *competence* to recognise and make use of access, and *appropriation* of a particular choice, including the option of non-action." The concept elucidates what the actual steps, conditions and actions behind mobility are. As such, it captures what exactly positions the Europeans as attractive candidates for entry-level professional jobs in Singapore and Tokyo.

As Franquesa (2011:1028) notes, "power, then, is not so much located in the pole of mobility, as an intrinsic attribute of it, but rather in the capacity to manage the relation between mobility and immobility." After all, the young Europeans are endowed with an amount high enough and various forms of capital that enable them to become mobile. Not only migration, or mobility, per se is significant here but also the destinations (Van Hear 2014). These Europeans, before risking social or spatial

immobility back in Europe, choose to become mobile by migrating to destinations as far, expensive, culturally different and selective in terms of visa requirements as Singapore and Tokyo.

In line with Bourdieu's claim (1986), economic capital constitutes the basis of other kinds of capital. More than that, however, Generation Erasmus can count on the combined activation of several other forms of capital. Put differently, they can at least afford the airplane tickets and the first weeks or even months before they earn a stable income; they receive recognition – and thus symbolic capital – for their university degrees also because they stem from Western educational institutions; they have an adequate proficiency in English and sometimes Japanese and/or one more European language (as well as their mother tongue); their national or regional (EU) citizenship provides them with credibility if not a notion of accomplishment as coming from a country or supra-national territory which is associated with being the cradle of Enlightenment, economic power and high culture. Finally, their curricula mark them as internationally experienced at work or in educational contexts.

The chapter revealed how involvement of so far ignored actors and structures in the migration process have created migration channels for the educated but inexperienced young European workforce. These Europeans do not only possess economic and cultural capital. In contrast to their school peers who enter the labour market in Europe, they have built social capital abroad and often especially in their later host societies by earlier mobility experience. However, even this does not yet suffice to explain their migration to Asia.

At this point, it is necessary to consider Kaufmann et al.'s (2004:750) use of appropriation more closely. It "refers to how agents […] interpret and act upon

perceived or real access and skills. *Appropriation* is shaped by needs, plans, aspirations and understandings of agents, and it relates to strategies, motives, values and habits." The young Europeans know at least enough of the foreign labour markets they enter as to reckon that they cannot access any occupational field or firm. In Singapore, they need to work their way through the strict visa requirements. In Tokyo, the Europeans know of the language barrier but also of firms' globalising efforts and the demand for English speaking staff or for natural science majors. Competent in either of the sought-after skills, they appropriate their resources and institutional channels which could open the door to the respective industries.

Through the lens of motility, we can thus explain *how* the young Europeans migrate and which segment, or stratum, of the receiving Asian societies they enter (Van Hear 2014). The specific company types are significant in that they have the means to sponsor the migrants for a visa and because in turn, the fresh graduates can apply their skills – even if these skills do in fact not meet official visa requirements. Only later might the young Europeans be able to access other jobs in the host country labour markets.

Skills, then, are a vague concept. In both Singapore and Tokyo – though arguably more common in the latter – migrants do not always fulfil the stipulated requirements for a skilled work visa. Nevertheless, old power structures which are perpetuated by partly very recent migration channels enable the young Europeans to migrate. Only when they have accumulated further capital valuable in the host country's labour market do they actually become foreign talents as the following chapter will show. What kind of capital this is depends, as discussed above, on the fields in which it is activated. These are the respective types of East Asian capitalism (Lechevalier 2014). While social

capital in both cities helps the young Europeans into jobs, profound work experience and internationally approved credentials, human capital, are valuable in Singapore. In Tokyo, however, locally acquired cultural capital, especially language proficiency, are crucial.

To conclude, it is necessary to consider migrants' access to the Asian labour markets from a broader angle and place it into a contextual and comparative perspective. In the light of the competitive labour markets of a European Union in crisis and a changing global power balance, the role of motility is accentuated. Once "on the way", various forms of distinctively European middle-class capital, i.e. symbolic capital, is a tool of great value for navigating life. Seizing their chance, Generation Erasmus choose to seek alternative routes and upward mobility through outward mobility.

6. Strategies and Practices of Working in Asia

The previous chapter illuminated the salience of so far poorly understood institutional channels and social networks through which the young Europeans exercise their mobility to Asia. What happens after the migrants start working? What kind of career paths do they follow and how do they negotiate issues of career advancement, relations with colleagues but also gender or racial barriers – or privileges – on the job? I open this chapter with a look ahead and sketch migrants' professional trajectories over the years. Table 5 and 6 illustrate Europeans' employment upon arrival and again after two or more years work experience in Singapore or Tokyo. It hints at distinctive patterns of job transfer in both cities, an issue I closely examine in this chapter.

Table 5 shows that the majority of the Europeans in Singapore first worked for a foreign company. After 2 - 3 years roughly half of these employees in foreign firms (10) have left Singapore. It is also striking that six Europeans engage in their own entrepreneurial venture, four of them full time and two of them as a second job. In Tokyo (table 6), slightly more than half of the informants initially entered Japanese companies. Their numbers mark a slight decrease after two or more years. Interestingly, none of those in large Japanese companies – the hierarchical firms where foreigners supposedly struggle most – has directly exited their employer and have left Japan. The table does however not reveal if they first changed to a different company type after which they might have left the country. What we also see is a considerable increase of employees in foreign companies in Tokyo. Nevertheless, half of these employees in foreign firms have meanwhile left the country, too.

Table 5: Informants' organisational mobility and exit from Singapore

	Foreign firm	EU gov.-related	Domestic firm	SG gov.-related	Start-up (founder)	Total
Upon arrival	21	4	8	1	1	35
After >2 years	22 (of who 10 left)	1 (already left)	7 (one left)	1	6 [of who 2 have 2 jobs, and another one left]*	35**
Net exit from SG	10	1	1	0	1	13

*[] indicates numbers for those with two occupations: both entrepreneur and employee, thus counted in two categories; ** n=70, two informants counted double since both employee and entrepreneur.

Table 6: Informants' organisational mobility and exit from Tokyo (Japan)

	Foreign firm	Large JP firm	Domestic SMEs	JP gov.-related	Start-up (founder)	Total
Upon arrival	15	9	7	3	1	35
After >2 years	21 (of who 9 left)	6	5 (of who 2 left)	2 (of who one left)	1	35
Net exit from Tokyo (JP)	9	0	2	1	0	12

In brief, the tables point to important dynamics concerning job changes in both migration destinations. The significance and the directions of the transfers require further examination, one of the main tasks of this chapter. The tables also suggest that EU government related jobs in Singapore function as a step towards employment in the private sector. All of the initially four informants switched to different employment, although one of them left Singapore in the course of the job transfer. Similarly, Japanese government related jobs lead to transfers to private business and of the three

Europeans in this category, only one has left Japan. While the tables leave us with a first impression of the complexity of Generation Erasmus' professional trajectories in Asia, they raise more questions than they deliver answers. In the following, I delve into informants' accounts in order to generate a more nuanced yet likewise comprehensive picture.

6.1 Singapore: Professionalising the Self

In the first part of this chapter, I use the story of Nico to show that the young Europeans strive for achievement after all the legal framework in Singapore. High criteria for the eligibility for an Employment Passes (EP) require foreign talents to constantly upgrade their skills in order to guarantee the renewal of their visa. Generation Erasmus, who often arrive in Singapore with little work experience, try to build a professional profile and measure themselves against objective markers of success such as title or salary increase. Through these practices they claim legitimacy of the foreign talent status. Their strategies accentuate that in fact, the migrants are often not "talents" from the outset but become so along the way of professionalising themselves.

Nico is Portuguese, 31 years old and had been living in Singapore for eight years when I met him in early 2017. He grew up in a small Portuguese town, studied economics in one of the country's major cities and spent six months on an Erasmus student exchange in Italy. Upon graduation, he envisaged greater opportunities overseas and applied for a government-sponsored internship with a Portuguese company abroad (aicep Portugal global 2017). As described earlier, Nico felt "lucky enough to […] go to

Singapore." When he returned to Singapore for a full-time job the following year, it was less about the contents of his job with a Portuguese wine importer but a means to living in Singapore.

> Also, I really wanted to come back because I had met my current wife, that was an extra incentive. I had good options in Portugal. Two good offers earning good money for the status that the country was at that time. But I really wanted Singapore so I made every effort to stay in that company [the wine importer] because even though I like wine but I was young and looking for more of a corporate job, right? But it went well, I stayed there for a year and a half. I was the only employee, doing everything like logistics, dealing with customs, taxes, doing marketing, sales, delivery. […] After that I left because the salary was not that competitive. And the boss was over 70 years old so there was a real gap. *(sic)*

Nico's first occupation was obviously not his dream job. Being the only employee and the age gap to the much older business owner curbed his enthusiasm both about what he perceived he could learn and regarding collegial relations he imagined at other workplaces. Furthermore, Nico named the poor salary as one factor. Nevertheless, his main rationale for changing jobs was neither of the two. In his opinion, a large corporate structure was the most suitable work environment for learning. Nico had been back to Portugal for five months without finding a corporate job in Singapore. Hence, he reckoned that his connections to the Portuguese wine importer would be his only way into the Singaporean labour market. Despite aspiring a higher salary and the corporate experience, the job pleased him for the moment because it allowed him to get a foothold in Singapore, to be together with his future spouse and to extend his professional network.

After one-and-a-half years, Nico switched to a huge American software MNC. As a consultant in the operations department, he was able to build a profile as a business developer in the media and technology industry. Nico valued the experience for its "super easy job, well paid, and one hundred per cent stress-free. After being the only man in the company with lots of pressure, this was excellent." The job left him enough time to explore professional possibilities. Two years later, the Portuguese Chamber of Commerce in Singapore, where he had earlier completed his internship, closed. Nico seized the chance for an entrepreneurial venture. "I got more requests from Portuguese companies to help them to get distributors etc. So me and another colleague […] opened our own company. We help companies to have an open door to Asia."

For two years, Nico worked two jobs as a corporate employee during the day and as a business owner in the late afternoon and evening. Since I was introduced to some of his friends during my ethnographic field work, I learned about his reputation as well-connected sociable person. This expansive network helped him to grow his business. Nico and his friend registered their company as a Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) which enables foreigners with an EP to open their own business quickly and without much financial investment.[36] With four years in his job at the MNC and two years with his own firm Nico initiated another organisational move. He became business development manager in a Singaporean start-up which sold marketing software around the world. While the company was still in its infancy the position provided him with an

[36] A minimum of two natural persons over eighteen years are eligible to open an LLP and only one, the manager, must be an "ordinary resident" in Singapore. The LLP is quick and easy to set up with few bureaucratic procedures and moderate initial expenses of only 115 Singapore Dollars (ACRA 2017).

extraordinary number of clients in the region and globally and afforded one hundred per cent of his time.

> In five to six months I met over 150 people for micro companies. I expanded massively the number of clients from three to more than 40. It was an intense period where we didn't have time for our own company […] We still have [the company], if we have time and the project can be done aside we still do it. Then I stayed for one year […] They had a nice product and were a start-up, that's what I was looking for. I wanted to expand the market for the company from scratch.

Nico considered the job as a chance to prove himself as a successful sales person. He acquired industry expertise and enlarged his network. Two months before our interview Nico married his Malaysian Singaporean girlfriend. The wedding changed his legal status in Singapore. He received a Long Term Visit Pass and planned to apply for Permanent Residency (PR). The Long Term Visit Pass opened up new possibilities. When we met, Nico was again interviewing with several companies.

> Tomorrow I have the final interview with a [technology] company for a good position. I am talking with others as well. I have more time and less pressure, so I want to choose a good job. The EP was a limitation, certain companies don't have a slot for EPs, or only with a valid pass. Now my options are much broader. But that company would be a really good position. It is still a start-up in Southeast Asia but [has] various branches in the US. It is part of [a famous technology company].

6.1.1 Job Transfer as the Norm

Nico's trajectory offers a fascinating insight into what becoming a foreign talent – rather than starting out as one – means in Singapore. In this subchapter, I argue that job

transfers are the norm for the European migrants. Generation Erasmus have what it needs to become mobile in the first place, which is motility. I demonstrate below that, while this helps them to exercise their first move out of Europe and into the Singaporean labour market, horizontal mobility becomes an important tool for navigating the competitive labour market. Job transfer, or the "boundaryless career" (Arthur 1994), is the norm and provides access to vertical mobility. Horizontal moves across organisational boundaries (more often than not) advance Europeans' social position as foreign talents in Singapore. The organisational mobility reinforces the status of a foreign talent through objective markers such as rise in title, salary or employment with a famous company.

As for youth everywhere around the world – and argued in reference to millennials in particular (Porschitz, Guo, Alves 2012; Hershatter and Epstein 2010) – the young adults also were often clueless which occupational track they should follow. Having chosen a major at university did not necessarily mean that they had a clear career outline. Nico only knew that he wanted to work abroad. The internship programme offered this opportunity and provided assistance with some of the legal and bureaucratic issues. For Nico, the kind of job was of secondary importance and, lacking a specialisation in his economics degree, he was uncertain which industry to choose. The internship programme released him from the decision but offered instead what was Nico's highest priority: It assigned him to a company abroad and so set the course for an overseas career.

In contrast to Nico's move to Singapore "out of the blue", he became more focused over the years. While the internship and his first job were the only options at hand as a fresh graduate, he could choose more deliberately later. The more resources –

cultural, social and economic capital – he had accumulated the more he was able to strategize. Nico owed his first sojourn in Singapore to his degree in economics, his Portuguese and English language proficiency and presumably his ‘intercultural competence’ acquired during Erasmus. This mainly cultural capital did however not sponsor him a visa. Later Nico was able to convert the cultural capital, by developing a social network during his internship, into social capital. This eventually led to his first full-time job with the wine importer.

Nico’s trajectory can be grasped when examining the role of motility. To recall Kaufmann et al. (2004:750), motility consists of the three interdependent elements access, conditions, and appropriation. Nico’s case evidences the salience of all three elements. They enabled him to exercise his spatial mobility and as a consequence led to social mobility. First, without the Erasmus experience, Nico might not have become interested in living abroad. Furthermore, his chances of acceptance in the internship programme would have been reduced. The fact that a government sponsored internship system exists is, after all, an important factor. Nico had the option to apply in the first place and the conditions were for him favourable: As a Portuguese citizen and based in one of the bigger cities during his studies where all necessary facilities for preparing for the selection process were available. As Nico pointed out, the selection process was competitive and required thorough preparation and determination.

Following this line of thought, an economics major is nothing particular and so Nico’s time in Italy along with the acquisition of another European language certainly increased his chances for the position. In Kaufmann et al.’s (2004) words, Nico had *access* to mobility – shaped through options and conditions – and the *competence* to

take action. The authors' third element of motility, *appropriation*, then is crucial for explaining Nico's move to Singapore and his later trajectory (ibid:750).

> Appropriation refers to how agents (including individuals, groups, networks, or institutions) interpret and act upon perceived or real access and skills. Appropriation is shaped by needs, plans, aspirations and understandings of agents, and it relates to strategies, motives, values and habits.

Nico frankly spoke about his indecisiveness over his future profession. He did however understand his skills as suitable to try the internship which would bring him abroad, an aspiration he had since participating in Erasmus. After the six months in Singapore other motives added up to his strong motivation to attempt a return to Asia: His girlfriend and his plan to make a career in business for which he expected Singapore to be a promising location. However, he also understood that the biggest barrier to his move were the high requirements for an EP which he as recent graduate hardly fulfilled.

Here, his social capital played the decisive role. Nico's capacity to activate the business contacts in Singapore and the trust his later employer had in his personality and skills ultimately enabled him to return. The combined activation of different forms of capital then allowed Nico to migrate. Yet the move also came with some compromises as to the employment conditions and scope of his job. In line with Kaufmann et al.'s notion of "appropriation [as] shaped by needs [and] plans" (2004:750) he adjusted his professional aspirations, knowing that the wine importer job was the only access to Singapore at that time.

Having secured his legal status and gained some work experience, Nico sought a corporate environment where he could learn work processes on a large scale. This corporate 'training' enabled Nico to open his own business. Later, with some economic

securities from the previous stable jobs, he could finally allow himself to apply for promising positions selectively. His professional trajectory was not entirely smooth, though. Apart from the high work load and stress in some of his jobs, Nico also experienced lay off once. Due to financial concerns, he bridged the time up to his wedding with a temporary job while waiting for issuing his Long Term Visit Pass. Once he was granted his new and more secure legal status, Nico again focused on his career as his remark about the scheduled job interview with his desired employer revealed.

> At this time of my career it is important to make a mark in the company. I am 31 years old now and I really need to make my mark in the company. […] It is a little bit of pressure because it is a sales job, but rewarding because it makes the company grow. I still have the energy, I don't have kids. I need to step up and make something out of it, ink my name in one's company development. In this company, I [would be] the one leading the development in Asia, I will be the one whose name is highlighted. That's what I want. I'm a little bit cheesy for looking for glory at this time of the career. That's why I am evaluating well enough my options. […] I want to choose well. [The] potential for me to shine is bigger.

For Nico, a professional identity is tied to objectively observable signs of success. In a young company, he has greater influence which allows him to be recognised for his performance. For this sake, he renounced the well-paying position as sales force at a big firm and opted for the more stressful sales job of a small company. Success, for Nico, takes on an almost identity-shaping significance. His account reveals, through words like "rewarding" and "glory" that Nico is less concerned about money but the status which a steep career in business confers.

Europeans' strive for a professional identity is related to their status as migrants in Asia – not in Europe, which, to recall, for them barely feels as having 'migrated' and

does not require a visa. However, their status in Singapore as foreigners on temporary work visa is uncertain. Apart from that, with increasing time away from their home countries, the Europeans come to view a return to Europe more critical. Consequently, the most intriguing option is to accumulate enough professional credentials as to stay employable – in Singapore or in other countries with promising employment conditions and a high quality of life.

6.1.2 Gender and Racial Issues

Migrants' experiences with working in Singapore and their strategies to manoeuvre employment are shaped by more than immigration regulations and labour market structures. The following subchapter reveals how gender and racial issues affect migrants' work experience. In fact, gender and race indicate different dimensions of 'being a foreign talent' and play out in interesting intersections. Women perceive their opportunities for career advancement as fairly gender-equal and favourably compare the situation with more conservative structures in some European countries. Gender, thus, if it affects Europeans' perceptions of working in Singapore, does so in a positive way in the sense that it appears to be relatively neutral.

In contrast to that, the Europeans report to meet reservation, if not reluctance or mistrust from Singaporeans at the workplace. They realise that Europeans continue to be associated with the affluence and seniority of the senior European – and importantly, white – generation in Singapore, the expatriate community. Their whiteness makes the young migrants, both men and women, suspicious and underlines the different dynamics of race and gender in the Singaporean work context. I demonstrate how the young

Europeans differ from company-assigned expatriates and oppose such labelling. The migrants seek recognition for their self-earned skills and their individual abilities rather than status conferred by postcolonial inequalities. Nevertheless, trajectories divert with those who are able to overcome the invisible barriers that are reminiscent of the colonial past and those who give up and turn to the Western community and colleagues.

I waited for Verena, a Russian-German woman, to arrive for an interview at 3pm on a Thursday afternoon. As many times before, I interviewed during a weekday's day time, and Verena's situation confirmed that job transfer is considered to be the golden path to career advancement. Verena arrived late, in classy grey pencil skirt, elegant dark blouse, brief case in compatible colours and hair impeccably pinned-up. The brunette woman apologised and explained her delay with a job interview which had taken longer than expected.

Verena's first full-time job was with the Asia-Pacific headquarter of a Western European logistics company in Singapore. The firm needed someone for the Asia-Europe trade. After six months on a definite contract, Verena and two other new foreign employees – a Mexican man in charge of Latin America and a Filipino woman responsible for Southeast Asia – became regular staff. Verena was grateful for the firm's dynamic environment. Through client acquisition and high-quality sales training her initial learning curve was high. The company announced to train the three foreign employees for management positions within a year. However, the logistics industry experienced a slack. Verena disappointedly reflected on the events when business slowed down in her company.

> I was very goal oriented. I wanted to go out and work on my career. […] They had big plans with us, wanted to promote us but then our manager was

> promoted to country manager and no one was looking after us anymore. […] The focus was gone from us so we all started looking for another job. One [of my two foreign colleagues] resigned, the other one was fired and I was like searching for another position.

Ultimately, Verena did not change job because she was promoted to set up a new team. Part of her rationale for moving to Asia had been her impression of the chance to reach managerial level quickly. Indeed, it took her less than three years in full time employment to do so.

Verena did not raise gender as an issue. Despite her limited work experience, young age, status as a foreigner and 'weaker' sex, she was promoted – as was her Asian female manager –, likely as an incentive to stay in the company. When I probed on gender issues at work towards the end of our conversation, Verena shook her head. After a second, she added frowning, "[But] I feel like if as a woman in Germany you are wearing a skirt with heels, you better don't do it, right? You better dress – I felt like as a woman you have to prove yourself first, right? They will judge you if you are wearing a dress." Verena obviously counted on my understanding since we shared the experience of growing up as women in Germany.

A few other women, too, reckoned their career prospects – at least at a young age – to be higher in Singapore than in their home countries. Florence, a 28-year old French who was hired as legal manager Asia-Pacific at the Singaporean branch of her French firm, is a case in point. "In Europe, I would have had this position maybe in my 40s – so perhaps 15 years later." Employment in Singapore, then, sometimes propels young migrants' careers. Additionally, it equips them with practical skills and a professional standing which positions them favourably on the global job market. This becomes clear when they seek change in employment but also when they return to Europe. Florence

and her French husband moved to Germany after two years in Singapore. In her opinion, the overseas work experience in a managerial position helped her to secure a position in a British firm in Berlin.

For the European women, Singapore offers an environment where they perceive to have the same professional chances as men and where their gender does not prompt people to question their professional qualifications. That said, my ongoing interview with Verena revealed her mixed feelings regarding acceptance in the company. Verena encountered how white people were admired and were the centre of fascination in India, where she had previously completed an internship. Yet she was taken aback to find similar stereotypes in Singapore's multicultural business environment.

> In India […] they put themselves lower than you, which I never liked. They are like 'you are the smart one, wealthy.' […] But in Singapore I didn't expect that it would be similar. […] They still think that someone from Europe is paid more, is more important because they basically get transferred from the HQ. […] [Singaporean clients] always treat you much better I would say. […] But I don't like personally if someone puts them [my Singaporean colleagues] in a conversation below me. […] I have many Indian colleagues who work here, who had been to Dubai or someone who studied in New York, who had exposure to the Western world. So they are different, they treat you the same. But Singaporeans and Asian people, they always treat you like special. […] Most [Singaporeans] think we are getting transferred from the HQ and get all this expat package, like housing and all the money for everything which wasn't the case for me. I know lots of Germans who got all these benefits. I came here with my 2000 euros which I saved. The Mexican guy and the Filipino girl [we are] all on the same level. […] We all started from zero.

Verena's narrative provides evidence for the fact that while neither gender nor young age might be limitations per se, the intersections of several social categories (Leek and

Kimmel 2014) matter for these European migrants' work experience in Singapore – not in terms of title or salary but for socialising with colleagues.

More than simply whiteness, it is the lasting symbolic status of Westernness or Europeanness that account for Singaporeans' suspicion of their young European colleagues. Verena's account demonstrates that her young age and low status in the company render her peculiar in colleagues' eyes as she does not fit the picture of a German expatriate who receives generous benefits. Verena became friends with other Asian foreign talents, yet her relations with Singaporean colleagues remained limited. Other interviewees confirmed this experience. Interestingly, however, their perceptions ranged from positive to negative ones.

Several women mentioned similar situations where they felt uncomfortable with the somewhat elevated treatment or worse, sensed that colleagues doubted their professional qualifications. Some of them, for instance the French legal adviser Florence, concluded after several unsuccessful lunches that the "Asian" colleagues were not willing to open up. She mostly stayed among the few other European women in her firm over her time at the company. When her husband's contract neared its end, Florence was looking forward to their move to Germany. In her eyes "Europeans are more similar to us." While she attributed this to different preferences for spending free time ("they just watch TV or go shopping on the weekend"), she also admitted that her Filipina colleague could financially not afford traveling in Southeast Asia, one of Florence's beloved hobbies and one of her favourite topics at lunch.

Again, race alone cannot account for these migrants' difficulties to socialise with Asian colleagues. When asked to expand on her perceived differences between Europeans and Asians, Florence uses culture as an explanation for different leisure

preferences. The reference to her Filipina colleague who remits part of her salary to her family in the Philippines identifies socio-economic reasons as one side of the coin. The other and equally important factor is these Europeans' identity of the stranger who wants to observe, experience and explore. In the tropical climate of Singapore where long-term residents and citizens avoid the heat of a city which they already know, the young European migrants embrace the tropics and tailor their leisure activities to the new and unfamiliar. This is how their leisure preferences differ.

In other cases, however, workplace relations developed into collegial relationships. Giacomo, the Italian engineer who was hired for the Malaysian branch of his Singaporean firm and only later moved to the city-state, relayed his challenging but after all fortunate start as an employee. As he was the only non-Malaysian in the Kuala Lumpur office and a junior employee fresh out of university, his colleagues were initially sceptical of his skills. It took Giacomo several months of hard work to win their trust. It was crucial that despite communication problems, he went for lunch with his colleagues and lived like a local. His co-workers knew about his tiny maisonette apartment and watched him spend the same small amount of money on food. On the weekends, they sometimes took him out for scenic drives outside of Kuala Lumpur. While he did not become close friends with the majority of his colleagues who were significantly older, Giacomo is nowadays, more than two years after leaving Kuala Lumpur, still in touch with some of the younger ones.

To some degree European migrants' characteristics as white but young and inexperienced employees help to pull down some of the exclusionary racial boundaries. This is especially true for domestic companies where the young migrants are surrounded by locals, as Giacomo's comment on his first job in Kuala Lumpur reveals.

"It was also probably good in the sense that it forced me to […] adapt rather than having another Westerner and creating your own group." Giacomo assumed that being the only non-Asian in his office facilitated integration into the team. The fact that fewer Westerners used to live in Kuala Lumpur than in Singapore and Giacomo's fairly low salary might have accentuated the situation in that it created a more even playing field among employees.

As discussed, migrants' qualifications, a proactive attitude, flexibility and educational credentials are assets that secure the Europeans their jobs. This is in line with the Singaporean government's emphasis on neo-liberal attitudes such as lifelong learning and competition on the labour market as positive for economic growth (Sidhu, Ho, and Yeoh 2011; Phelps 2007). Nevertheless, the young Europeans are not necessarily what Singaporeans expect foreign talents to be as the prevalence of racial stereotypes underlines. I now turn to one more feature of Europeans' work experiences in Singapore. This is the discrepancies between the official image of foreign talents' employment characteristics and the realities I found in the field.

6.1.3 Entrepreneurial Self-making

The European migrants in Singapore not only change jobs for straight-forward career advancement. In this last section of the chapter on work experiences in Singapore, I show that for many working on themselves – their personality, their skills or their creativity – becomes increasingly important, sometimes more than a stable job, and with it, the EP. Male engineers and software specialists are particularly prone to open a business, often together with others. I also met female entrepreneurs as well as a few

Europeans who opted for occupations not considered professional and thus not eligible under an EP. Europeans' entrepreneurial endeavours and their strategies in navigating high living costs, professional dreams and rigid immigration policies are the focus of this section.

Despite their passports, their race and their tertiary degrees, many young Europeans initially struggle to meet the requirements of the EP. Andras for instance, the Hungarian hospitality employee who I introduced in the opening of this dissertation, was fully aware and concerned of his insecure status in Singapore. He thus enrolled in an MBA programme next to working long hours in the emotionally straining hotel sector. The rising competition for jobs partly explains migrants' drive for professionalisation. Only a professional job, which is increasingly harder for foreigners to secure, grants the EP, which is the golden pathway to the status of a desired migrant or 'foreign talent.'

While the Europeans come for a variety of reasons, all somehow bundled under the impression of Singapore being a multicultural country that offers job opportunities, a high quality of life and stimulating surroundings of different languages and cultures, there is more to their strive for professionalisation. Andras, although concerned about the tightening visa requirements, also sees value in Singapore's demanding system for foreign talent.

> I came here with an [EP] but when I renewed it I wasn't sure if I was going to get it because the quota levels are going back and the minimum salaries are going up. Mine ends next year […] and I don't know if I will be extended. Because what I heard is if you're in the same level for all the years […], they are not going to [extend]. But […] if they can see that you are not just hanging out and they see that you're moving up, then they will [grant

> extension]. […] I like that because in a way, they want people to have better lives.

Many of my interviewees reported how friends failed to get an EP or how others were denied PR despite having stable jobs, high salaries and having been in the country for long.[37] While this obviously contributes to their insecurity they seldom consider returning to Europe. Instead, they put all the more efforts into their careers. For Andras, the MBA symbolises the path to a better life. The hospitality industry is a harsh workplace with long hours, comparatively low salary and often disrespectful treatment by both customers and bosses. Singapore pushes him towards an imagined better future and, despite the physical and emotional exhaustion his lifestyle demands, he is proud of challenging himself.

Others have more stable jobs. They emphasise that the conditions in Singapore allow them to concentrate on what they deem important. This is for many their career, less in monetary terms but in a sense of "personal growth" or "professional development." Some interviewees have their companies aside, usually founded together with same-aged (but sometimes nationally different) friends. They share work, organisational responsibilities and liability. While the start-ups are often online platforms, software tools and IT services, one informant also owns his own restaurant. Limited taxes, excellent infrastructure, fast and efficient bureaucracy and the ease of opening a firm on an EP (see Nico, this chapter) are some of the most important conditions in place.

[37] Zhang et al. (2017:14) argue that the quota which exist for foreign workers contribute to foreigners' uncertainty towards life in Singapore. Similar to my interviewees, the authors' highly skilled informants reported rejection by immigration authorities on basis of such quota. Officially, however, the quota only apply to lower skilled foreign workers with work permits and S-Passes and not the EP (MoM 2018c).

Nevertheless, only two informants so far fully live off their own company. Others, while officially being employed, work in unconventional jobs in the leisure industry or have become part of what they call a "community" rather than a firm and colleagues (see below). Severin and Mona represent the two poles of the spectrum of such entrepreneurial careers. The prevailing idea common to both stories is the intrinsic meaning they gain from entrepreneurial work, even when it means juggling two jobs or risking illegality in Singapore.

Both informants choose their job because it fulfils them. Their security net and their salaries, however, could not be more different. Severin is a French software specialist who I met twice during his employment with an American IT start-up in Singapore. During our second interview, when Severin had worked roughly 3 years in Singapore, the 30-year old software developer revealed that he saved 3000 Singapore dollars, one third of his monthly salary, each month.[38]

One year later when again exchanging emails, Severin had joined another high-tech start-up which peers from university had founded: The team regularly moved and settled for several months in a global city that offered a stimulating business environment. When they came to Singapore, Severin joined. His work is now his hobby. Since the company does not have offices, Severin decides on a daily basis where he wants to work that day. While the young French does not know if the company keeps growing and if this at some point means to leave Singapore or the firm, he is content with his situation. Creativity and autonomy define Severin's daily work, and financially, too, the organisational move was attractive.

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[38] Equivalent to approximately 2260 US dollars at that time.

For Severin, a return to France would not entail unemployment. Thanks to the high salaries in Singapore's booming high-tech industry, he is one of the best-earning informants. Yet, his tremendous salary increase – which he saw in real terms on his balance sheet, not as in France where tax deduction results in a much smaller net salary – and his currently secure status as foreign talent render other destinations unattractive.[39]

Sometimes addressed as path-dependency (Scott 1995), the young Europeans often come to see their migratory pathways as irreversible. While they can technically return to their home countries – they are no political refugees nor did they flee famine or war – they cannot simply resume life at home where they left. Such awareness becomes a concern for many, yet one which they keep pushing away. Hubert, who together with his wife and toddler returned to their home country Germany, one of the EU's best performing economies, looks at the downside of his return. He admits that "business-wise– Financially [Singapore] is better. Lower taxes, the salary, the job, everything is somehow more attractive, better, nicer, more economical. If you look at the hard facts, it would be wiser to stay."

Next to Singapore's business-friendly climate, the opportunities for early career advancement and the low taxes, which enable them to save, are assets the Europeans are unlikely to enjoy in their home countries. They benefit from the recent wave of start-ups and the incentives for entrepreneurial ventures which are open to foreign talent. While the migrants appreciate this environment, they also experience it as competitive. Ever tightening conditions for issuing or renewal of the EP and the general focus on business

[39] Income in Singapore is taxed at 15 per cent or progressive rates for higher-income employees. My informants all fall under the 15 per cent tax rate and compared this very favourably to the much higher income taxes in their home countries. In France or Germany, for instance, the amount is often more than double for young non-married professionals (Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore 2018).

and success in Singapore drive these migrants to devote much of their time to work and to professionalising. Job transfers in Singapore are common and these European migrants are no exceptions. Changing jobs is a way of career advancement in Singapore. What sounds like mere choice and opportunities however becomes a constraint for those who define 'professional employment' differently than the state.

Rarely are informants' employment trajectories as linear as Severin's. Mona, a 29-year old Italian designer, came to Singapore as an intern at a prestigious research institute and later switched to a full-time position. Yet, Mona felt increasingly unmotivated in her job and started to invest more time in her hobby yoga. She also considered returning to Europe but her Portuguese boyfriend, who she had met in Singapore five years earlier, wanted to stay.

Mona reported how her hobby became the solution to her problem. "I did more yoga and found a reason to stay, and now, my reason to stay here is yoga." After three years at the research institute she resigned and enrolled in a yoga instructor course instead. Mona started to teach every day. She did some freelance design work aside in order to top up her income and was fairly happy with her life. Yet, her legal situation became an issue.

> The problem in Singapore is you cannot stay without an [Employment] pass. For six months it was okay but then I needed to find something, a full-time job. I stayed as a tourist and went out once after three months. I just needed an [Employment] pass, any solution I was considering. The usual [thing to do] is getting married but I was like "No, I don't think that's a solution." So I applied for a job, it worked out well and now I am okay.

At the time of our conversation, the period of her uncertain legal status lay one year back and she had resumed 'professional' work. Meanwhile I had met a few people with

periods of an ambiguous legal status. Some left the country, travelled and, upon re-entering, used their renewed three-month legal status as tourist to search for a job. Others again, as Nico, went for the more typical way of marriage.

Mona's case is striking for two reasons. For one, it confronts you with the great variations within the group of European migrants. A professional identity and finding meaning in one's daily work causes some people to divert from their original profession. Mona felt like "I moved in circles [in my previous job in Singapore]. I couldn't grow." For her "growing" means developing her personality, but also nurturing practical skills. She obtained a license after an intensive three-month yoga course and enrolled in further classes to upgrade her qualifications. For Mona, being a professional is not the design job with her previous employer, the prestigious research institute.

Nevertheless, the young migrants are not entirely free to choose their profession. Over time, life in Singapore on a low income and an uncertain legal status became too insecure and Mona resumed work in her original profession. When we met, her day-time job with a small design firm – which grants her the EP – allowed her to stay in Singapore. Her passion however is teaching yoga which she continues to do aside. This is the price the young migrants have to pay for their mobility choice. In Europe, Mona would be free to work as a yoga instructor since EU's freedom of movement does not require "professional employment" in the sense of Singapore government definition. Although the young Europeans can choose to leave their industry and have a certain amount of agency in directing their professional trajectories, rigid visa policies continue to impact on their professional development.

Mona's case, as an exception, actually underlines what is the norm. Mona is one of the few who dropped out of the scheme of the professional. For her, meaningful work

is an occupation which is not deemed professional for immigration authorities. The majority, however, and this is the first conclusion on Europeans' work experiences in Singapore, interpret the pressure to professionalise, constantly build new skills and invest in their employability as something positive. They internalise the rhetoric of success and strive for status as a way to legitimise their presence in Singapore or elsewhere. A feeling of usefulness, worth and pride is important in weaving their personal story. In Sennett's words "most people […] need a sustaining life narrative (2006:5)." Despite all the flexibility and mobility in Generation Erasmus' lives, they still seek a coherent story. The professional identity feeds their self-esteem and allows them to nurture a sense of self.

My second conclusion is linked with the first and concerns the issue of gender. In contrast to other forms of Western migration, the European women of the millennial generation do not forego their individual professional development. Mona's and other women's work trajectories show that they pursue their own career, independent from their boyfriends and husbands. When Singaporean visa regulations enforce the state-definition of a professional, they adjust in order to stay independent. Mona, instead of foregoing her professional identity or her relationship, stayed in Singapore and re-entered 'professional' employment.

This is in harsh contrast to trailing spouses in expatriate assignments and lifestyle migration (e.g. Yeoh and Khoo 1998; Lundström 2014). These young European women neither consider marriage to be a solution nor do they stop working when their husband's promotion would allow them to stay out of work altogether. Even the few who have children re-entered employment as soon as the children were old enough to be taken care of by a day care centre or a nanny. The professional is an identity these

women assume and, as I will develop later, an identity that is often tied to mobility. The competitive Singaporean labour market supports such professional trajectories regardless of gender whereas employment in Tokyo poses quite different challenges to the European women.

6.2 Tokyo: Finding One's Niche

The young Europeans' work experiences in Tokyo differ in several aspects from those in Singapore. *Gurōbaru jinzai*, or global human resources, is the key term for highly sought-after staff in the globalising Japanese labour market. The term vaguely encompasses anyone capable of working in international settings. Yet, this chapter unravels that the European migrants negotiate several forms of such *gurōbaru jinzai*. In contrast to the Singaporean labour market, the company type migrants initially enter in Tokyo entails specific employment trajectories. As I explain below, institutional factors, such as (varying levels of rigidity of) the internal labour market, weigh heavily (Lechevalier 2014). Therefore, I analyse Generation Erasmus' work experiences in Japan with reference to the company types and the institional structures in which they work.

To recall, a significant majority of informants in Tokyo (26 of the 35) had intermediate or above proficiency in Japanese when entering employment. At the time of finishing fieldwork for this dissertation, 24 of the 35 interviewees have at some point worked in a domestic company but only 11 stayed in domestic firms throughout. The pattern I found is that migrants target domestic, preferably large and long-established

firms first *if they can.* This mostly depends on their Japanese language proficiency. Later, many migrants transfer to foreign companies. A second group are those entering domestic SMEs, mostly in the IT industry, but also in other sectors such as translation or marketing. Informants' work experiences and employment patterns differ considerably from those in the established Japanese firms. Young Europeans who enter foreign firms from the outset usually have quite clear reasons, which I examine below. I now analyse these three institutional types separately and discuss how employment patterns and migrants' strategies unfold for each. Striking about Tokyo workplaces are diversity issues, which I consequently discuss after the three different types of firms. Migrants racial and gender features which make them stick out from the norm of the Japanese white-collar employee mark a clear difference of these Europeans' experience in the two field sites.

6.2.1 The Pinnacle of 'Japaneseness': Making it in (and out of) *ōtekigyō*

I discussed earlier how the *cultural enthusiasts*, due to their love for Japan, study the Japanese language and often spend considerable time in Japan pre-employment. They are aware of Japanese firms' preference for fresh graduates and know that a term at a well-known Japanese university increases their chances for what they consider to be a good job. More than in a professional sense, the *cultural enthusiasts* expect that a Japanese firm is their entry ticket to Japanese society. Furthermore, they expect to be welcomed with open arms. Below I demonstrate their hope of becoming permanent employees as this guarantees their status and recognition as members of society. Yet, their fantasies often come to an abrupt end. Not only are language and cultural issues more challenging than expected, but migrants have to realise that their pre-employment

fantasies were somehow distorted. Why that is so and how the Europeans react to the situation at stake is the focus of this section.

At the time of graduation, the *cultural enthusiasts* possess "embodied cultural capital" (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) thanks to their familiarity with Japanese educational institutions and the language. Some interviewees regarded this as their chance of entering prestigious firms without having hard skills other than the Japanese language. This, as they are clearly aware of, would hardly be possible in their home countries. They strategically used the status that employment with established Japanese companies conferred to advance their careers. Alex, a Czech sociology and Japanese language graduate had a clear goal when applying for a famous Japanese trading group after his master. He was interested in aviation and knew that employment in this field was hard to enter in Europe since it required a highly specialised university degree. Alex, who had been interested in Japan for long, strategized on the particularities of the Japanese labour market. Knowing that Japanese trading groups catered to all kinds of industrial sectors, among them airplane technology, he studied the Japanese language diligently and completed a double master degree with a prestigious Japanese university. This positioned him as a suitable candidate to access his dream industry through the trading group despite lacking technical knowledge of the field.

Employment with established firms provides stability, financial benefits and social status. Furthermore, it might give access to a highly specialised occupational field. Alex valued these advantages too much as to care about his company's hierarchical structures, which he disliked. Alex did not join most of the socialising activities after work although he was expected to attend. It is likely that he was less worried about his outsider role and the tense relations with some colleagues because he was determined to

change employer from the beginning. After two-and-a-half years in his firm, Alex had gained enough knowledge of the field to appeal to specialised companies in the airplane industry. Family matters called him back home and Alex used his acquired expertise to apply for a smaller but more flexible competitor firm headquartered in Europe. He negotiated his desired return in the interview process and, after a training period in the Japanese branch, moved as an international sales assistant of his new employer back to Europe.

Alex' determination and strategic move through Japanese companies is however the rare case. More often, the *cultural enthusiasts* imagined themselves to function as bridges between Japanese and foreign businesses from *inside* Japan, their favoured country of residence. Lacking a clear occupational profile, they perceived it more realistic to rely on their embodied cultural capital – soft skills, language proficiency and familiarity with the prescribed way of gendered speaking and acting in the Japanese society (Aronsson 2012) – as Anita, a Romanian woman, remarks.

> Better you continue what you started than going back and later regretting because it's harder to come back later. […] I applied mostly for Japanese companies. That was conscious, I wanted to experience [a Japanese firm] since I am in Japan. I'm sure there are good and bad parts and I wanted to see it. […] [My company is] a joint venture between the Japanese and American firm, so I thought that I could somehow be between those companies, be a bridge, experience both cultures.

Anita's account does not only reveal the curiosity for experiencing work in a Japanese firm. Anita expected to be assigned to a position in which she would be the link between "both cultures" and could thus use her embodied cultural capital. More than that, applying to an established Japanese company, also known as *ōtekigyō*, is strategic. As

discussed in the previous chapter, entering a company as permanent employee (*seishain*) directly after graduation is still regarded as the norm and as the golden path to social status in Japan. More than that, Japanese upwardly aspiring middle-class – and as a consequence many of the *cultural enthusiasts* who counted Japanese middle-class students among their university friends – target at well-known *Japanese* companies. The large manufacturers and trading firms are still associated with prestige, Japan's decade-long economic boom and the country's famed production methods (Waldenberger 2016; *Rikurūto Wākusu Kenkyūjō* 2018). When probing it turned out that many interviewees had previously imagined to enter precisely such firms.

Olga, a Baltic woman, was hired by a famous Japanese manufacturer. Her men-only team was known for their successful work throughout the department. "We were the bestselling team, we had this experience and actually our team, they are real professionals. Looking at them, the way they work, I just loved it. Like, they are real professionals." The "professional" image apparently boosted team members' ego and installed a very exclusive team culture. Excessive working hours, frequent after work drink sessions and work on the weekend tied team members together and created a competitive and very 'masculine' atmosphere.[40] Fresh out of university, Olga admired her senior colleagues for their business knowledge and imitated their intense work style. The colleagues seemed to like her, called her "princess" and included her in team conversations.

Yet, eventually Olga as other respondents struggled with the strict hierarchy and the demands to conform to work extra hours and gender norms such as playing the

[40] After-work socialising and a strong focus on the team have been a common practice in Japanese firms (Brinton 1993).

‘hostess’ during after-work drinking sessions.[41] All of my informants in respective companies attempted to withstand the pressure but became gradually disillusioned. After months of working late and on the weekends, Olga tried to reduce the social commitments and went home earlier than her colleagues once. After this incident her team members, especially her mentor, started to attack her for making minor mistakes or blamed her for not knowing a Chinese character. While initially proud of her language skills and eager to ‘go native’, Olga, as other, especially female informants, increasingly felt being treated unfairly.

While so-called power harassment is not uncommon in Japan (e.g. Kumazawa 2000; Nemoto 2010), these Europeans’ experiences take on a certain quality. The criticism or punishment is directed at their deficiency in something which they cannot make up for: The fact that they have not been socialised in the Japanese society from childhood on. It often targets at mistakes with the Japanese language or the lack of cultural knowledge. While expectations to conform troubled all my informants, the feeling of exclusion encroached women more than men because they were overwhelmingly surrounded by Japanese men. In the male-dominated Japanese workplace where career women are still the exception and where employees forfeit the authority over their work to the company and superiors, the European women often lack the cultural (language and tacit cultural knowledge) and social (trust and supportive relations with mainly conservative male managers) capital to develop their careers (e.g. Ueno 2013; Ho 2018; Nemoto 2016).[42] Olga first hoped that the situation would

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[41] Nemoto (2010) illustrates how some white-collar women in Japan, expected to fulfil the gendered roles, normalise this as part of their job while others opt out instead.

[42] Japan’s post-war economic boom has partly been attributed to the gendered division of labour where women were homemakers and caregivers. The breadwinner male was symbolised through the *salary man*

improve. After eleven months, however, she quit. "Yeah, it was a harsh experience. […] But you know I can now take the pink glasses and throw them away. I can see really good." *(sic)*

The metaphor of the "pink glasses" – more commonly known as rose-coloured glasses – provides the possibility to look behind the myth of the Japanese corporations as seen in these *cultural enthusiasts'* eyes. For the *cultural enthusiasts,* employment, as the discussion on their migration motivations illustrated, is a means to the end of securing longer-term residency in Japan. However, since they long for acceptance if not integration in the Japanese society, a fair number of this subtype of Generation Erasmus strive for the prototypical Japanese career.

Olga's narrative took me to more complex issues being at stake than patriarchal bosses and hierarchical structures. Few informants explicitly named these factors, but they unravelled when I heard more stories like Olga's. For the blonde woman, leaving a famous company like hers equalled personal failure. To recall her motivations for studying Japanese and working in Japan (see chapter four), Olga wished to become a "professional" in the Japanese language and not only mastering it as a "hobby." The discourse on *gurōbaru jinzai*, who are proficient in English and possibly another foreign language, have intercultural skills and overseas experience, are all among Olga's

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who was committed to his company, to long work hours and to after-work drinking with co-workers and clients (Reskin 1993; Ogasawara 1998). Until today, women's career prospects, salaries and corporate ranks in Japan are still considerably lower than men's (Yamaguchi 2013; Nemoto 2010). The World Gender Gap report of 2016 which ranks Japan 111th – second lowest among OECD countries – reflects this (World Economic Forum 2016a).

attributes. Thus, her dream materialised when she received recognition for all her efforts in form of a job offer from a famous company.

I suggest a two-fold relationship between entering such corporations and these European migrants' subjective work experience. For one, the barrier to enter these firms is high and those who succeed feel confirmed when they receive an offer. However, informants' pre-employment expectations and the reality of work are often incompatible as Olga's and others' examples evidenced. I will return to this dilemma in a discussion on the significance of race and gender in Japanese workplaces, but before that I now analyse the situation in SMEs and foreign firms.

6.2.2 SMEs: Trading Stability with Flexibility

Informants who entered employment in Japanese small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) or less traditional and less hierarchically structured Japanese companies report on their work experience very differently. Their experiences highlight that while they receive less in monetary terms and social security benefits they generally enjoy daily work more. This has two reasons. First, they are more often employed in their field of specialisation. As outlined earlier, Europeans in large Japanese firms and foreign companies are more often graduates of humanities or social sciences who lack the specific training. Among my informants in SMEs, science graduates – mostly male – report to be intrinsically interested in their jobs and appreciate the recognition they receive for something they like and are good at.

Second, and at least as important, is the less hierarchical structure of the firms, less pressure to conform and often a more international environment. Although some

informants have quite stressful jobs, they value the flexibility and relaxed atmosphere. The software developers in this category generally work few overtime hours under less time pressure. Others, who switched from traditional Japanese companies to less hierarchical SMEs, emphasise the reduced emotional stress. In most cases, their new workplaces exert less pressure to conform to Japanese norms and migrants feel released from the rigid seniority principles they encountered in the bigger firms.

My lunch interview with Vincenzo on a mild spring day was exemplary of what such a work environment could be like. Vincenzo brought his self-made *bento* (lunch box) and we sat down on a park bench for the interview cum lunch. While this was unusual for my field work in Japan, my interview partner's appearance perfectly matched the situation. Office work in Japanese companies normally prescribes suits or at least formal clothes. Vincenzo however greeted me with his long hair loosely tied back and in washed denim and T-shirt. The Italian man, a software engineer with doctoral degree, decided to leave academia after his postdoctoral appointment at one of Tokyo's prestigious universities. Since then, Vincenzo has worked in the same company for one-and-a-half years, a relatively small firm specialising in robotics where he was hired as a programmer. "I am really happy working here", was one of his first comments on the job. His company developed a new robotic software and prepared to launch it in a few years. All employees are, according to Vincenzo, highly motivated and excited about the project. Since there are very few non-specialist positions, employees have high autonomy over their daily work and there are few hierarchical layers. Another feature Vincenzo appreciates is the multicultural environment at his workplace.

> Vincenzo: On a daily basis I can speak four languages. Not on work. On work I speak three because there is no other Italian. So the company is

> absolutely international. I would say there is about half of foreigners and half of Japanese people. […] And different religions. It's really a super multicultural environment. Even though it's relatively small. We are, I don't know, less than a hundred people.
>
> Me: Do you experience this as positive, this environment?
>
> Vincenzo: Of course. I mean that's a good reason to be there.
>
> Me: So was it important for you when searching for a job here in Japan?
>
> Vincenzo: Absolutely. Absolutely, yes. It has grown on me because I have always been living in a multicultural environment, even though I was a lot in Japan. […] So, it was definitely a plus. Plus, if there is such an environment in the company I would say that the management is more- I would say more capable of understanding the different people and their different needs.

Vincenzo' case is fairly representative for the other Europeans I interviewed in the IT industry. Not everyone is as satisfied as him, either due to language issues or personal problems with a manager. In general, however, informants perceive the atmosphere to be relaxed and for those who can compare far more international than in traditional and bigger Japanese firms. This, in these Europeans' eyes, enhances mutual understanding and tones down intercultural problems at the workplace. Moreover, as Vincenzo's account vividly illustrates, the migrants are intrigued by the opportunity to use several languages at work and to work side a side with 'interesting' people, namely those of a different cultural or religious background. Probably most important is the fact that participants in this industry are considered to be specialists. Having autonomy over their work gives them the feeling of recognition, something which lacks from the narratives I collected from informants in large and hierarchical companies.

The IT industry is a significant employer for men in my informant group as well as for foreigners in Japan in general. The ones I talked to either stayed in the same

company or moved within the same industry and a similar company size. Yet, a few of my respondents in SMEs and start-ups work in different industries and among them, the majority are women. They work in the language industry, design or advertising as well as in recruitment. In contrast to the male engineers and software specialists, this is usually not their first job. For those who are frustrated and quit a hierarchical firm, such smaller companies with more flexible hiring systems are a welcomed change. They appeal to the young Europeans by their flatter hierarchical structures and often lower requirements as to Japanese language proficiency or adherence to a rigid seniority principle. Lena, a German informant whose first job was with a famous Japanese communications company, moved to a recruitment start-up after a year. Lena appreciates the responsibility and learning opportunities that the dynamic start-up environment offers. It contrasts her previous employer a lot where she "had not learned anything" after a year.

Table 6 at the beginning of this chapter seemed to suggest that domestic SMEs are the 'least attractive' types of employment for the young Europeans. This hypothesis now deserves a corrective. First it has to be stated that migrants with the most linear trajectories – those who have not changed company and who do not intend to do so – are people like Vincenzo. Three of my male informants have never changed employer over their five or more years working in Japan and all three firms are small software firms in Tokyo. In two cases this is a domestic firm. In the third case all employees are Japanese except of my informant. Although the firm is based in France, my interviewee's description of the company structure and daily work resembles the two others' stories. All three IT specialists state that they could find another job anytime they wanted but they currently see no reason to do so.

On the other hand, informants who left domestic SMEs did not necessarily do so because of problems. Lena, who was fairly happy in the female-led recruitment start-up, frequently travelled to Southeast Asia and Europe to explore market entry possibilities for her firm. She perceived this, despite being stressful and challenging, as an excellent training ground. The exposure to different work styles and problems sparked her interest in trying herself in a new environment after more than five years of permanent life in Japan.

Ultimately, her refined professional profile secured her a job offer in Berlin. While Lena had previously excluded to 'return', the circumstances of working in a multinational team in one of the world's leading start-up cities made the move attractive. She had left her first employer, the large Japanese communication firm, because she disliked the strict hierarchical layers and that learning was slow. The Japanese start-up, then, offered her the dynamic, challenging environment she was seeking. Lena's case is not the only one where work in a start-up led to unexpected professional opportunities (often, but not always, abroad) and explains the transfer patterns to and again out of Japanese SMEs.

6.2.3 Foreign Firms: Global Talent Factories?

I opened this chapter with table 6 which suggests two striking issues concerning Europeans in foreign firms in Tokyo. First, after two years and above in Japan, the migrants show a tendency to transfer from Japanese to foreign firms. Second, however, slightly less than half of those who worked for some time at a foreign firm have

meanwhile left the country. This raises the question if adverse conditions at foreign firms cause the Europeans to leave the country.

My data suggests a more complex situation. It reveals that the Europeans at foreign firms did not leave Japan because of unbearable workplace conditions. Instead, those without Japanese language proficiency viewed their time in Japan as limited from the outset. These informants almost exclusively worked in foreign firms. Also, a few of those who left Japan after having worked in a foreign company had worked at hierarchical Japanese firms before. The foreign company introduces them to jobs of a more international scope and thereby changes the course of their careers. It equips them with skills which are valued on the global labour market. At the same time, such jobs are limited in Japan – or inaccessible to the young migrants – but abound in other global cities. Therefore, a position in a foreign company in Tokyo is for many Europeans a temporary experience before they move elsewhere, in most cases another global city. The ones who stay in Japan even after some time in a foreign company have usually other than professional reasons to stay, an issue I will examine in the following chapters.

Work experiences in foreign companies are contingent on the industry but even more on the employee's language proficiency in Japanese and, if applicable, previous work experience. Some Europeans function as bicultural bridges. They assist the foreign management of the local branch or communicate between the local branch and the head quarter. None of them completed a trainee period with rotation across various departments as it would be typical for fresh graduates in large Japanese companies, including the informants introduced earlier.[43]

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[43] The Japanese rotation system aims at training generalists who are committed to their company and can be flexibly assigned to departments with current need for staff. Western firms, on the contrary, commonly

An intriguing case is Federica's, an Italian woman with two years of work experience in a German engineering company in Italy and Germany and degrees in the Japanese language as well as Human Resource (HR) Management. She negotiated a move to Japan within her firm – albeit this meant sacrificing the social benefits that came with a German contract – and became leadership and talent development manager in the Tokyo branch. The position tremendously increased her authority as she became responsible for implementing global processes for talent development in the Japanese branch.

Federica is the only foreigner in the office. She is also the employee with the highest proficiency in English. Thus, besides her official tasks in HR, she became the unofficial contact person for guests from headquarters. This placed her in a unique role and extended her network. "If I get to see people who are coming over from headquarters in Germany who are that [high] level of HR, if I was in Germany I wouldn't meet them. I would have three people above me."

Other informants, even though not managers but assistants to foreign management, assess the responsibilities their position grants them similarly positively. Resembling Chinese graduates who secure challenging positions in Chinese-Japanese businesses in Japan (Liu-Farrer 2011b), the young Europeans, including women, seize professional opportunities in the transnational niche of European-Japanese businesses. However, high Japanese language proficiency is a prerequisite and even then such a position in

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hire specialists from the external labour market for specific positions (except some cases like the banking industry in Germany). Since job transfers are common, an internal rotation system is redundant. This is also valid in their Japanese entities which are usually small and have few internal divisions (Cole 1969; Komisarof 2011).

only one case led to promotion in Japan. Claire, a French woman with two years of experience in her firm assumed that "for a higher position, I would have to be Japanese. So although my current job is a great chance for learning […], I cannot grow further in this office."

As Achenbach (2014) demonstrates, Chinese women, upon their return to China, are sometimes hired into management positions in the Chinese subsidiaries of their firms. For the young Europeans, the situation is different. An Italian woman who returned to Paris for a job in the headquarter of her firm after two years in the Japanese subsidiary found herself in a position that lacked the scope of her previous job in Japan. In a follow-up interview via Skype she confessed to regret her return at times.

Tsukasaki (2008) claims that Japan is unattractive for skilled foreigners, especially those from Western background because they cannot transfer their skills upon return. Both the language but also the distinctiveness of Japanese firms' in-house careers, management practices and employee relations obstruct skill application in a different, i.e. Western organisational environment. Apart from the fact that very few of my informants have returned to their home countries within a few years, Tsukasaki's claim seems to partly apply to foreign firms in Japan, too. For one, these Western firms' headquarters are situated in saturated markets where the general trend is towards flexible labour and decreasing headcounts. More than that, a generally high educational level in these countries generates oversupply of skilled labour which translates into slow career advancement as upper positions are filled with experienced senior people.

Nevertheless, the situation for these European migrants is not simply black and white. I found a complex picture of both opportunities for career advancement in foreign firms and drawbacks that had not necessarily been obvious from the outset. Nils'

return to Germany came with a rise in salary and a position with global responsibilities in his German-based but globally present consulting company. He was hired for this position thanks to his three-year stint at the firm's Japanese subsidiary directly after graduation.

Nils was frank about the many barriers he, as a non-Japanese speaker, experienced in the Japanese office. What looked very attractive on his CV had been a fairly rough work experience, a finding that reminds us of the difficulties Indian IT specialists face in Japanese firms (D'Costa 2016). The young man reported that he had several conflicts with Japanese senior staff. When he voiced his concern over the implementation of projects which in his eyes were bound to fail he was ignored. Frustrated, Nils started looking for jobs with more growth potential. When a global position in the German headquarter opened he took the chance. Looking back during a follow-up interview, Nils assessed that from a European point of view, his overseas experience was impressive and suggested that he was versatile and capable of managing stress and unfamiliar situations. This was what secured him a global position at the age of 30 years.

Nils himself, however, views his return and its impact on his career with ambivalence. With a bachelor degree in Asian studies Nils knows that he was lucky that the internship at the Japanese branch of his current employer, for whom he already worked as a student assistant in Germany, turned into a job. The subsidiary urgently needed someone with high proficiency in English and preferably knowledge of German head quarter and German language so they were happy to offer him a job. Upon his return three years later he had gained the credentials of a business person, which his university major alone would not have allowed him.

Nevertheless, Nils is critical of the scope of his work in Europe and his opportunity to quickly acquire new skills quickly. His role in Japan had exposed him to projects with other subsidiaries around the globe, which he appreciated as a way of learning international business and expanding his network in the company. At the same time, as a non-Japanese speaker he could not exploit learning opportunities in the domestic market. Furthermore, he experienced work back in Europe as somehow unsatisfying, similar as the Italian woman cited above. For both informants, the job suddenly feels mundane and they wonder if they took the right decision.

Eventually, however, Nils was able to advance internally again. Business opportunities in the Buenos Aires branch led to a position in South America with attractive conditions. For Nils, the job enabled him to leave behind the familiar once again and challenge himself in new surroundings. Meanwhile, his CV has become tailored to such global positions. Likewise, Nils is less and less excited about working in German surroundings. Despite potential safety issues and language problems in his new country of residence, Nils embarked on a new phase of an incalculable yet appealing "worklife pathway." It is this combination of international experience, social and cultural capital gained in the course of previous mobility, neoliberal attitude towards work and cosmopolitan aspirations which propelled some informants' careers.

Berna, the Italian woman, on the other hand has meanwhile stayed in the French headquarter of her firm for more than 2.5 years. She cannot help feeling that work in Tokyo was more challenging but also more interesting. Life, as she pensively uttered in our last conversation via Skype, seemed to pass by in the more comfortable but less dynamic environment of the Paris headquarter. While she enjoys being closer to her family in Italy and benefits from French socialist employment regulations – almost

twice as much paid annual leave as in Japan and an all-encompassing health insurance system – Berna herself is ambiguous about the way her professional and private life is unfolding in Europe.

Nevertheless, foreign companies in Japan are not always short-term work experiences for the Europeans. Alexiou is Greek and studied the Japanese language for years. At the time he completed his master programme in Tokyo, he was fairly proficient in the language and was hired as a business analyst in a French financial services firm. When I first met Alexiou, he told me about his clear preference for a foreign firm. "I wanted to try to work in a foreign bank. Don't even bother to try to get into a Japanese one. Japanese companies [pay] bad salary." Despite the company being French and his international team, Alexiou felt urged to conform to the Japanese business style which his Japanese senior team member set as example. In order to prove himself and set the course for future promotion, Alexiou bought academic books on Japanese business etiquette and continued to study the complex honorific language after work hours.

> My problem is I am not Japanese and not French. I try to survive, I have to say it in English because I don't know the nuances. So, I always feel between the chairs and have to fight. […] The French know the system, the Japanese [are competent] for clients and manners. It's tough for me, I'm not on either side; the Korean [team member] speaks Japanese as a native, and the Algerian speaks French.

Alexiou's insecurity regarding his acceptance as capable employee and as a foreigner among advantaged colleagues is striking. He mentioned his interest in other countries such as Singapore, but when we met again two-and-a-half years later, Alexiou had married his long-term Japanese girlfriend. The couple considered buying an apartment

in the future when Alexiou, who had applied for PR (permanent residency), would be eligible for housing loans under his new status of residence.

As an employee in his fifth year he had meanwhile been promoted to an associate from his initial position as an analyst. “Next year I’ll become vice president, but it’s just a title. Always after 3 - 4 years it’s changing and you are stepping up,” he explained. The Greek was on the standard career track in the Japanese office of his firm and his narrative revealed that his foreignness had ceased to matter as an issue for career advancement (though not in terms of identity issues which I discuss in chapter seven). Five months later, however, Alexiou moved to the Japanese office of one of the world’s leading banks. I have not talked to him since. That said, his upward career mobility and the couple’s plans to invest in property in Tokyo suggest that he will stay in Japan for an indefinite period of time.

6.2.4 Race and Gender at Work

The last three sections elucidated that the young Europeans had varying expectations and imaginations of working in Japan. To recall, the *cultural enthusiasts* in particular thought they would somehow enter as preferred employees who push forward traditional companies’ efforts to globalise. As a matter of fact, Europeans mostly enter SMEs on grounds of their specialised skills and the objective to work in the field of their training. A third group of migrants consider foreign companies as the most suitable work environment, either because of their lack of proficiency in Japanese, because of better salaries or they expect a less hierarchical environment. In this section, I further trace how and why such expectations, which in the prevailing case of the *cultural*

enthusiasts often amount to idealisations of the Japanese work place, came about. I link them to the salience of race in Japanese society and investigate the gendered aspect of migrants' struggles.

The analysis demonstrates the need to understand migrants' dreams and expectations as products of their racialised and gendered identities as white foreigners in Japan. My data suggests that pre-employment experiences prompted some of the young Europeans to adopt such racialised identities and to consider permanent employee status in an established Japanese firm as attractive. Europeans in domestic SMEs and foreign companies faced fewer problems which I ascribe to their different expectations but also to their different positions in these firms. However, negative cases do exist and 'resituate' the discussion on race and gender in the larger context of the Japanese labour market.

Returning to my hypothesis that many of the Caucasian *cultural enthusiasts* expected to be welcome with open arms even by conservative Japanese companies, one might consider why they extended their stay after studying or returned to Japan after graduation back in Europe. Some frankly admitted that they liked life as a foreigner in Japan. Lena started her professional career in a large Japanese communication company. The German woman recalled how she had enjoyed the year with her host family in Tokyo as a high school student so much that she wanted to return for work later. Apart from her enthusiasm for Japan, the return to Germany as a teenager was disillusioning. "I was really sad. Here [in Japan], I was a foreigner. You stick out which was kind of cool at the age of 16. I enjoyed it and desperately wanted to come back. In Germany, you find yourself simply being the same as everyone else."

Other narratives hint at whiteness as a factor positively influencing their experience in Japan more explicitly. Respondents talked of the attention, sometimes admiration they enjoyed, something they had, as ordinary citizens and Caucasian among other Caucasians in Europe, not encountered before. Alexiou, the Greek who has worked in foreign financial firms for his entire career, frankly admitted the racial element underlying this treatment, stating that "One thing I like and everybody likes about Asia, and if they don't say it I think they are liars, [is that] you feel a bit special. In Hong Kong maybe not so much or in Singapore, but in Tokyo you feel a bit special."

Olga, too, was conscious of her visibility in the job application process. However, her narrative reveals that her perception of this visibility changed over the course of the interview stages. "If you're foreigner they are interested in you, right? They are all Japanese, right, and you just stand out," was her comment on the attention she received in job interviews. In the early interview stage, questions circled around her motives for being in Japan, which was easy for her to answer. At least initially, her visibility was advantageous.

Later, however, when she was invited to group discussions together with other applicants, Olga felt treated unfairly by her competitors and implied that her visibility was working against her. "And you speak like with nine people, nine students. And they just ignore you because you're a freaking *gaijin*." *Gaijin*, although literally the (derogative) abbreviation for foreigner in Japan, is often associated with either non-Asian foreigners or explicitly with white foreigners (Komisarof 2012; Debnár 2016). Olga obviously used the term in the same sense. As I learned later, there were other foreigners at these events but she did not meet any non-Asians. According to her

complaints it was her different looks, or race, that drew attention to her and made her feel extremely uncomfortable.

> Everyone looks at you, I tell you. […] Somehow, I didn't meet any [other non-Asians]. Like Chinese sometimes but I was really standing out and I hated the way they looked at me, in the interview, the *mensetsu-kan*, everyone was looking at me like a clown. Like "What do you think you do? Like exchange student?"

Olga's unease was probably not only rooted in others' looks at her. She admitted that she expected one of the companies to reject her on grounds of her inadequate answers during the advanced interview stage. Her account reveals what Sennett called "narrative agency" (2006:188). Throughout our conversation, she scrutinised the events which culminated in her exit from the famous company. In her search for explanations, Olga tried to make sense of a story of seemingly contradictory actions. Why did she, in spite of so many job offers and her high proficiency in Japanese, fail? As her account demonstrates, she attributed her poor performance to her discussion partners' unfair treatment rather than her language deficiency or lack of the appropriate debating skills.

Other informants, too, complained about the fact that in their Japanese offices they were supposed to be as fluent in Japanese and behave exactly as Japanese employees. Similar to Olga, they were frustrated with the fact that a few other foreigners – Koreans and Chinese, who know *kanji* from childhood on – did better than they themselves, and used the language as a justification for what they perceived to be their personal failure.

Olga's comment also reveals her assumption that people doubted her capability of obtaining a job offer. When she received several offers from big companies she was all

the more confident that her language proficiency was sufficient. Her choice to tell me about the offers without me probing might signify her pride of the fact that such well-known Japanese firms wanted to hire her. In a more critical tone, however, she added that one famous company offered her a job despite a bumpy interview. Olga suspected that her foreignness – which for her means whiteness as we can see in the following quote – was the central factor for this offer.

> I got the *naitei* [job offer]. I don't know [why], there is no logic. They just want a foreigner. It's probably just the same as [in my current company]. They will give you a *naitei*, you will start working at this company but they don't know how to treat you. Because they don't even speak English. They see only your blue eyes.

Her remark that the firms hired foreigners just for the sake of having foreign employees hints at the significance of the context of globalising Japanese firms. Amidst the calls for opening up Japanese business and society to the global stage, visibly foreign faces seem to have become symbols of a company's level of globalisation. My research suggests that especially the ones whose phenotype clearly demarcates them as coming from Western and thus technologically advanced globalised countries are used as icons, even in a literal sense. For instance, another blonde woman was asked to participate in a video shooting that advertised the 'global face' of her company.

The problem however roots deeper. Indeed, some firms seem to deliberately hire a few (white) foreigners and use them as poster children for a global company image. Nevertheless, the data reveal that neither the personnel department nor the majority of Japanese staff support foreign employees' special treatment or heightened attention. Fieldwork with HR personnel from large Japanese firms revealed that they expect

exactly the same performance from foreign new recruits as from Japanese ones. In general, these firms make no exceptions – and do not provide extra support – if foreign employees cannot meet the requirements (Liu-Farrer, personal conversation).

Europeans' accounts of other types of firms are insightful here. They enable the observer to contextualise the bitter experiences which migrants make in traditional Japanese firms. The Europeans who did not enter established Japanese firms, despite their fairly high proficiency in Japanese and thus the possibility to do so, deliberately decided against what they expected to be harsh work environment. They spoke about how they preferred a more "Western" work style and employment conditions. Importantly, they emphasised that they felt more at ease in a multicultural workplace, which is a marker of SMEs in certain industries and foreign firms, at least if compared to large Japanese firms.

At this point, it is insightful to mention that only two of my informants in Japan are non-Caucasians (one woman with Arabic features and one biracial man with a Southeast Asian mother). Thus, their cases do not allow to establish causal relationships. Nevertheless, it is illuminating that neither did they speak of any preferential treatment because of their looks nor did they consider big firms. The Arabic woman, who was fluent in four languages, one of them Japanese and held a master degree from one of Japan's elite universities, only focused on small companies in the design and arts field when she searched for jobs and the biracial man founded his own one-man company.

Gender, however, strongly impacts informants' perceptions. Leila, a German woman who left her German-Japanese joint venture after over three years in order to obtain a fresh perspective, had imagined start-ups as a conducive work environment. Instead of the flexibility envisaged and more dynamic processes, the Japanese

marketing firm was heavily micro-managed. Given her mid-career position, Leila voiced her opinion and made suggestions how to improve business practices. This however stirred conflicts with her bosses. As the only foreigner and the only woman in the regular management meetings, she felt isolated and saw no chances for improvement. Leila left the firm after only eight months, and, after a similar experience in another Japanese start-up, resigned and switched to a foreign recruitment company.

With prolonged fieldwork in Tokyo, a pattern regarding the direction of transfers emerged. That is organisational moves from big Japanese to other firms, and from Japanese SMEs to foreign firms or directly abroad. Of course, there are exceptions, depending on the industry and informants' length of stay in the country. However, foreign companies, too, challenge the young Europeans and again, gender surfaces as a contested social category. Ann, a Dutch woman who does not speak Japanese, thought her American fashion company would run the American way. Her assumption proved wrong and she found herself to be the only female manager and the only non-Japanese speaking foreigner.

Ann met huge resentment by her Japanese male subordinate who refused her advice and accused her of being incompetent. She noticed that the respective employee did consult with other, more senior Japanese male managers. A befriended colleague suggested that her peculiar characteristics – as a young and female foreign manager on a local contract – were unprecedented and caused the subordinate's suspicion. The fact that Ann did not speak Japanese made her vulnerable. Although she enjoyed her own superior's support the situation escalated and only found an end when Ann, pregnant and increasingly emotional, quit the job.

What can be observed here as the major problem is ambiguous. From the company's side, especially the prestigious Japanese firms which receive many applications every year, there is a lack of understanding of foreigners' struggles with hierarchical structures, male-dominated teams and patriarchal management styles or language and communication issues. Drawing from gender studies and organisational sociology explains my female informants' struggles in traditional Japanese workplaces to a further extent. Acker (1990:152) claims that organisational structures in the white-collar workplace are inherently gendered. "While women's bodies are ruled out of order, or sexualised and objectified, in work organisations, men's bodies are not." The ideal worker, thus, is a man, and, whereas in Western countries this man is supposedly white (Delgado and Stefancic 2001), in Japan he is Japanese (Dasgupta 2003; Holbrow and Nagayoshi 2016).

As above HR managers' accounts as well as informants' experiences reveal, the general principle in traditional Japanese firms is still that 'the nail that sticks out gets hammered down,' which means that female white employees need to conform to the ideal of the male Japanese salary man. My experience as a trainee in the German-Japanese company in Tokyo qualifies the above saying. Both my internship and several informants' accounts confirmed that foreign companies' human resource policies often encourage diversity and promote gender equality and work-life balance. Nevertheless, as a matter of fact, client companies are mostly Japanese. As such, once client relations are involved, the gendered power relations of Japanese workplaces weigh heavily.

An episode from my internship illustrates this. At evening events organized by the chamber, participants were mostly mid- or upper-management. Representatives from Japanese companies were in all but very few cases senior Japanese males. The events

which were mostly meant for networking purposes and served alcohol reconfirmed what Nemoto (2013:161) argued about organisational masculinity in Japan: At one occasion, a Japanese manager involved the other female intern and me in a conversation about alcohol drinking behaviour, urging us to respond to his pushy questions even when we tried to leave the conversation. He saw himself in the position of power – as a client, a manager and a man – and objectified us in a similar way as Nemoto (ibid:161) describes Japanese women' subordination as "listeners or sex objects."

This illustrates Japanese firms' continued reluctance to accept diversity and demonstrates the extent to which gender norms are entrenched. The *cultural enthusiasts*, for their part, expect special, maybe even preferential treatment that is to be exempt from the expected gender roles. Their narratives, especially those of female informants, evidence that the European women were taken aback when they experienced objectification or became aware that male Japanese colleagues did not take their professional aspirations seriously.

I suggest that such expectations partly stem from the celebration of *gurōbaru jinzai* and migrants' misunderstanding of the meaning of the term. More than that, however, these Europeans' distorted perceptions are fuelled by the particularly positive experiences they had in Japan pre-employment and which at least some of them tacitly relate to their white or Western symbolic capital. If their managers do not show special consideration to their needs and if cultural misunderstandings or language problems arise, the young migrants, insecure and hurt, sometimes attribute the treatment to the one social category of whose significance in Japanese society they know – their visibility, or more explicitly, their racial difference.

The cases I observed – all of them Caucasians and the majority women – demonstrate that after one or two years of gradually rising pressure, migrants take off their "rose-coloured glasses" and quit their jobs. In contrast to the *cultural enthusiasts*, those without pre-employment study experience in Japan and others who are specialists in their occupational field, display less skewed expectations towards their treatment. While this does not spare them cultural or language problems, it less often causes bitterness towards colleagues and work in Japan in general.

6.3 Skill Acquisition under Different Types of Asian Capitalism

This chapter centred on Generation Erasmus' work experiences in Asia. By examining my respondents' employment practices along with their hopes, expectations and changing strategies over time, I attempted to understand what employment as migrants in Asia entails from a career perspective. In Singapore, once granted a valid work visa which classifies migrants as foreign talents they strive to live up to the professional image. Failure to do so risks losing their eligibility for the EP whose requirements are high and keep rising. As a consequence, the young migrants try to professionalise themselves by navigating the dynamic labour market. Strategic job transfers promise career advancement. Intrinsic meaning of daily work and success in one's job are ever-present elements of their narratives. It is important to acknowledge migrants' varying interpretations of success. They range from objectively identifiable markers of career advancement to feeling appreciated or perception of personal growth.

The scripts the young migrants use illuminate how strict migration policies and meritocratic principles in Singapore shape the Europeans' notion of a career. The young

adults assume a professional identity through organisational, occupational, but often also spatial mobility. This mechanism reveals the link between the professional identity and mobility. It helps us to understand migrants' rationales towards mobility and their strategies for navigating the labour market.

In Tokyo, labour market competition is less pronounced also because the internal labour market discourages organisational mobility. *Cultural enthusiasts* who are proficient in Japanese and aspire living in Tokyo strive for a permanent employment status in large Japanese firms. These Europeans reckon that such employment legitimates their status in Japan and functions as access to Japanese society. Yet, business practices in traditional Japanese firms, the expectation of conformity and the ignoring of cultural diversity pose severe problems for the migrants. Many transfer to less hierarchical firms or to foreign companies. While SMEs and start-ups seldom guarantee comparable conditions in terms of stability, security or status, they are more open to diversity and mid-career hires. Consequently, they are more accessible and seem to offer higher work satisfaction.

Other Europeans are less certain that they want to stay in Japan indefinitely. While limited proficiency in Japanese is one of the reasons, more often do they regard Japanese hierarchical institutional structures as unattractive. They try different ways of building a professional profile. These migrants strive for recognition, either in start-ups with growth potential or in well-paying subsidiaries of foreign firms. For them, success usually sets an end to their time in Japan. To advance in their career is to move to the next promising position which might be elsewhere in Asia, in Europe or in completely different (emerging) markets.

Race and gender shape migrants' work experiences in Asia, for many unexpectedly. In Singapore, which celebrates diversity and multiculturalism, informants are surprised and often uneasy when Singaporeans approach them as 'elite whites.' This contrasts with the few non-Caucasian informants' narratives who neither experience prejudice because of a perceived elite status as whites nor because of their ethnically mixed background. In both national contexts, white European migrants feel uncomfortable at such unfounded respect – or scepticism – but they are ambivalent in their reactions. They know that the status of being white and European gives them advantage. Uneasy to acknowledge the continued significance of race, some revert into a self-subscribed role of the marginalised other. One example is Olga, who in her own words saw Japan through "pink glasses." She increasingly felt treated unfairly not only by colleagues but by the Japanese society in general. At the time she quit her Japanese employer, she felt alienated by Japanese people in general and remarked that she "hated how they look at me, even in the subway." Other informants, however, are able to break the boundaries and build cordial relationships with local or Asian colleagues (Giacomo).

The discussion elucidates that migrants are aware of their particular role in either the perpetuation or questioning of racial inequality. Their reactions to the uncomfortable truth are two-fold. Some are able to contest the historical ethnic barriers and are accepted in their teams at the workplace. In contrast to their senior expatriate co-ethnics, the more equal footing of this young migrant generation on one side and (at least the same-aged) local employees on the other side seems to encourage interethnic bonding at the workplace.

The analysis illuminates different outcomes in the different national contexts. Gender marks the most obvious difference between the two field sites: European

women in Singapore appreciate the favourable conditions for advancing their careers, which some evaluate as more gender-equal than in Europe. In Tokyo, female informants struggle in male-dominated workplaces, especially in traditional corporate Japan where patriarchal structures are still dominant. They feel to be outsiders in a double sense, both because there are few Japanese career women around them who could act as role models or could become friends and because they lack the cultural and linguistic ability to fit in smoothly. Since the European women can hardly imagine a professional future in such workplaces, many transfer to foreign firms or domestic start-ups within one or two years. For a few, gender norms are among the main reasons to leave Japan.

The comparison reveals more profound implications of the different types of East Asian capitalism in which the young migrants attempt to build a career. Some exceptional cases confirm the norm of Japan's internal labour market: A few Europeans are able to turn the particularities of Japan's organisational culture into an advantage. These are the ones who are able to match their disciplinary training in a highly specialised industry with excellent Japanese language skills. Furthermore, few use Japanese companies' indifference towards graduates' majors in the hiring process as an opportunity to enter occupational careers that are regarded highly competitive in other countries. Yet in most informants' eyes, the conformist organisational culture does not allow them to develop adequate skills for a business career.

The findings show that the Japanese firms which invest in these young employees' training are likely to lose the majority of them. This is counter-productive, both for the migrants who feel they are wasting their best years as young and capable workers but more so for the firms which are in urgent need of diversifying and expanding an internationally-minded work force. It is in contrast to Singapore which reveals the

possibility of a much more fruitful marriage between migrant workers and host country firms. While many of the Europeans in Singapore are prone to move on, too, their time as employees in Singaporean workplaces bears immediate fruits for both employees and employers.

Overall, the young Europeans are grateful for gaining overseas work experience as white-collar employees in the Asian cities. This alone allows them to construct a life narrative – not one as ‘lifestyle migrant’, ‘victim of EU economic crisis’ or ‘disoriented millennial’ but one of a foreign professional in a sparkling global city. Among their multiple identifications the professional identity provides them with respectability and “legitimacy” (Sennett 2006:190). Identity construction however is a struggle. Insecurity over their future pushes many to upgrade their skills and professionalise themselves.

Over time, their professional profiles sometimes align with the domestic labour market. More often, however, their profiles appeal to positions on the global labour market, typically located in one of the hubs that connect global business. In either case, their growing cultural, social and geographical distance from their home countries simultaneously alienates them from their home country labour markets. They accumulated work experience far away from Europe and thereby adopted different perspectives on who the future economic players are. Additionally, the rapid growth of formerly peripheral regions alters these Europeans’ perception of their options. They start to grasp that their chosen biographies hold compelling opportunities in store. Yet, seizing these chances demands sacrifices, for instance regarding free time or frequency of visits to family members.

Migrants’ personal development, too, unravels changing strategies and desires. The ideal types, which I outlined in chapter four, distinguish the Europeans in their

initial motivations for moving. However, this chapter underlined how types gradually dissolve and converge. Even many *cultural enthusiasts'* focus shifts away from Japan and sometimes translates into repeated spatial mobility. However, work and career alone cannot explain migrants' changing strategies and practices. In the following, I turn to migrants' social world in their Asian host cities and investigate how socialising shapes the migration experience.

7. Migrants' Social World

"Tomorrow I am flying home. Wherever that is– " I was on a Skype follow-up interview with Nils, the German who, after three years in Tokyo and another two years back in his home country, was just about to move to Buenos Aires for his new job. Nils had just been on a business trip to Argentina and agreed to Skype from his hotel room before he would return to Europe for another week to sort out last bureaucratic issues. Everything to come after was still open and Nils seemed too jetlagged as to think about his new life further.

The Skype interview stuck in my mind when writing the last parts of this dissertation. I thought of Deborah, a Greek woman who I met during my first field trip to Singapore in 2015. She was the first informant to pin down issues of home and mobility when she answered my question about her plans for the future with the words, "We never know, for most people like us, like who left many years ago […], it's not easy to say that I'm going to stay somewhere permanently. Okay, just call me in a year and maybe we're here or maybe in Dubai or London, you never know." I was unable to contact her during my second visit to Singapore in 2017, but on this spring afternoon in 2018 I dropped her another email and was lucky. Deborah, in contrast to Nils, is still in Singapore. I learned that she has three children meanwhile, started her own company and has lived in the city-state for nine years. These two interviewees' trajectories accentuate the range of possible meanings which place and home can assume in the process of migratory pathways.

This chapter connects Generation Erasmus' sense of place and the meaning of home to their socialising and community building practices. Drawing from the concepts of 'boundary work' and 'place making' I approach the following questions: How do

migrants manoeuvre the physical place of their host societies and already existing group boundaries within? Which boundaries do they draw, contest, or tear down and how do they align socialising practices with their cosmopolitan aspirations and with a sense of place? In the first part of this chapter, I sketch the Europeans' geographies in Singapore. The second part then shifts the focus to Tokyo. Assessing common features and differences between the migrant groups in both cities allows me to sketch a more refined picture of this European generation and their (lack of) embeddedness in the Asian host societies.

7.1 Singapore

By underground, bus, ferry, taxi, (Singaporean) acquaintances' private car and most often on foot, I gained an impression of the social make-up of the places where the European migrants spend most of their time – and of the places they do *not* frequent. This enhanced my understanding of the "spatial modes of distancing" (Galasinska 2010:947) which the various ethnic groups and other, for instance occupationally defined communities use. Singapore has two faces. There is the showpiece Singapore: a successful multicultural, multiracial and multi-ethnic society. But in recent years, there has also been the fragile Singapore whose news report on ethnic communities' segregated living, racial tensions and online xenophobia (e.g. Mathews and Hong 2014; Ho 2014; Yang, et al. 2017). The European migrants' social relations are as complicated and multidimensional as the societal composition suggests. A common thread of informants' narratives and my observations point to their identification with an internationally minded group of 'foreign talents', including a few cosmopolitan

Singaporeans. At the heart of their collective identity lies the shared experience of mobility and foreignness.

7.1.1 Singaporean Place-identity versus Migrants' Place Making

The startling fact about Singapore is its officially harmonious mix of numerous races and cultures but the *de facto* separation of the very same in most spheres of life. While studies as well as my interviewees agree that people are used to foreigners of various ethnicities, anything beyond inter-ethnic *instrumental* interaction is scarce (Ho 2014; Kathiravelu and Ye 2015). Business is somewhat different as many offices are multicultural.[44] Still, my field work suggests that inter-ethnic friendships seldom develop at the workplace, and in many cases even lunch breaks are separate.

In this section, I look into the given Singaporean place-identity and young European migrants' attempts and practices of carving out their own place. Moving away from the realm of work, ethnically and class-based separated places of socialising are salient. One of the most obvious divisions is housing (e.g. Velayutham 2007; Ho 2014). The base line for division is the kind of housing people can access. Most lower middle-class and middle-class Singaporeans live in affordable government-subsidised housing (hereafter HDB) whereas wealthy citizens, as well as most foreigners who can afford live in condominiums.[45] The latter are equipped with a range of facilities such as gym,

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[44] Not all industries are multicultural. For instance, Ye and Kelly (2011) claim that the financial industry hires employees based on racial and cultural capital. The industry is dominated by Caucasians and Chinese whereas Malays and Indians are denied access or are excluded from promotion because of historical racial power relations, colour of the skin or a non-standard English accent.

[45] The Singaporean Human Development Board (HDB) is a Singaporean government organisation. It coordinates the ethnic make-up of the state-leased flats in which the majority of Singaporean citizens live. The acronym HDB is associated with these government-subsidised apartments, which are, in contrast to private condominiums generally more affordable (Matthews and Hong 2014).

pool, shopping facilities and guards, and are generally more expensive than HDBs. Work visa holders, however, are not eligible for the HDB scheme. Thus, they either have to look for a room to rent within a Singaporean-owned HDB, or they move into condominiums.

Most of my interviewees chose to share a condominium for economic reasons. Usually there are two or three, sometimes even four or five parties in the apartment. The decision for a condominium almost necessarily precludes interaction with Singaporeans, who opt for the more affordable HDBs. Moreover, according to my informants, young Singaporeans, even when working full-time, often stay with their parents until marriage since family bonds are strong in most Chinese, Malay and Indian households and high rents discourage young workers from moving out. As a result, public image portrays condominiums as the place of foreigners and often emphasises the exclusivity of the 'rich expat condos.' Contrary to the stereotype, however, few informants (including couples) could afford a condominium on their own.

A few others moved into HDB flats which they shared with several parties. The strict rules, however, that came with HDBs, were a drawback in the eyes of my informants: They stated no visitors, only 'light cooking' and no noise but cleanliness as a must. Nevertheless, the choice for an HDB was conscious, less for an economic but for a cosmopolitan rationale. Andras appreciated the experience of living in an HDB during his first three years in Singapore.

> If I go to a country I want to fit in, so I went to an HDB. […] In condos there are only few locals, they might buy it but then rent it out. In an HDB the whole flat is rented out, they share. In condos you don't learn and meet others. In HDBs you get to know locals. The man who managed it was a retiree and explained me quite a few things. He took the time to walk me

> through those markets, explained food, etc. He showed me all those little things and I am grateful, but we are not friends. As soon as business is over it's done.

Andras' narrative reveals both appreciation and disappointment. Against his hope, even living together with locals and the friendly introduction to Singaporean life by the caretaker did not lead to deeper interaction. The housing situation mirrors young Europeans' social world and the role place assumes as access or barrier to socialising. From the locations where Generation Erasmus socialise to membership in hobby circles, the notion of foreignness is omnipresent. The ones who first chose an HDB usually moved into a condominium later. Firstly, well-maintained HDB where foreigners are accepted are limited. Furthermore, different "cultured behaviour" (Middleton 1989) among the parties sharing an HDB flat – concerning privacy, cleanliness and noise – led to my participants' disillusionment over the feasibility to create close bonds to locals or simply the chance to have more privacy.

Cosmopolitan Singapore has a distinctive place-identity (Carter et al. 2007). Expatriate magazines and business forums emphasise the image of the global city with its pool parties in expatriate clubs, party nights along the Quays (the central nightlife area) and casual networking in the bars around Club Street. The people who inhibit cosmopolitan Singapore are featured in suits, mostly Chinese or Caucasian looking, managers and expatriates.

Such place-identity constitutes a view from the top and is "subject to an imposed, created and manufactured place construction" (Carter et al. 2007:765). While it is associated with (particularly Western) foreign talents, this is a place-identity my informants barely share. They obtained a sense of it when informing themselves about

Singapore pre-migration. However, once having secured a job and having made friends, few of the young migrants frequent such places. For example, Club Street is an irregular meet-up to gather with friends easily – given its centrality and easy access – rather than making new ones. Participants named less well-known areas and local restaurants close to their residences as their preferred places to "hang out" or to exercise.

Singapore's media has debated the city-state's alleged association with being a 'money-making' machine but lack of authenticity or, as termed by Iwabuchi (2002:455) in a different context, of being "odourless." Efficient, clean and business-driven, characteristics most other global cities could only dream of, have gained Singapore the image of a boring, impersonal place – good to make money but with little incentives for people to lay down their roots. Several informants seemed to agree with this estimation and some of them have meanwhile left the country. Comments like "Singa*bore*" or "Switzerland of Asia" punctuate the reputation of an impersonal business centre.[46]

The majority, however, developed a sense of place for Singapore through activities and memories tied to distinctive localities over time (Carter et al. 2007). Their sense of place is different from Singapore's official place-identity, be it "odourless Singapore" or "cosmopolitan Singapore" (Yeoh 2004; Bork-Hüffer 2016; Ho 2014; Ye 2016). Such activities include cycling around the island, joining dragon boat clubs, basketball groups or amateur photographer circles. Such activities link socialising to specific places like Singapore's parks and waterways, residential areas' basketball fields and scenic nature spots, respectively. Others actively engage in home-making processes. Sarah, who earlier criticised Singapore for its "lacking emotion", describes how she

[46] The term "Singabore" blends 'Singapore' with the adjective 'boring' and is an allusion to the country's alleged "odourlessness."

became more satisfied after she actively looked for places that would create a homely feeling.

> What I've been doing here was seeking out the more unique kind of places in terms of restaurants, bars, shopping. […] It takes a while but I try to find those little places that have character and are really unique and that keeps me happy. And they do exist, I happened to move into a neighbourhood, it's a hipster hood. It's got lots of little cafes and a new beer bar and I'm pretty happy to be there.

While Lena sought out Singapore's hidden gems because she was dissatisfied, Hector's sense of place for Singapore developed along with his hobby, running. It structures his life in Singapore, which he might have already left if it was for the job. The Portuguese is in banking and found his way to Singapore via detours and contingencies more than five years ago. He complaints about poor working conditions and strained relations with bosses. As a passionate sportsman, however, Hector started to explore options for outdoor activities soon after his arrival in Singapore. He discovered lush areas in the island's many parks and water reservoirs, all fairly accessible thanks to the well-developed public transport system. Together with a group of enthusiast runners from different continents, Hector spends his Sunday mornings in the various corners of Singapore.

During a half-day trip to one of Singapore's islands Hector examined the island's running course suitability for his jogging group. He keenly explained Singapore's infrastructural projects to me. The government was in the process of extending the running course, which so far spans half of the island, to a full circle. Hector seemed fully immersed in his hobby, which to pursue with the current intensity few other places than Singapore might allow.

7.1.2 Myth of the Pool Party Lifestyle: Socialising Contextualised

In the "smart(phone) nation Singapore" (Hooi 2014), many of the young Europeans organise their lives via the internet. I am interested in migrants' socialising practices here as these practices are shaped but also how they contest the official discourse of foreign talents' typical lifestyles and socialising activities. Upon migration, social media are one of the most important sources for contacting others, as they are for maintaining bonds and scheduling get-togethers later. I joined several online groups which informants mentioned and followed the activities posted on open platforms.

LinkedIn, the world's largest online job portal, is popular among the young migrants beyond its original function. Furthermore, the migrants are actively involved in facebook groups – both nation-based groups as well as interest-based groups –, InterNations, and Meet-ups. InterNations, as the name suggests, is a network that "helps you feel at home around the world" (InterNations 2018).[47] At least initially, all of my interviewees used one or the other service, although many stopped attending events or engaging in groups once they had found a network of friends.

A group of European and Singaporean women drew my attention to the so-called "Newby gatherings." These parties are organised by the social network platform Meetups. The five women had met at a previous similar event and so I anticipated an informative research site. The event took place at a small bar close to Boat Quay, a lively night life district in central Singapore. At the entrance, I received a sticker that

[47] InterNations spans 390 cities worldwide and boasts 2.9 million members, proudly calling itself the "Largest Global Expat Network" (InternNations. 2018. Available at https://www.internations.org/about-internations/). Meetup is another online social networking service with various groups and functions similar as InterNations (Meetup. 2018. Available at https://www.meetup.com).

marked me as a “Newby.” It turned out to signal others to address me. Single men dominated the scene and I understood why most women came with a group of friends.

The most intriguing conversation I had was with a mixed group of Asians of both sexes, among them Singaporeans, with an age range of 20 to 50. This group struck me as locals or long-term foreigners in Singapore who were eager to meet new people of non-Singaporean background. When they found out that I was in Singapore only temporarily their interest decreased. As informants told me later, both Singaporeans as well as long-term foreign residents – including the young Europeans – befriend other permanently staying people purposely. In the dynamic hub, it is all too common that bonds are cut because people frequently leave. Some interviewees described it as a waste of time and energy to invest in such short-term friendships.

In contrast to that, men seemed to use the event as a chance to meet women. Some of my female informants reported the same impression and most of them stopped attending the events once they had found friends. Others, being single and active on mobile dating apps like Tinder, continued to sporadically visit the parties. With reference to participants’ narratives and my own observations that night, I discovered the range of options newly arrived migrants have in terms of different communities to socialise. Ultimately, however, meet-ups are a one-time experience for many. Migrants’ use of online social networking services and their preferred places for socialising changed upon becoming familiar with Singapore and having established personal ties. Initially, meet-ups might lead to a new friendship or to a romantic adventure. Later, migrants are introduced to acquaintances’ friends and they enlarge their networks on their own initiative.

The experience of mobility and a foreign identity strongly shape with who the young Europeans comfortably mix. Drawing on Brewer's social identity theory (1986), Wimmer's (2009) ethnic boundary making and Jenkins' (1996) writings on collective identity direct analysis to the interplay of two dialectic processes, namely out-group and in-group definitions. That is, individuals define their in-group along several shared criteria which create the feeling of being part of a community. The same individuals display commonalities that allow outsiders to objectively define them as members of one group. With this theoretical approach in mind, I now turn to migrants' boundary making practices.

7.1.3 The In-group: Young Mobile Professionals

Early during my second field trip to Singapore, a Portuguese informant invited me to a barbeque party. The get-together took place at one of the huge condominium complexes in the heartlands, Singapore's suburban residential areas with supposedly few foreign talents. People at the party ranged from Singaporeans, Asians from most parts of Asia, to Europeans of almost every European nationality. Occupations, too, covered a wide range, and I was surprised that one of the other hosts, another Portuguese, was working as a tennis coach. Age – from late 20s to late 30s – and higher education were the only easily observable characteristics of the group but I would discover more commonalities as the evening went on.

It was already dark when an Asian woman and a Latino man approached me and involved me in an intriguing discussion. When they found out that I was living in Japan the conversation switched to Japanese. The Japanese woman was, like the other party

members, fluent in English and obviously enjoyed conversing with the mixed crowd of people. The ability to speak several languages, and the fun of doing so, were traits I found among many of my interviewees. Marcos, 34 years at the time and originally from Lisbon, had lived in Japan before and so our conversation circled around life in Japan and Singapore and our experiences of mobility.

That evening, I started to understand what the “international atmosphere”, “cosmopolitan environment” or “diverse cultures”, to adopt my informants’ terms, means for them. The gathering revealed what was (from a European perspective) distinct about these migrants’ social world. While I learned in one-on-one interviews that the majority of my informants’ close friends are European, approximately half of the wider circle of friends, as I witnessed at the barbeque party, are Asians. What these young adults actually have in common is their foreign identity, their desire to explore the unfamiliar, but also the shared concerns of establishing a career and the pursuit of happiness abroad. Those who have a similar “reference point,” as one Belgian woman phrased it, are Europeans, Asians and sometimes people from other continents, as well as a few Singaporeans.

When I talked to a young Singaporean couple, the man relayed that he felt inspired by discussions with people from diverse backgrounds at these get-togethers, something he could not find among Singaporeans without mobility experience. Race and ethnicity lost their dominating power among that evening’s young middle-class crowd. On a different occasion, John, a young British interviewee noted that having Asian friends was simply natural. He started his first job in Singapore at the age of 22 after having completed a year at a Singaporean university.

> I don't know any British people here. There are many here but they mostly don't work in construction. Actually – that's not true, some of them do but they are like expats, like 40 or 50 years old. But [my friends are] mostly Singaporean and yeah, just the normal thing here. It's normal to have friends from China, Indian, Pakistan, Philippines definitely, Indonesia.

Certainly, not all informants would have agreed. Yet, John's socialising habits roughly represent those of the younger Europeans who migrated alone without prior work experience. They show more common features with other Asians – foreigners and Singaporean citizens – than with the established and privileged European community of a post-colonial Singapore. This fact however underlines that other kinds of privilege than race have not waned. Middle class, the millennial generation and a certain attitude towards life as a project to manage and to improve – for instance through organisational and geographical mobility – are the most obvious markers of this group. Following and participating in that evening's conversations, I noted that the majority of those present, regardless their background and including the locals, were highly educated people working as professionals. Secondly, all but few had experienced mobility in their lives, often repeatedly. This accounts for both the Asian as well as the European migrants, whereas the Singaporeans had usually not migrated but counted foreigners among their close friends and frequently travelled the region. Last but not least, they were all millennials.

For this cohort, distinction and forging ever new ties go hand in hand. They understand social media as main means of private and professional communication. What's app groups, facebook and LinkedIn are, next to email, the different tools they use for business but also when answering my requests for an interview or when inviting me to their group activities. They are open to challenges and to new contacts, which

initially helped me to approach them and win their trust. This attitude is necessary for starting a new life abroad in the first place and turns the migratory process into an exciting if undeniably exhausting one.

At times, I sensed that such enthusiasm for new contacts was more than mere personal interest. Particularly those who own a business or plan to establish one see broadening their networks as a fruitful and necessary instrument. For instance, an interviewee with the business idea to develop models for foreign talents' successful human resource management proposed a future collaboration. He apparently assumed that my qualitative research could complement his statistical analytics.

To sum up, these Europeans are keen to tap a pool of possible business ideas, to travel new places and to make friends of different backgrounds. Their international friendship (and sometimes business) networks are not only fun or instrumental – they become a way of defining themselves, a collective identity. Deborah, the Greek woman who has lived with her Greek husband in Singapore for nine years, is not the only one who is proud of her friends' diverse demographics. "My friends are from everywhere. We got married in July in Greece in a remote place. There were 180 people. 130 were foreigners from 26 different nationalities. Imagine all the Greeks in that small village, they were like "what's going on here?"

For Deborah as for others, a large network of people from different national, ethnic and cultural backgrounds is an asset she carefully nurtures and maintains. These are the people the young Europeans feel most at ease with rather than senior co-ethnics in their host societies or some of their peers at home who cannot understand their hunger for "leaving one's comfort zone." This was only revealed over time and piece-by-piece thanks to the ethnographic lens which enabled me to observe and participate in

a range of socialising activities and everyday get-togethers. Only interviews or a strong theoretical approach – like one directed by race or gender – would not have unravelled the emergence of the ethnically, nationally and culturally diverse in-group of young professionals and what defines membership in this community. My data powerfully points to the complexity of migrants' boundary work in the Asian context. The following section illuminates how Generation Erasmus deliberately distance themselves from the co-ethnic expatriate community but also struggle to not revert to "ethnic boundary making" (Wimmer 2009).

7.1.4 Navigating Co-ethnic and Inter-ethnic Boundaries

In colonial Singapore, the British colonialists were on the top of the social hierarchy. In postcolonial Singapore, the British maintained their dominance, evident in their diplomats' and managers' top positions, the unchallenged status of British English among other English accents, and the exclusive British clubs whose membership testified wealth and power (e.g. Beaverstock 2011; Meier 2006; Wee 2007). My informant group are part of the next generation. Decades have passed since the described omnipresence of post-colonial structures. Also, they are the first generation to have grown up with the EU's cultural policies that promote a European identity. Furthermore, their young age and low or middling status in the company hierarchy clearly separates them from the senior, affluent expatriate community. Some of the more senior interviewees in their mid-thirties seemed to be troubled by their lower status. Singaporeans' and other Asians' expectations of them as "*ang mos*" – rich and white Westerners – constantly reminded them of not living up to this image. Most of the

participants, however, younger and embracing cosmopolitan ideals emphasised their difference from such "expats."

> There are two kinds of Westerners here: the young ones who want to understand and are open. And the others who are older and just want to make money. […] There are people like this everywhere, they don't really want to integrate. There is this facebook group "Singapore nana" where they complain, mostly house wives [complaining] about maids. Stupid, [they are just] following their husbands. "How can I make my maid understand-?" The way they are speaking about the locals– no respect, nothing. For me, they should go home!

Chantal resembles others' voices and accentuates migrants' conflicting thoughts. They do not want to be taken for what they describe as "self-righteous" or even "supremacist." She contrasts the "older" Westerners with "her" group, the young Westerners, by criticising the former that "they don't […] want to integrate." Such deliberate boundary-making practices deserve closer examination. The previous section illustrated that the young migrants find a group of like-minded young professionals with whose features they increasingly define themselves. They, however, struggle to find their position vis-à-vis senior co-ethnics and Singaporeans of a different class and generation – or, simply, locals who lack their mobility experience.

Chantal's account above as well as Andras' anecdote of moving into an HDB flat demonstrate the young migrants' desire for integration. Yet, deep inside they seem to anticipate limits to differentiating themselves from the senior expatriates. Most of the migrants admit moments of disillusionment or frustration when they cannot surpass the borderlines separating them from Singaporeans. One example is Andras' earlier account

on the lacking possibility to befriend the elderly Singaporean who managed his HDB flat.

In other cases, Generation Erasmus try to justify what they regard as their own failure of not being able to strike up friendships with locals. They use the notion of cultural difference, citing Singaporeans' different interests and leisure activities – shopping, dining out and watching TV. Several informants contrast such free time activities with "their" – young Westerners' or Western educated people's – interests like discussing political and social issues, travelling or consuming arts. By this, they inevitably fall back into classical prejudices against an (ethnic) out-group, argued by Blumer (1958) as one of four factors that foster a sense of group position.

The migrants long for upward career mobility which naturally comes with salary rise and probably the means to rent their own flat in a condominium. As such, their own lifestyle might align with that of the senior expatriates in more and more aspects on the long run. They know that non-Westerners will then be quicker to subsume them under 'ignorant expats.' Their desire to transcend ethnic and cultural boundaries sometimes results in resignation when they fail. Some retreat into their national or ethnic European networks whereas the majority feels an enhanced sense of identification with the community of young mobile professionals.

European humanistic education with its emphasis on cosmopolitan ideals proclaims equality among humans in general as well as in the EU context between the European regions. Andras, the Hungarian hospitality manager, however contends that ethnic and national divisions continue to exist in the European setting. He experienced subtle discrimination in France where he had worked for four years before coming to

Asia. “Parisians are […] so obnoxious, they are really arrogant. They kind of look down on- they make jokes about Eastern Europe.”

Such hierarchical notions which still surface within Europe seem to have largely disappeared in the context of being a European foreign talent in Singapore. Depending on the context, informants refer to themselves as world citizens or as European millennials. Being a world citizen for them means sharing a cosmopolitan orientation whereas culture and growing up with a positive notion of mobility is, for them, rooted in their European identity. As tertiary educated European millennials, they perceive themselves as a group who share the benefits (e.g. educational geographical mobility) and burdens (the labour market crisis), which shaped their lives as young European citizens.

Nevertheless, some national groups among the European migrants seem to stick together more than others. Marcos, the Portuguese architect, points to this in his remark on language use in the young European community. “I think expats tend to create clusters. French don’t mingle so much, British of course– I think Portuguese, we are a very mixed group, people from all over the world. And if someone doesn’t speak the language, is from another country, we start to speak in English.” His comment supports findings from interviews with French informants and other informants’ views (see Andras above). For instance, a French informant referred to language as one of the main factors why after years in Singapore he increasingly turned to the French community. In his opinion, language was the only tool to communicate humour particularly and insisted that language impacts one’s ability to think deeply. “You have to understand that the language is one of the main supporters for thought. You don’t have deep thought if you don’t have a deep mastery of your language.”

Several interviews revealed that next to the language issue the French identity, too, was somewhat enhanced compared to most other European national identities. This can partly be attributed to the fairly large number of young French who have been observed to have emigrated to Asia. Besides newspaper articles (e.g. Marlowe 2013; Moutet 2013) and my informants' accounts, the statistics on V.I.E.s highlight the strong role of Asia-Pacific as destination region for V.I.E. interns (Business France 2017) and hint at the young French community's growth in Asia, including Singapore.

In addition to that, I found that my French interviewees – who indeed are the dominant national group among my informants in sheer numbers – are well connected to other French *across* Asia. In most cases, they had either found their jobs through a French friend or had helped other French to access the Asian labour market themselves. Furthermore, they support their peers when they search for accommodation in a new migration destination. Interestingly, the awareness of Chinese first-tier cities' pollution and the perceived bad quality of life seemed to have triggered a kind of chain migration among some informants' acquaintances and friends as the following example reveals.

Chantal, a 29-year old French trade lane manager at an established German logistics firm, considers herself to be part of a group of young French who move repeatedly 'within' an informal French network to Asia, across Asia, and sometimes back to Europe in circular migratory pathways. "When I arrived here, one of my friends from Shanghai followed me. [Then there are] other French we met here. And last year we had a couple of French from Shanghai who moved here. […] My brother was with me in Shanghai as well and moved last year back to France."

Socialising practices and the boundaries the Europeans draw to define their in-group of young mobile professionals vary depending on the wealth of migrants' social

and national networks. The young French in Asia are stronger in numbers than most other European national groups and are well-connected enough to allow their members to mainly stay within their national network. It is within this network and the information it provided that Chantal, her brother, and several of her friends moved to China, from Shanghai to Singapore, and a few of them back to European economic centres.

Others, like the Portuguese migrants I met, are less well represented in numbers. Their socialising – for instance the barbeque party I attended – testified more diversity and seemed to invite, next to non-Portuguese speaking Europeans, also a considerable number of non-Europeans and locals. While national and regional *hierarchies* within the young European migrant community largely ceased to matter in the Asian context, *divisions* continue to exist in their socialising practices and shape further migratory trajectories. The persistence of such divisions only emerged as preeminent after extensive field work. I was then able to compare and contrast informants' mobility experiences and their socialising behaviour in different contexts over time. This finding again testifies the value of the grounded approach which a strong theoretical reading through the lens of, for instance, whiteness would not have allowed.

7.2 Tokyo

"Singapore and Japan are like the two extremes."

(Caspar, Singapore, author's field notes)

This was Caspar's first impression when I told him about my research. I met the French during my early field work in Singapore in 2015 and even before sitting down or turning on the recorder, he expressed his thoughts about the two countries. Later during the interview, I probed what he had meant with this impulsive initial statement. "In terms of openness to– position regarding migration, Japan is one of the most closed countries in the world. They don't want." Our earlier conversation had revealed that Caspar spoke about Japan's identity of an "island nation" as he phrased it.

People who did not have experience with Japan, like many of my interviewees in Singapore, thought of Japan as ethnically homogeneous. For scholars and informants living in Japan, including Caspar who held a double degree from a Singaporean and a Japanese university, this was certainly different. And yet, the feeling of being a foreigner, especially different from the majority of ethnic East Asians in their appearance, was a constant in my informants' lives in Japan. How it influences European migrants' socialising and what this means for their feelings of belonging are the questions that guided my field work in Tokyo.

7.2.1 Convenience and Cultural Abundance in the "City of Contrasts"

Chapter five and six revealed that many of the migrants are ambivalent towards their work experience and career opportunities in Tokyo. The puzzling question then is why they stay. I demonstrated that they often react to adverse working conditions with job transfer or perseverance during the first two or three years. After more than two years working full-time in Japan, however, the situation looks different: 12 of the 35 interviewees in Japan have left the country. Seven of these 12 Europeans had studied the

Japanese language intensively at university. While three of them left because of their spouse, others left *despite* their long-term romantic partner living in Japan and their intention to maintain the relationship.

One of those who is still in Japan is Olaf. The Baltic man is after two years at a Japanese manufacturing firm still dissatisfied with the job. After my follow-up interview with him and on the underground ride home, I thought about his persisting frustrations. Meanwhile, the train left Kagurazaka station. *Kagura* refers to the spiritual music traditionally dedicated to Shinto gods. The Tokyo district is known for its French flair and shops, but at the same time boasts with exquisite Japanese dining places and geisha houses in the back alleys. The quarter is one of the migrants' countless ways to spice up routine life in Tokyo. I had come here twice for an interview, and Kagurazaka's popularity among interviewees punctuates their fondness of the combination of fancy French and traditional Japanese, of a cultural mix they consider hard to find elsewhere.

On my walk home from the station I made a short stop at one of the more than 10,000 convenience stores that provide Tokyo residents with everything from warm food to tooth paste to insect repellent 24/7, 356 days a year (statista 2018b). Withdrawing money from the store's ATM machine and grabbing a bottle of milk that I had forgotten to buy earlier, Lena's story came to my mind. The German woman first came to Japan for a year during high school where she attended regular classes and lived with a Japanese host family. When I asked what kept her in Japan after almost 11 years that she had spent going back and forth between the countries, she did not think long to explain why Japan had become her "second home."

> When I was here in high school, I sometimes couldn't sleep at night. In the morning at 2am I thought "I'll now go and get myself an ice cream." And

> there was a specific one I wanted. I left the house and went to the *conbini* [convenience store], alone, as an under-aged girl. I bought the ice cream I wanted and sat outside on the pavement. And I thought "this is the greatest freedom I have ever felt." I got what I wanted, when I wanted it, and I was outside alone and felt safe. And this is what keeps me staying. This is the lifestyle I have here.

The freedom Japan offers to the young Europeans is a recurrent theme. Lena referred to both the safety but also the high standard of living and convenience, which enabled her to lead this lifestyle. For others who were less familiar with the country, the fascination of "different Japan", in addition to living in a safe and sophisticated society sum up what appeals to the young Europeans. It were Tokyo's attractions that were most important to many: As the biggest city on earth and yet, with a less international and thus more "exotic" atmosphere in terms of the limited number of non-Japanese and especially non-Asian people and English not that widely in use, it offers the little something extra which few global cities have. This does not mean that life outside work is hassle-free. To understand migrants' interaction with other Tokyo residents, how joys and frustrations differently affect their perceptions and ultimately their embeddedness in Japan one has to disentangle their social world.

Earlier, I used the typology of the *cultural enthusiast* to describe the motivations of the majority of my informants who migrated to Japan. Based on their cultural interest in the country, and in a few cases a romantic relationship, the majority studied the language before they started to work in Tokyo. Also, as I mentioned earlier, many Europeans had spent a year or longer in the country before they, through entering the labour market, committed to a long-term sojourn. This means that despite initial struggles such as language, cultural misunderstandings, geographical distance to home,

the overall experience meant they saw the upside rather than the downside of living in Japan. In this respect, we must recognise that their positive perception of Japanese society and living in Japan is inseparable from their symbolic white capital (Lundström 2014), an issue I look into in the following section.

7.2.2 White Others and Intra-ethnic Boundaries

Wimmer (2009:245) problematises the method of treating "ethnicity as self-evident units of observation and self-explanatory variables" since it easily misleads to explaining ethnicity as unambiguous and given rather than a "range of possible categories" (ibid:251). In agreement with him but without denying the historical significance of whiteness and Westernness in Japan (e.g. Ching 2006; Iida 1997), I conceptualise the unit of analysis – the European millennials – not as one of ethnicity.[48] Rather, when approaching potential interviewees, I focused on their tertiary degrees, their (main period of) upbringing in the EU and socialisation through European institutions and, most importantly, their belonging to the middle-class millennial generation; this is, having experienced mobility at a young age, internalisation of European values and middle-class dispositions and aspiration. Consequently, there are also mixed-race and non-Caucasians among my informants. Apart from ethnicity, however, my attention was also drawn to the significance of other variables. I want to discuss these in the following and suggest that ethnicity is but one social category that

[48] For a discussion on race relations in Japan, especially Japanese society's ambiguous orientation towards the West as well as Japanese people's consequent positioning towards black people see for instance Russell (1991).

explains these migrants' internal and external definition as others (Jenkins 1996) in Tokyo.

All except two of my interviewees in Japan are white. Of the two non-whites, one has a mixed ethnic background with one parent being Asian and the other being of entirely Arabic background. Among the rest of the group, informants repeatedly remarked how they, as Caucasians, benefited from positive discrimination. They spoke of Japanese people's curiosity and welcoming attitude, which they describe as "kind", "friendly", or "respectful." Debnár (2016:116) calls this the "'small benefits' of everyday life," which white foreigners enjoy in Japan, and argues that such positive experiences "translate to feelings of apparent acceptance (ibid:117)."

Supporting Debnár's (2016) findings, my field work points to a double-edged experience of whiteness in Tokyo. On the one hand, I uncovered immigration authorities' racial bias towards migrants from different racial background. While people from developing countries or "coloured" migrants are often subject to surveillance in Japan (e.g. Wadhwa 2017; Russell 2009) this rarely applies to white people (Komisarof 2012).[49] For example, some informants referred to the tacit consent when they violated the law by minor but obvious acts such as drinking on the beach, which is prohibited. Police on patrol simply ignored them. Others mentioned how they had witnessed that Asian foreigners were treated less favourably whereas they enjoyed unfounded respect.

[49] The long field work period requires a qualification of the statement. In 2018, when having almost finished writing this dissertation, I collected several voices opposing the privileged treatment of white people, including my own experiences. A Caucasian woman and former informant reported being stopped and checked for no reason by the police. In my case, I was stopped twice when riding my bicycle and the officers checked my persona as well as my bicycle's registration as a proof that it was my own bicycle and that it was not stolen. On both occasions, the officers' first question was if that was my own bicycle and if the lock I was using was the original. As such, the police officers' suspicion of myself having stolen the bicycle was obvious. I relate this to the rapid increase of foreigners of all ethnicities in Japan in recent years and the Japanese bureaucrats' understanding of Caucasians no longer always being elite, a notion which seems to directly translate into negative – in contrast to the former positive – discrimination in specific cases such as the one above.

Last but importantly, Jonatan, a Spanish interviewee, did not report when losing his job but stayed in Japan and so became an over-stayer. When he finally found employment and reported to the authorities, the official instructed him that “you should have come and report[ed] to us.” The informant apologised “Oh sorry, I didn’t know that” and received his new visa with the words “Okay whatever. Next time come and report it to us.” While his breach of law was obvious the situation did not entail legal consequences.

Despite such privileges, the young Europeans encountered structural discrimination as foreigners. Their lack of social capital for example meant that they were often unable to rent an apartment. It is a commonly known fact that many Japanese landlords do not rent out to foreigners, and easily available “expat apartments” are too pricey for the young Europeans. While the problem has different causes in Japan than in Singapore where law prohibits lease of HDBs to foreigners on work visa, the effect in Tokyo is similar in that migrants experience discrimination on the housing market.[50]

At other times, the Europeans were denied concluding contracts for mobile phones or a Japanese credit card despite providing all necessary documents and disclosing their income. Despite such discriminatory practices towards foreigners in Japan regardless nationality or race (e.g. Suruga 2017), the young Europeans are in general positive about their private life in Tokyo. Yet, migrants’ social relations are complex and often cause ambivalence towards living among Japanese.

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[50] The difference in the structural discrimination regarding housing for foreigners lies in the fact that Singapore has the two types of housing (condominiums and HDBs) and thus channels foreign labour who can afford into condominiums. Since there is no official distinction between types of housing, foreigners in Tokyo simply have to search until they find a landlord who accepts foreigners. Given the much smaller proportional number of foreigners in Tokyo compared to Singapore and the lack of a European quarter, the young Europeans, once they have secured housing, usually live in an area where the majority of their neighbours are Japanese people.

Apart from a few non-Japanese speakers, informants emphasised that they did not want to be seen as the "typical expat" who comes and leaves without interest in the host country. They are aware of the stereotypical image of the non-Japanese speaking, sometimes "embarrassing Westerner." The attribute of the West is important since it signifies – to both informants themselves and Japanese people they know – greater physical size, unfamiliarity with non-Western tradition and habits such as eating with chop sticks, as well as an "imperialist" attitude as some informants remarked. Thus, they are assertive about their difference.

The boundaries they draw between themselves and the stereotypical Westerners in Japan recall those of first-generation immigrants elsewhere. In Japan, Le Bail (2005:4) found that the Chinese "oldcomers" strove to distance themselves from the newcomers "in order to preserve their own image as a model community." This happened in the context of the 1990s when the newcomers aroused negative attention in the media which changed only recently. Interestingly, in the case of the young Europeans who consider themselves cosmopolitan and knowledgeable of Japan, the order of distinction is reversed. It is the young ones, the newcomers, who feel embarrassed by the older, or in their eyes, the ignorant non-Japanese speaking Western migrants in Japan.

Tobi is a peculiar case and displays quite well the boundary making dynamics between the co-ethnic groups. He is discontented with his own slow progress in Japanese and his consequent alienation in Japanese society. Evident from his account, the young Europeans erect boundaries between their in-group, young and 'cosmopolitan' Europeans, and senior co-ethnics.

> It bothers me that I don't speak Japanese but not because of work. I always hated Americans who go to a country and are so ignorant that they don't

> learn the language. This attitude is just not cool. But I simply didn't have time to study Japanese. Most people learn it through their wife or a friend or at university. […] But I'd find it awful and I'd be very disappointed of myself if I left here one day and could not speak Japanese.

Tobi is not the only one who presents reasons for what he regards his failure to learn Japanese. Also, he is not alone with pointing to the recent stereotype of the native English speakers – often associated with the low-status job of English teachers – who are supposedly male and stay in Japan because of their Japanese wives. It is the other salient boundary which the young European migrants frequently draw. They seek to protect themselves from stereotypes of not being interested in the country as well as from the status loss of someone who does not or only poorly speak the domestic language.

The Europeans' reactions towards Japanese people, who obviously regarded them as tourists, changed over time. One of the standard phrases addressing foreigners in Japan – especially if easily identifiable foreigners such as Caucasians – is the iconic *nihongo jōzu desu ne* (your Japanese is good). Many informants mentioned how often Japanese people curiously commented on their Japanese language skills although they had barely said a word in Japanese. When the migrants were still new to Japan and their language level basic they seemed to be proud of the compliment. After some time, however, it became a symbol for their ambivalence towards and sometimes frustration regarding living in Japan. Many reported how they heard the same words even after years in Japan when they had become fairly fluent in the language.

Informants often complained about the fact that Japanese people, despite the recently rising numbers of foreigners, still did not expect them to know the language. Worse for the Europeans is that, even if they answered in flawless Japanese, their native

conversation partners sometimes seemed not to believe that an *ethnically different* foreigner could actually speak their language and therefore kept replying in broken English.[51] For the young migrants, such situations reminded them of Japanese people's reluctance to accept them as members of society and their continued alienation in Japan.

7.2.3 Attempts to Bond with Japanese

The Europeans know that until shortly it was natural that the image of the foreigner, especially the white and Western foreigner, was that of someone from far-away who did not intend to stay, even less to integrate. Thus, they make great efforts to distance themselves from this image. For instance, several interviewees experienced the Great Tohoku Earthquake in 2011. At that time, the derogative term '*flyjin*' became a synonym for mostly Western foreigners who fled the country for fear of radiation.[52] Thomas, a French who studied at a Japanese university in spring 2011, stressed that despite his parents begging him to return home, he stayed in Japan since "I could not just leave and run away."

The fact that he as many others wanted to share this with me, without me initiating the topic, hints at the importance the migrants ascribe to differentiating

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[51] My data, similar to Debnár's (2016) findings, demonstrates that co-ethnic foreigners such as Chinese people are often expected to speak Japanese fluently whereas white people experience the contrary. This renders them privileged but at the same time marginalised foreign residents in Japan.

[52] The Great East Japan Earthquake with a magnitude of 9.0 occurred on March 11, 2011 and triggered huge tsunami waves that devastated large parts of the north-eastern coastline of Japan's biggest island Honshu. The tsunami waves severely damaged the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant and caused nuclear meltdowns in all three reactors. The natural disaster and the consequences of nuclear contamination of parts of the surrounding area, the ocean, and the soil cost thousands of lives and destroyed hundreds of thousands of homes, drawing the country in tragic economic and social problems. Many foreigners who had resided in Japan for work or study at the time, hastily left the country due to fear of radiation. This earned them the sarcastic nickname '*flyjin*', which is a variation of '*gaijin*', the abbreviated informal expression for foreigners in Japanese and the English verb 'to fly', as they left the country by airplanes (e.g. Budmar 2012).

themselves from the *flyjins*. Their accounts reveal how determined – sometimes desperate – they are to strive for recognition or even belonging. Many confide their concerns when friendships do not become as intimate as they wish. In fact, many of the Japanese-speaking Europeans suffer from not living up to their own ideal of penetrating the Japanese society. In the interviews, the young migrants tried to explain – and often justify – their behaviour. Federica, a 29 year-old Italian woman who works as junior HR manager in a German firm, contrasts the friendships with her "foreigner group" with those with her Japanese friends.

> For me, the fact that I speak the language and know the culture to a certain extent did not create me many problems. But if you ask me do I have a lot of Japanese friends? No. I would like to have more but it is *so* ermüdend [tiring; added by author, the informant used a German word here]. Because you create the relationship first but then when you ask to meet for a coffee they need to know one week ahead. And then you arrive and somehow, it's always a bit set. Pre-booked, they know already the plan. If I am into cultural discovering then I like to go but if it's Friday night and I'm exhausted then I go out with Italians. And I'm not the type of person that is looking for Italians abroad but I discovered my origins here. I love to go out with Japanese but it's not fun. It's interesting […] Plus really, there are two girls, I maybe met them three times and we have been rescheduling 23 times. So, at some point I don't want to do it anymore.

Federica contradicts herself several times in this short interview excerpt. This is most explicit in her sentence "I love to go out with Japanese." This is a strong, empathetic statement. However, she discredits her assertion in the second part of the sentence with the words "but it's not fun." Federica seems to be aware that she contradicts herself. She quickly adds explanations and justifies her rationale with her exhaustion after work and the infeasibility to meet spontaneously. Her remark captures many others' inner

conflicts. Although they have Japanese friends, structural factors like time or distance but also cultural factors prevent them from developing the friendships into more intimate ones.

Olaf, the Baltic man who I mentioned above, tried to describe this feeling by using the Japanese word *iwakan* (literally: feeling of unease, that something is out of place). He referred to it in a double sense. He himself did not feel to be part of his Japanese surroundings. Furthermore, Olaf sensed that his Japanese interlocutors regarded him as someone different, an alien. The word accentuates classic boundary work by in-group and out-group definition, as does Federica's use of framing devices such as "they" versus "Italians" which she links to her origins. Migrants' experiences resonate with the overall impression that swept through my interviews with Japanese-speaking informants. The young Europeans appreciate their friendships with Japanese and long for more integration. Yet, they inevitably encounter barriers that seem insurmountable. The barriers, however, cannot be reduced to ethnicity or more explicitly, whiteness. Federica's comments on a "set" atmosphere and the fact that her meeting preferences depend on the day of the week imply that there are other issues at stake.

Language is one. While many informants are fluent in conversational Japanese, they face their limits when talking about feelings and expressing intimacy or humour in the foreign language. Another aspect is communication style – implicit rules how and what to communicate with friends. Some share their concerns over work and relations with colleagues with young Japanese employees and so create bonds. More often, the young migrants interact with Japanese friends over sports or nightlife activities. Nevertheless, an important part of their lives is the experience of being a foreigner in

Japan, a constant issue in their minds and a reason why they sense limits to close friendships with Japanese.

In combination with language, these factors leave the friendships somewhat lacking for both parties. Federica experiences friendships with Japanese as “tiring.” After an exhausting week, she prefers after-work gatherings where she does not need to use a foreign language nor adjust herself to Japanese cultural conduct, such as planning in advance. Likewise, her Japanese friends’ repeated rescheduling points towards their priorities lying elsewhere. While Federica stresses that she does not want to miss her Japanese friends, she reserves a different time frame for these intercultural friendships: weekends and less busy times when she is fresh and thus willing to do the additional emotional work these friendships afford; that is, sensitivity to different cultural norms and willingness to engage in linguistically challenging conversations.

Although they experience it as exhausting, informants report that they enjoy having ‘different friend groups.’ These friendships seldom go beyond shared hobbies, outdoor activities, or having drinks together. And yet, they are precious enough for both parties to continuously initiate meet ups despite time constraints and considerable distances. All in all, friendships with Japanese are part and parcel of how the young Europeans define themselves as foreigners in Japan and having these reference points reassures the migrants that their lives in Japan – including all work-related struggles – are meaningful.

That said, the young Europeans feel the need to balance the joyful but tiring emotional work which their friendships with Japanese requires. Moreover, they long for people to vent their frustrations over daily struggles as foreigners in Japan. This leads many informants to socialise more with other foreigners over time. Some informants are

conscious of this fact and explain during the interview why they have increasingly turned to an “international community.” Others, like the Italian Emilio, become aware that they are missing close friends when their foreign friends start leaving. “All other friends that I got sooner or later would go away for some reason.”

In search of new friends, the young Europeans turn to people in a similar situation or with a multicultural background. These are easy to meet in sports clubs, church networks or music events in Tokyo. Those who seem to be most content are the ones with extensive networks, both foreign and Japanese. Resembling Frederica’s rationale, they choose which group to meet depending on the occasion. This practice of socialising enables the migrants to harmonise the different ‘qualities’ of each friendship and settle conflicting desires; the longing for intercultural encounters, that for embeddedness in Japanese society and that for more intimacy.

While migrants’ narratives demonstrate that there is room for improvement, they also emphasise how much the young Europeans value their lives in Japan, the multicultural friendships and the possibility to socialise in two or three different languages. The Greek Yiannis provides a summarising statement for his satisfaction with life in Tokyo and the people who are part of it.

> Tokyo can offer you- you know, there are always things to do and things to see. So it never gets boring. My friend has a home party or we go outside or there is a club event. […] My friends are half and half [Japanese and foreign, added by the author]. My closest people are maybe foreigners, or Greek friends. No, I even talk to colleagues, it is not decided, it depends on the problem. And there are of course the Greek friends back in Europe with whom I will email. I am still in close contact with them. […] My boyfriend and me converse in Japanese. His friends as well [are] more Japanese but he has a lot of international friends and other foreigners would come […] to

> visit so there is a lot of going out with visiting friends. That has to do with the EU I guess.

This diversity of networks, then, might portray migrants' attachment to Japan, to Europe, and to their home countries best. They neither absolutely identify with one or the other and their feelings of belonging are at least bifocal (Brettell 2006). They have grown roots in Japan, yet they intensively engage in their transnational networks as well. Code switching (Fleming and Roses 2007:371), depending on which group they interact with, is a highly appreciated and versatile tool that these migrants have adopted to varying extent. Those who can adeptly manoeuvre Japanese cultural capital generally enjoy their time in both worlds, although it, at times, reminds them of their limits to transgress the barriers fully which continue to separate them from Japanese society. Migrants' situational practice of balancing different friendship networks is the key to understanding how they bond and seems to offer a fairly satisfying life.

7.2.4 Approaches to Difference: Between Resignation and Freedom

Not all my informants are comfortable Japanese speakers and some only picked up basics of the language. They admit that they at times regret that they are not able to communicate more extensively with the majority of the Japanese citizens. Although they know that their language deficiency limits their deeper penetration of the Japanese society, they generally seemed to be more confident than their Japanese-speaking European peers. Given that they could not try to follow conversations in Japanese, they did not have to care about linguistic mistakes and losing face or about unconsciously shaming their conversation partners. This was an issue many Japanese-speaking

migrants worried about and often learned the harsh way, for instance when they lost friends after repeated miscommunication. In contrast to the group of Japanese speakers, the Europeans who do not speak Japanese seem to feel more equal to their friends – other foreigners and a few Japanese – who are proficient in English.

Tobi, the German who followed his Italian girlfriend Federica to the country of her dreams despite not speaking Japanese himself, recognises two ways to look at his language deficiency. Overall, he is very positive about his outsider position maybe also because he directly experienced Federica's conflicting thoughts on her friendships and the enormous emotional work this entails.

> Even after 2.5 years I speak only very limited Japanese which is good and bad. [...] I cannot ask anyone why people are doing things differently. But I enjoy talking for hours about all these things that I am marvelling about. And yet I will never really be part of it, I mean entirely. [...] I like being the exotic person here but I also miss having more contact to people. Still I know that even if I spoke the language there would always be a barrier. [...] You just feel that. [...] But when my Swedish friend calls we meet up the same day, no problems at all.

Both Federica and Tobi have close foreign friends who they can rely on. But Tobi, who has apparently accepted the fact that he will stay an outsider in the Japanese society, seems more at ease concerning socialisation and friendships in Japan. Federica, as we learned above, is still hoping to deepen her friendships with Japanese. Yet the longer she is in Japan and her language proficiency is improving, the more she understands that there are obstacles she cannot overcome. While I observed that Europeans like Tobi simply enjoy meeting with friends, Japanese-speaking informants often put pressure on themselves to develop what they deem an intimate friendship with Japanese people.

Friendships based on English as main language are limited because of the smaller amount of people who speak English fluently. Non-Japanese speakers are thus excluded from certain conversations and activities. Yet ironically, they experience their limited integration in Japanese society also as one of few constraints. They feel like a welcomed outsider, especially if they compare their situation with feelings of unsettlement in their European home countries. Nils, the Slovakian-born but naturalised German, strongly expressed this sense of freedom.

> Nils: You are here - how they call it? As a *gaijin*. Something different, not the mass. But at the same time, you are not discriminated for something. You're not a black person in Germany or a Muslim in Germany. You're something different but still from a very privileged perspective. And I really like that in Japan. It gives you something to be in Japan. To be a foreigner who is still much appreciated, in a kind of way. [...] I was always in Germany an Ausländer [foreigner]. [...] I came to Germany as an immigrant. So no matter how integrated you are, like my family right now, we are total upper middle class. [...] But the point is when [...] I was young in Germany, we were- no money, no status. I went to schools only with other immigrants, poor people, Turkish, Kurdish, whatsoever. Like Ausländer, *gaijins*. I was growing up in a society of outsiders. [...] But suddenly it feels so nice to be an outsider and to be appreciated for what you are. [...] I always thought I was not mainstream. I'm not part of the mainstream German society through my experience in my youth. Like coming into the kindergarten and not speaking German.
>
> Me: But nowadays, you enjoy it?
>
> Nils: Yeah, I enjoy it very much. [...] I learned to love the status of being [an] outsider. And again, in Japan, you're not only an outsider but you're a privileged outsider. Everybody is interested in you, what you are doing here. Okay, you still get a lot of discrimination in the workplace like you don't speak Japanese so who should care? But still, having a special status.

Nils' appreciation of living in Japan is related to his childhood experience as a migrant – an outsider in German society – as much as it is to him being one of the 'desired' foreigners in Japanese society. The fact that his look marks him as an outsider means that people do not expect him to understand, or to know the rules and thus to conform. This allows him to act outside of social norms and constraints which he, in Western Europe where he grew up and was part of an ethnic but not racial minority, could not so easily do.

Nils resembles a few other of the Europeans in that they felt as 'others' even pre-migration. Two gay informants as well as Andras, who after his childhood migratory stint to the US never felt at home in ex-communist Hungary, considered themselves more at ease in a society where, in contrast to their home countries, their physiognomy singled them out in the first place. Tobi, who I cited above, feels a different kind of freedom from social pressure. He grew up in an idyllic town in Southern Germany which was known for its fancy sailing clubs and wealthy community. Tobi's background, however, disturbed the pretty image. He is from a lower middle-class family and his parents, who worked in mechanical jobs, had not obtained higher education. This, he suggested, might have been the reason why he never felt really comfortable in his home town and developed, from as early as the age of 15, a longing for far away countries. As his narrative conveyed, being an outsider has good and bad sides, but he emphasises to enjoy his life in Tokyo.

Two qualifications are necessary here. First, these migrants are only content with their position as others because it does not translate into discrimination as it does in the case of many non-Western and particularly non-white migrants. Second, one should not idealise their otherness since the majority of the migrants, especially those who invested

in Japan for instance through language study, long for inclusion. Nevertheless, the 'positive' experiences of otherness sensitise to the diversity of the migration experience and warn against one-size-fits-all approaches to the complexity of boundary work.

To conclude, non-Japanese speakers like Nils and Tobi who are content with their somehow marginalised status in the Japanese society point to migrants' differing approaches to otherness. Their inability to communicate with the majority of the society frees them from social pressure which they experienced in various forms in their home societies. As Caucasians among other Caucasians, they were always expected to fit in. In Tokyo, most people expect them not to fit in. Nevertheless, locals treat them with respect, often even curiosity and friendliness. These Europeans' freedom, however, implicates that they feel less embedded compared to their Japanese-speaking peers. Both Nils and Tobi have meanwhile left Tokyo and moved to a third and, importantly, *not* their home country.

The majority of the European migrants in Tokyo have a quite different approach to otherness. They sacrificed much time and energy to fit into the Japanese society and are thus troubled by their otherness. Despite their language proficiency they cannot fully overcome the barriers that separate them from the Japanese society. This causes a constant sense of lack and deficiency. They are grateful for their extended network in Japan with both locals and other foreigners and value the extent to which they feel part of some Japanese networks. Yet, their ambivalence towards their otherness has not ceased even after years.

7.3 Vertical and Horizontal Boundaries

Migrants' everyday interactions and socialising patterns emphasise the existence of different social hierarchies in Singapore and Tokyo. These can be traced back to Singapore's and Japan's distinctive (colonial) histories and result in two very different contemporary societies, the multicultural Singaporean and the Japanese where foreignness is still considered alien.

The young Europeans contest and transform such hierarchies with the help of boundary work (Lamont and Mizrachi 2012:367). The concept of boundary work enables to recognise a comprehensive issue in the young Europeans' socialising patterns: They (aspire to) practice openness – to the world, to other young professionals of various cultural, national and ethnic backgrounds, and to the host society, although we saw that this has clear limitations. At the same time they draw clear lines to their senior co-ethnics, the Western expatriate community. As Roose, van Eijck, and Lievens (2012:492) suggest, theirs is a "distinction *through* openness." The out-group from which they distinguish themselves includes both the ordinary public in their home countries – who supposedly display less "openness" through their relative immobility and rootedness – and the co-ethnic expatriates in the host society who have been criticised for their snobbery exclusionary socialising practices.

The in-group, then, is a community of young highly educated people who are mostly, though not exclusively, foreigners in these Asian global cities. They share the mobility experience, both its assets and the concerns that evolve along with a mobile lifestyle. Next to the mobility culture, their middle-class dispositions, tertiary education

and the characteristics of a 'millennial childhood' are the defining properties for group belonging.

That said, there are striking differences between migrants' approaches to and opportunities for socialising in the two global cities. In Singapore, the housing situation entails migrants' mingling with other foreign talents as do initial networking activities via online groups and 'expat' events. The multicultural composition of society and the ease of navigating one's ways even as a foreigner facilitate settling in. However, the local circumstances also mean that while the migrants are relatively smoothly integrated in a community of foreign talents, deeper interaction with Singaporeans is limited.

In Tokyo, many migrants' first touchpoint with the host society is during university days. Young and often single, the young Europeans have the time and motivation to invest in language studies and to develop friendships with Japanese. Nevertheless, the Europeans experience a peculiar, elevated yet marginalising treatment as white foreigners. This continued salience of otherness in Japan underlines their struggle to become part of the Japanese society.

A closer look at the composition of migrants' friendship networks reveals qualitative differences. In Singapore, the strong presence of foreign talents from various backgrounds translates into great diversity of Europeans' networks. Some nation-based young migrant communities like the French are tightly connected in and across Asian cities and as such develop more independently from the multi-ethnic and multi-racial crowd of foreign talents with who the majority of Generation Erasmus socialise. In Tokyo, with few European migrants compared to the much larger foreign community of middle-class East Asians, Europeans tend to mingle with Europeans on the one side and Japanese friends on the other.

Europeans' bonding practices with young locals are the most striking difference between the two cities. The Europeans with Japanese language proficiency are able to bond with same-aged Japanese even if their local friends lack any mobility experience. The characteristic which is defining for the European migrants as a group, a propensity for and identification over mobile life trajectories, becomes second priority when the Europeans sense their chance of developing deeper bonds with Japanese people.

Yet, as much as the young migrants appreciate these friendships, they feel a lack of intimacy if they compare them to their friendships with foreigners and mobility-experienced Japanese. Ultimately, they maintain two friendship networks, one with Japanese of their age, using Japanese as language of communication, and one with other migrants, mostly but not exclusively from Europe. Although switching between these two networks can be tiring, it allows them to engage in 'two worlds', the Japanese and the international.

These two worlds are, at least to some extent, exclusive. They require extra effort on part of the migrants as it costs time and energy to keep up with both networks. Yet, and this is perhaps the most intriguing finding of the comparison, it seems to pay off. Although Japanese-speaking informants in Tokyo ponder more about their deficiencies in the language and lack of integration than those who do not speak Japanese or the migrants in Singapore, many of them have come closer to their goal of being part of the society than the two former groups. Their practices and strategies reveal that they are the ones who have grown some roots in the host society. Furthermore, two of the informants who had left Japan for a while came back and a few others seem to settle – perhaps the only ones among the 70 participants of this study. Thus, despite and perhaps

because of the higher barriers to 'access' the local society, Japan might ultimately be more accessible in terms of growing roots and eventual settlement.

The discussion directs the conclusion to migrants' commonalities in both cities. Japanese-speaking Europeans in Tokyo, despite their appreciation of the two friendship networks or worlds in which they live, are nevertheless disappointed with the barriers between them and their Japanese friends which they cannot fully overcome. As a consequence, all but few gradually invest more into their friendships with other foreigners. Ultimately, the majority of migrants in both cities strikingly resemble each other in their socialising patterns. While the Japanese speakers mentioned do not cut their ties with Japanese friends, they more and more resemble non-Japanese speaking migrants in Tokyo and the majority of those in Singapore. They feel most at ease in a community of young and mobile foreign professionals with who they identify over the shared mobility experience and their life as foreigners.

Again, similar to the preceding discussion on migrants' work experience, the initial motivational types for moving to Asia dissolve. The analysis of Europeans' socialising practices illuminates that migrants who were culturally or regionally focussed in the beginning – for instance the *cultural enthusiasts* with their fondness for Japan – start to widen their perspective. Step-by-step, they become more integrated into a community of internationally-minded, mobility experienced young professionals than one that is ethnically or linguistically defined.

As a consequence, migrants in both cities find themselves in a dilemma. They are caught between the senior and affluent Western expatriates, who they avoid, and the lacking chance to satisfy their cosmopolitan aspirations by becoming an integral part of the host society. The young adults are aware of the post-colonial image of typical

European expatriates in Asia and try to differentiate themselves painstakingly. To a varying extent, migrants challenge inherent power structures such as the post-colonial legacy of white privilege and face the walls that separate them from the host society. Examples are shared apartments in Singapore and the investment in the Japanese language and a considerable network of locals in Tokyo. This statement, however, holds true only for the in-group which is ethnically and culturally diverse yet more homogeneous in terms of class, educational background and generation.

To sum up, Generation Erasmus' boundary work elucidates two diametrical dynamics. They erect vertical boundaries which separate them from their co-ethnics who are 'above' them in terms of age, income and status. At the same time, they (to some extent) horizontally cross ethnic boundaries. Their middle-class professional dispositions form the base of the community. The shared mobility experience is at its heart. These migrants identify as young mobile employees who are used to coming and leaving. They sometimes alter their place of residence and their career goals flexibly when opportunities come up. Thus, they have multiple belongings. Although they regard one or several places their home, they might not return to their home countries for long, or never. They find like-minded young adults practicing mobility in a foreign community. At the same time, such boundary work often denies growing deeper roots.

8. Emotional Geographies

8.1 "Home is where the Heart is"

The preceding chapters attempted to sketch the young Europeans' lives in Asia. While the migrants often display determination and rationality in the work sphere and draw from cosmopolitan discourses concerning their friendships, issues of love and intimate relationships suggest that emotions constantly guide their actions. This chapter places home and identity at the core of the analysis. Tying together the links between migrants' narratives of love, mobility and belonging I argue that only by recognising intimacy as crucial for guiding migrants' lives can we obtain a coherent picture of their geographical pathways.

The following parts of the chapter are structured as follows. First, I briefly describe my informants' experiences of romance and relationships in Asia. The Europeans exhibit several patterns of intimacy and feelings of belonging. These patterns lead to different, sometimes overlapping outcomes for migrants' (continued) geographical mobility. For reasons of simplicity, I adopt the term partner when referring to both a spouse or a romantic partner in a long-term relationship.[53] For analytical purpose, I divide the patterns into the following four: i) those with a home-country national partner, ii) those who find a local, Singaporean or Japanese, partner, iii) those with a third-country national partner (hereafter TCN), and finally iv) the ones who are and stay singles. I then discuss how each relationship pattern influences migrants' living

[53] In an analysis of the details of all interviews I found out that it does not make a significant difference whether to subsume or to differentiate these two forms of partnership, but it might have blurred the results.

experience abroad differently and how they navigate feelings of belonging and multiple identities.

8.1.1 The Relationship as a Fix Point

In chapter four I introduced different types of movers. Among them, the *lifestyle migrants* and occasionally Europeans of other motivational types are those who moved to Asia as couples. Moving as a couple in few cases means that migrants actually migrate at the same time, set up a home together and work in the host society for the exact same period. Instead, their migration resembles what I call a relationship project. In most cases, these couples decided to embark on an overseas work or lifestyle experience together (with either factor being more dominant) and think of themselves as moving together.

In reality, timing seldom allows them to do so. As none of the partners wants to give up his career and financial independence, they regard a full-time job, preferably in their occupational field, as the minimum requirement for moving. This means that one partner often migrates first. The other one follows when the time for a job transfer is convenient or when he or she secures an attractive position. Therefore, many couples live through one – or in case they move repeatedly – several transition phase(s). Long-distance relationships of several months are not uncommon.

A few keep up their relationship despite physical separation over years during which they visit each other only for short periods of time. Especially recent graduates who start working full-time as interns, trainees or in contracted positions abroad maintain a multidimensional transnational lifestyle, often with both partners working in different foreign countries. Only after finally being in a more stable (though not

necessarily long-term) position they resume life together. Paul, a French logistics specialist who moved to Hong Kong as a V.I.E. trainee, remarks about this first full-time position,

> [A position like mine is] normally for one year. If you do well, one more year. Most people go back, they seldom stay unless the guy is getting married with an Asian girl. I had a girlfriend already, French. She was in New York, I was in Hong Kong, we were from the same school. […] [We are now] in a 10-year long relationship. We met in France. I moved to Shanghai, she came to visit and managed to find an internship for […] company. After that I came to Singapore and she could move […] here, too. It's a complicated story […] I get married in France in August, then I will be coming back here afterwards, of course. I wanted to stay [in Singapore] but if I become a father I understand that my future wife wants to go home.

Despite his long-term relationship, Paul's account is all about independence. Over the past ten years, he had been to Scotland, Bali (both not mentioned in above quotation), Shanghai, Hong Kong and now Singapore. While his girlfriend was able to visit him in Shanghai, joined him in Hong Kong later and is nowadays living with him in Singapore, they did not move together once. Even now she will return to France to prepare for the wedding, while he is still in Singapore and busy with his job. Apart from that, throughout the time in Asia, she did not always follow him, as her stint in New York reveals. They both pursued their professional and lifestyle interests for years. Nevertheless, after ten years and many different countries, they now enter an institution that promises permanence.

To juxtapose this apparent contradiction, we can see that the couple were only able to sustain the fleeting and temporary nature of their mobile pathways comfortably because they could rely on each other. Their relationship has always been a fix point.

No matter how mobile their daily lives and how great geographical distances are, their pathways are interwoven. They regularly crossed each other's circuit until they finally shared a home in Hong Kong and Singapore. Now again, one of them is leaving, but only because they know that they meet again for the wedding in Europe.

Mobility characterises these couples' life. Nevertheless, mobility and their long-term relationship – which they at times sustained even over great physical distance – are not dichotomous but complementary elements. These couples have the cultural and social capital to cross borders in the first place. Their nationality and the educational institutions from which they graduated provide them with contacts to obtain internship positions. They hold tertiary degrees, speak English on a high level and many of them have mastered one or two other foreign languages to a certain extent. In combination, this increases their chances of obtaining a visa and thus a job. However, their limited financial capital demands two incomes. Despite all the opportunities which mobility grants, the young migrants try to protect themselves from being uprooted by anchoring themselves in the romantic relationship.

Paul's narrative, while optimistic and invigorating, also draws attention to the sacrifices. He mentions that most people return to France after their V.I.E. internship unless they marry an "Asian girl." For him, neither of the two is the case. His stable romantic relationship offers him the security that his life otherwise would lack. Meanwhile, Paul is in his early 30s, and turning the comfort of his intimate relationship into the legal institution of marriage might alleviate concerns over being alone in a competitive neoliberal labour market.

The legal recognition, contrary to many European peers who settle down when marrying, allows these migrants to maintain their mobile lifestyle. They are not alone,

neither emotionally nor legally. They have known each other for long enough to be assured that they can rely on each other. Apart from that, they share the experience of having grown up in the same country with the same mother tongue as well as the experience of challenging themselves abroad. Thus, no matter how far away from each other and their home country they live presently, they do not feel alone. Rather, the romantic partner becomes a support, insurance, friend and source of comfort in their exciting yet insecure mobile pathways.

Nevertheless, such floating lifestyle is bound to have an end. As Maehara (2010:954) notes, migrants' stage in the life-cycle significantly influences how "they change their priorities, concerns, expectations, goals and plans, all of which affect, and are affected by, emotional processes." Talking about children and the probability that his wife wants to return to France for good reveals Paul's inner struggles. After the wedding, he "of course" intends to return to Singapore, but he does not include his wife in this remark. Ultimately, Paul expects his mobile life to end soon. While for years, the couple sacrificed the time they might have had together, they will have to give up their independence and flexibility if they want to adopt the social role of a spouse and parents.

Not all of the couples that come from the same country move so often or live apart from each other for so long. Nevertheless, "doing mobility together" characterises their migration to Asia. Some stay and move on across Asia whereas a few migrants return to Europe (though not necessarily to their home country) after two or three years. The relationship project is the fix point in their lives and it means that they eventually start a family, have shared assets or even settle down. The couples who perceive their mobility as a shared project display stronger attachments to their home country than most other interviewees. They speak of the same "home" – associating home at least partly with

their home *country* – when thinking about childhood and their natal families. When they occasionally visit their families, they book flights to the same country and sometimes city where they both do not need to clear immigration. The shared images of and nostalgia for the same country of origin tie them close to each other. Yet, this does not mean that they return – home can also be a place one decides, for practical reasons, *not* to live, as Lam and Yeoh (2004:154-55) note, a notion that is reflected in some of these couples' narratives.

Caspar, the French entrepreneur who has been living in Singapore for seven years (the first two years as an MBA student with his wife still being in France), says he is "more French than ever." Still, the vibrant Singaporean labour market and the constrained situation in France deter the couple from leaving Southeast Asia. Instead, Caspar considers their marriage as a small nucleus in a world which he perceives as very uncertain. Sceptical of Europe's and Singapore's future development, the childless couple stick together and try to stay independent from state control and national systems as much as possible.

> I don't know what France's going to be in ten years, I don't know, no one knows actually. I think our situation will become more and more the norm. […] And here you feel as a French, as a European, well, you feel lost, and you feel scared, because you really know, you take care of yourself and that's it.

When I met Caspar again in Singapore two years later and probed his view on Europe and his feelings of belonging, it turned out that he felt stronger about his situation than ever. While his account of 2015 hints at uncertainty and speaks of themselves rather than his country France nor his host country Singapore as a point of reference, the

couple has taken the initiative to manage their situation as individuals rather than citizens by 2017.

> That's our worry number one, savings. For two years I paid [my pension tax] in France, it is mandatory. I have no hope to get this money back no matter what happens during whatever elections. When moving here I very naively thought "okay let's continue to pay […]." After one month I realised that it is so […] expensive for such a poor quality of service. To pay for something that I don't get anyway- no! So [we] do our own savings. The good news is that taxes is good in our case. There are less taxes so we can save much more. […] This is our situation but the problem is in which asset you put? So far [there is] no answer, that's quite scary. […] We prefer to have liquid stuff to be able to react fast. […] We don't want to be stuck with a property- It's very worrying, with that mobility thing you have no stable play if – you don't even know in what currency you should get your assets. Financial globalisation has been great for firms but for individuals it's a nightmare.

Caspar went on and on. Later, when he mentions the designated President of the United States Donald Trump as well as Singapore's increasing control of immigration, both low and high skilled, it is obvious that he does not want to rely on his current place of living, nor his home country or future global developments. His narrative illustrates how even a French couple, with professional jobs, recognised degrees, nearing middle age, do not simply return to Europe although they value their shared French background and the "European values," which Caspar repeatedly mentioned. Ultimately, they see themselves as a two-men entity, partners and each other's insurance and as such pursue their own path.

8.1.2 Growing Roots or Turning Native?

Another group of migrants (13 of the 70) are in a stable relationship with a host-country national. I define stable here as either married to (eight of my informants) or living together with their long-term Singaporean or Japanese partners. At first glance, the two cities differ vastly in this regard: Only one of my European informants is married to a Singaporean, whereas seven interviewees in Japan have a Japanese spouse. Yet, this statement needs qualification: Among the seven in Tokyo, one woman and her Japanese husband already completed their divorce, and another male informant is still sharing the house with his Japanese wife because of their daughter but has technically ended the relationship.

Two factors explain the numerical difference of European migrants' liaisons with locals in Singapore and in Tokyo. First, the different composition of both societies entails that in Singapore, where roughly one third of the population are foreigners and predominantly from Asia, several European migrants found a spouse from one of the neighbouring Asian countries. Second, migrants invested differently in the country of residence. As discussed above, many Europeans in Japan studied the Japanese language and dreamt of staying in Japan for long. During their first years, they tried to find Japanese friends (and a few were determined to find a native partner) and actively socialised with Japanese people.

This differs from most of European migrants' socialising practices in Singapore, also because migrants arrived at a slightly higher age on average and more often moved together with a romantic partner. Initially coming to Japan as students meant that the Europeans in Tokyo socialised very differently from the ones in Singapore. The life stage is significant here. Above examples underline that Tokyo is difficult to access for

couples given the requirement of at least intermediary language proficiency in Japanese for most jobs. We thus find that the choice of destination depends on potential migrants' life stage which again entails that those in Tokyo are more likely to find a local or third-country spouse in the host society than those in Singapore who more often migrate as couples.

In turn, having a Japanese partner or spouse allows for deeper penetration of the Japanese society. All Europeans in this group nowadays use Japanese as the main language for communication with their partners. However, many did not speak Japanese fluently first, so their partners are all Japanese people who can communicate in English. Nevertheless, Japanese became the main mode of communication for the Europeans on the long run. Other aspects of migrants' lives gradually turned Japanese, too. This includes banal habits like sleeping on futons in tatami rooms as well as more profound ones like fully relying on medical treatment in the Japanese tongue and the national savings and pension systems.

While their partners' proficiency in foreign languages might enable these couples to live elsewhere, migrants' accounts reveal that they see their future in Japan. The degree of their Japanese proficiency and their familiarity with Japanese social norms and institutional structures leave no doubt that staying in Japan is most pragmatic. In all but one case, the Japanese partner lacks sufficient language ability to work abroad or does not want to leave Japan, or, most often, both. This suggests that intimacy is decisive for migrants' prolonged stay in Japan. Olga is a Baltic woman who felt marginalised both at work as well as in the Japanese society when I first met her. Yet, she had been together with her Japanese boyfriend for long and made her point clear. "I don't know, if I wasn't with him, I can't actually imagine being here alone, working in

this kind of strange companies and so on. […] I don't like the people any more. […] No, yeah, somehow I still love my boyfriend." When I asked her if they considered other countries, she shook her head.

> That's difficult. Well, he wants to live in Japan. He actually can't imagine himself working in any foreign company. And probably he won't be able, I think so- Yeah, it's this problem with Japanese, really. They know how to work here and that's it. So yeah, I think that I have to stay here.

Olga's solution was to quit the job at her Japanese company and enter the Tokyo subsidiary of a foreign firm. A year later, she married her boyfriend. Eighteen months after her marriage, Olga changed company again in the hope for higher work satisfaction and, ultimately, life satisfaction.

Scholarship has frequently pointed to Western men's popularity among Asian women. Affairs, relationships, and families between Western men and Asian women attracted much attention (e.g. Kelsky 2001; Woan 2008; Prasso 2005). The cases of European migrants who are married to Japanese citizens do not clearly support this gender bias. While eight European men and four European women among my informants are in a stable relationship with a Japanese partner, the ratio looks different for those who are married: Four women, and thus all of those in a stable romantic relationship with a Japanese eventually married their partner, while only three of the eight men did.

In the case of Tim, a Dutch man of mixed Asian-European background, his wife's Japanese family were valuable supports when their first child was born. Their case is noteworthy since Tim's wife is the main breadwinner. As an employee of an established automotive corporation, she follows a career track position and provides the family with

not only a stable income but also insurances and the like. Tim is an entrepreneur and his one-man firm yields only enough money for grocery shopping.

When his wife's health was unstable before child birth she had to stay in hospital for three months. During that time, the expecting father, still struggling with the Chinese characters and bureaucratic terms in Japanese, managed the household and his firm, his wife's health issues and the huge amount of paperwork that came along with her hospitalisation as well as the child birth and insurance issues for the newly born. Nowadays, the family has a routine with Tim organising the toddler's nursing schedules, taking care of the household, cooking and working on his company while his wife is a full-time employee. Every few weeks, however, her parents visit them from the neighbouring province for a weekend and this is when the young couple can lean back for some time.

> Her parents visit every few weeks. Then they cook and I am not allowed to help. They support us a lot, they bring pickles and other stuff. […] Since our parents finally met this year the relationship has become much better. Before, her mother was very sceptic but now she is really easy-going. […] They are so happy to have a grandchild!

Tim enjoys his life in Japan and the couple recently had a second child. While his account indicates that the relations to his wife's parents have not always been so smooth, the first child changed the situation and nowadays he feels to be part of his Japanese in-laws' family life.

Another example of slowly turning native with time, yet with more ambiguous feelings, is Alexiou's. I met the Greek financial analyst twice, the first time in 2014. At that time he had already been together with his Japanese girlfriend for several years and

they were planning their wedding. Alexiou was proud of his high level of Japanese and his linear career advancement in the French bank he had been working for since graduation. In our follow-up conversation in 2017 he was still in the same firm and his initial struggles with technical language or Japanese honorific expressions had also ceased. Having been in Japan for eight years and having just submitted his application for PR, Alexiou did not consider other countries for the future. However, he admitted he sometimes was uncertain about his increasing "Japaneseness."

> Some days you feel like you want to be integrated a bit more and the other days you feel like "uh, screw it." […] What is my strong things - because I speak Japanese, or because I am a foreigner? What should I be? Realistically I will never be as good as Japanese in Japanese [language]. On the other hand, I am way better than somebody who has no idea what's going on. But then if that's so I should not try to become fully Japanese but keep my foreign identity. […] I guess I need to keep a certain originality? It's fun with my wife, sometimes I behave as a Japanese and she gets pissed. Then she is like "why do you do that?" […] But I think she is expecting me a bit to not go for the full foreigner thing. It's a difficult point, how to keep the balance? I don't know. […] I'm trying hard, trying to understand more about Japanese life and Japanese people, but it seems I have to keep some of my non-Japanese self.

Alexiou's account reveals great ambivalence towards his position facing the Japanese society. With decreasing language problems, he is increasingly treated like a Japanese person. Yet, the way he questions his situation detects his inner struggles. While he seems to have come very close to his previous desire to "integrate" into the Japanese society, it has also made him aware that he would never feel the same as a native. Who he was expected to be and what the right "balance" was has become an identity issue that is accentuated by his high degree of formal integration in the Japanese society. That

is, his native wife and Japanese in-laws, his entire career in Japan, savings in Japan and Japanese language as main mode of communication at work and at home.

The language and with it a particular way of thinking shape the young Europeans' lives as spouses of Japanese citizens. With regards to the Turkish diaspora, the particularities of the Turkish language and its difference from the diaspora's host language in Germany, Landau (1996) argued for the language as a mentality shaping factor. In Japan, several of my informants are increasingly identifying with the Japanese society, especially those with a Japanese spouse. Yet at the same time they feel ambivalent when they realise this change.

In Singapore, Nico, the Portuguese who married his long-time Singaporean girlfriend, faces a different issue. His wife and her family are Malay Singaporeans and thus Muslims. Only when he finally proposed to his girlfriend and received her family's acceptance, he felt confident enough to convert to Islam. "They accepted me and told me, which was the biggest turning point for [my] decision, that they would always respect our relationship. But if we married I had to [convert] because it would look bad in front of others." It took Nico years to overcome the unease with clarifying his stance towards a religion and its culture.

Calling such emotional work "emotion cultures", Maehara (2010:960) explained the case of Irish-Japanese families where Japanese mothers are troubled to raise their children according to Catholic values. In contrast to Maehara's example of a Japanese woman who tried to accept her child's Catholic education but failed, Nico considers his conversion to Islam as a formal step that hardly affects his daily life. At the same time, it allows him inclusion in a caring in-law network which deepens his feelings of belonging to Singapore.

The difference to the European spouses of Japanese citizens however is that Nico's religion does not affect his daily life nor his sense of identity: When asked, he frankly admitted that his conversion was a merely formal procedure and that nothing about his attire, eating habits or the like had changed. For the migrants in Japan, the language issue becomes symbolic for their identification dilemma. They feel torn between the cultural Japanese identity they have acquired to a considerable extent over the years and through marriage to a Japanese citizen; and the identity of a foreigner in Japan which, despite it keeps reminding them of their "lack" of something, they gradually rediscover and suddenly fear to lose.

8.1.3 Third-country Couples and the Search of a Home

So far, I examined two kinds of love relationships which inform migrants' identifications and perception of belonging differently. In simple terms one could describe them as the two opposite poles of a continuum that spans a wide range of possible variations of attachment and identifications. On the one end there are the same-country couples who form a two-man unit. They relate to a shared background even though this does not mean they return to their home country for years to come. On the other end there are those with a host-country national which increases embeddedness in the host society, though with differing outcomes. I now turn to yet another constellation, couples with complex identifications and attachments that could be located somewhere in the middle between the poles. These are couples whose cultural, linguistic and national backgrounds differs from each other *and* from that of the host society. For reasons of simplicity and with reference to international human resource practices on

employing third country nationals in a foreign subsidiary, I call them relationships with third-country nationals (TCNs).

In both Singapore and Tokyo, I met Europeans who are in a relationship with and sometimes married to a TCN. In all but one case – an Italian woman who met her future German husband in the headquarter of the German firm where both were employed – they met their partners in the host society. With 15 of my interviewees falling into this category they make up more than 20 per cent of my informants. The large percentage of foreigners in Singapore and European migrants' socialising patterns in the city-state could explain why TCN couples are common. While low when compared to Singapore, Tokyo's foreign population is high when compared to other Japanese provinces (see figure 7). Additionally, Tokyo boasts with a range of institutions and services which cater to foreigners. As such, many informants socialise at least partly among foreigners or in mixed groups (see previous chapter).

A few TCN spouses are of Western origin, sometimes Australia or the US, yet more often Europe. The majority of the TCN spouses are Asians from Southeast-Asian (in Singapore) or East Asian countries (in Tokyo). These relationships balance seemingly contradictory elements. One is tied to temporariness. The fact that the current host country is neither partner's home country means that they do not have family nearby and that both partners' legal status depends on a work visa. This denies them security in terms of their future and allows for only vague ideas regarding settling down. Therefore, these couples prepare themselves – mentally and often literally – to become mobile again. Hence, as discussed in chapter six, they strategically accumulate skills in order to be employable elsewhere. If they are both Europeans, they imagine their return to Europe at some point in the future but anything beyond, again, remains vague.

> If one day we returned together… where to? It is quite easy to decide because Portugal is not in the best financial condition nor Italy. So likely not either. We spoke about it, probably it would be Germany. The other reason for Germany is that it is half way for both of us, so kind of the right compromise. […] It wouldn't be very fair to move to one country or the other.

Mona's account pinpoints the compromises likely to arise if she and her Portuguese boyfriend Andre seriously considered returning. Thus, although aware of their temporariness in Singapore, the couple displays what I call "imagined mobility." They have been in Singapore for approximately five years and do not plan to move again at the present. Mona was close to leaving Singapore roughly two years before our interview. Yet, Andre wanted to stay and given the question of the next destination, she dismissed her plan.

These couples find themselves in a state of limbo. While they do not see themselves staying in Asia forever, they are generally satisfied with their current situation and both partners have an equal standing; none sacrificed his or her career or adapted to the spouse's country with all its linguistic and labour market demands. They have opportunities for career advancement and a decent living standard in Singapore or Tokyo.

Additionally, the return to Europe is a risk in itself. For example, in Andre's and Mona's case, their home countries suffer from economic stagnation. Making a living would be a challenge. Considering other EU countries and the chances of finding jobs and enjoying life, not many destinations are left. The English-speaking UK is a huge question mark for many since the start of the Brexit negotiations. Germany, which many perceive as the professionally most interesting place, seems hard to access without

German language skills.[54] Thus, while a notion of temporariness underlies these European couples' lives, they continue to stay and might do so for more years to come.

To some extent the situation is different for Europeans with an Asian partner or spouse. Seven of the 15 TCN partners come from a third Asian country. Most of them are married meanwhile. My informants in this category in Singapore, most of them men, have Indonesian and Filipino girlfriends and wives, while in Japan I met European women *and* men who are engaged or married to Thai, Burmese, Taiwanese, or Korean nationals.

The difference is that not all of the Southeast Asian wives of informants in Singapore hold a professional visa. For them, obtaining a secure legal status is much more difficult than for the European men. Furthermore, Southeast Asians who work with work permits in Singapore's hospitality industry are stigmatised as unskilled workers or maids with few rights. One couple left Singapore where they did not feel welcome as employees in the hospitality industry and therefore moved to Hong Kong where they married. For them, the Filipino wife's home country is an option for the future, but Andras, the Hungarian interviewee and husband, also knows that career opportunities are favourable and the living standard higher in global cities.

In Japan, language again is a salient factor. While one male English informant is content with life in Tokyo and does not consider his long-term Korean girlfriend and himself to emigrate for the time being, Madeleine, a French woman married to a Korean national, presents a rather different rationale:

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[54] A public referendum in June 2016 decided over the UK's exit from the European Union. Along with the heated debates between supporters and opponents, the term Brexit, a fusion of "Britain" and "exit", was coined.

> In our case, I think if I was not with him, I would be back to France already. I'm always a little bit tired of Japanese society. […] In our case we are kind of stuck in Japan because it's the only place where we can both find work. He has been here for 10 years, he already went through what I am going through now.

Madeline speaks about her mixed feelings of staying in Japan frankly. She knows it is the only realistic place for both her husband and herself to find work. Japanese is their only common language and thus Japan the only country where they both have the chance to secure work. As long as they can both find employment and can lead a satisfactory life, the young migrants, despite their desire for repeated migration or return, are unlikely to take action. Madeleine's narrative hints at her struggles in Japan that drove her to consider repeated migration seriously. Since this option has become fairly unlikely, she goes on to speak about the positive side of staying in Japan.

> In the beginning I was always wondering when to go back. Now I know I am here for a while so I am kind of settling down more also. In the beginning I wouldn't buy anything because I didn't know if I could bring it back home. Now I see something and I am like "wow, cool, I can buy it." My real life is here in the country, memory of friends from home getting far.

Madeleine's narrative reveals migrants' inconsistent, often contradictory attempts to manage their emotions (Hochschild 1979). She emphasises the positive side of her migration experience. Spending on items for her flat allows her to surround herself with objects that help her create a homey atmosphere and soothe her ambiguous feelings and agitation. Although many migrants value their mobility and freedom, they long for a home and thus, try to see the positive sides of immobility. This is also true for the ones with a TCN partner. Home, however, is not necessarily bound to a geographical place.

While TCN couples neither have family nor legal security in the host society, they can still build a new life together and create a sense of home through the relationship.

8.1.4 Bachelor Circuits: Between Freedom and Deracination

The final section of this chapter addresses intimacy from a different point of view. Roughly one third (22 of the 70) of the young Europeans are not in a long-term romantic relationship or marriage. Some of them long for a stable romantic relationship whereas others seem to regard their migration as a period of independence and fun, as depicted by other research (Knowles 2015). The young Europeans are aware of stereotypes regarding interracial desires such as white men's popularity in Asia and their promiscuous relationships with Asian women (Ma 1996; Woan 2008). A few interviewees referred to Singapore as the "place where relationships crash" or as "playground." Some explicitly addressed the racialised and gendered notion of this image, which sketches white women's bodies as "devalued" (Fechter 2016:73) compared to Asian women, and in opposition to white men, who are associated with sexual adventures.

Other informants however, men and women, questioned the stereotype and added that they or their friends had found their future spouse in Singapore or Tokyo. All European women who married a Japanese national did so before the age of 30 and had met their husband in their early twenties. Eager to understand the Japanese culture and befriend locals, they socialised with Japanese people and happened to find their future husband. Their physical difference did not obstruct, but rather facilitate mutual feelings of attraction. In both cities, narratives suggest that most of the male and female

informants who felt attracted to Asians developed their romantic interest through what Paquin (2014:31) calls "experientially generated preferences." That is, only when they frequently engaged with Asians of the other sex and eventually became intimate did they adopt racial preferences, if they did at all. In brief, racialised sexual preferences or the availability – or lack – of intimacy sometimes influence decisions to stay in Asia or to leave. However, such preferences scarcely trigger initial migration to Asia.

Regardless the city, migrants' attitude towards romance varies significantly depending on gender. Men's narratives more often than women's suggest that they enjoy their independence and sexual adventures. No man reported problems to meet women. This could however be related to interviewees' perception of my positionality: as both a researcher, but also as a white woman and thus someone who might be biased or might disapprove of white men's predatory behaviour. While women sometimes opened up and told me even private anecdotes, men were generally more reserved although a few implied their popularity with Asian women. Nevertheless, a fair number of the Europeans found their future partner or spouse in the host country (see 8.1.2).

In contrast, for a few informants the lack of a suitable romantic partner seemed to be decisive for their repeated migration. The respective informants are all women and their cases confirm that at least some of the stereotypical images of racialised femininity are true (e.g. Ma 1996; Lan 2011; Prasso 2005; Woan 2008). Isabelle, a mixed-race woman of North-African and French descent, commented neutrally on Singapore being a playground. She returned to Europe after only a year although she was fond of Singapore as a place of residence and of her job. Berna's reasons for leaving Japan are more explicit. Her return to Europe was clearly driven by her frustration with foreign

men's attitude towards promiscuity, which she witnessed over her two-year sojourn in Tokyo and commented on in our follow-up interview via Skype.

> Maybe more the fact that I was different from average Japanese women- Of course physically, but also expectations, lifestyle, how I use to talk. I think that was one of the points that was becoming kind of an obsession. I remember sometimes I was joking to friends. "Here in Japan, I don't feel like a woman any longer." Because the typical ideal woman partner for my foreign [male] friends was not what I could have been myself. It was more the childish cute Japanese girl and I think that was a bit painful for me. […] For example, I had some French colleagues. […] I understand that if you are in a foreign country, as a boy you really want to explore and that can be exploring local girls. But the fact that this had become a kind of habitude. It was always like this. I was kind of suffering. […] I knew that I could not fit that structure, that was my perception. So for me I was saying "I am not in the category of an ideal woman here, so I'm not a woman any longer for society or as a reference for male society."

Berna's example leaves no doubt over the dissatisfaction she experienced regarding love and relationships in Tokyo. However, I also met European women who established serious love relationships in Asia. In the case of Tokyo in particular, where the migrants often arrive at young age, trained in the Japanese language and enthusiastic about living in Japan for a longer period of time, the actual problem seems to lie in society's gender norms and a gendered division of labour. While most of my female informants' Japanese spouses support their wives' careers and appear to favour gender-equal relationships, structural constraints are among the most influential adverse factors my female informants cited (Roberts 2011). For instance, the male breadwinner model and the norm of long working hours in Japan meant that European women's Japanese husbands, even when they supported their wives' careers, bowed to their companies'

rules of long working hours and after-work drinking. As a consequence, these women felt left alone with household chores but also concerning time together with their spouse who often came home late and was then too tired to listen to their concerns or enjoy the time together.

One more aspect explains some European women's ambivalence towards romantic relationships in Asia. I found that many women expect intimacy not only from their spouse, but, especially when considering offspring, long for proximity to their own parents. In one (male) interviewee's eyes, women wanted to be closer to "home", namely their natal family, during pregnancy. In the respective interviewee's case, his fiancée had recently started talking about having a baby and had expressed the wish to return to her home country to have a family in the future. While few women explicitly state such feelings, many speak of their wish to meet their parents frequently when they have their own child. This is an emotional desire but also instrumental. Many of the women hope to receive support from their parents because they plan to stay in their jobs.

In terms of family planning and settlement, women who are single and approach the typical age of giving birth perceive Asia as an unsuitable place to find a partner with who they could return home. Karina, a 34-year old Greek woman, had left Japan and moved to Bangkok. In a Skype interview after two years in Thailand, she deliberated on her new relationship with a Thai man and her desire to have children.

> I think I am getting old. My answer is very private. If I was younger, under 30, I would probably leave Thailand because I already have two years of working experience. […] But now I am thinking about a family and this has limitations. I don't have that much time any more. Now I have a boyfriend and I am so confused. […] My plan was to go to Europe and settle down and have a family. Here maybe not, it's very different. My family is too far away and it's hard to have a family here. It's maybe different for guys, women

> have the baby and birth issues. You can maybe combine family and career but your partner has to be caring then.

Karina voices a concern which many bachelors share with increasing age and prolonged time in Asia. Their friends at home buy houses and have children, and migrant couples around them make family plans, too. Considerations over who could be a marriage partner inevitably involve issues of culture, family, visa and how these variables influence family life. Male bachelors sometimes state that they expect their future wife to be interested in their home country. However, married European men, when facing decisions on the place of residence upon child birth, usually leave the decision to their wives and her in-laws, especially when these are locals of the host society. I found examples in both field sites.

In Singapore, the interviewee and his Malaysian Muslim wife stick to her family's Islamic traditions at least formerly and the question of leaving Singapore never arose. In Tokyo, a European informant and his Japanese wife returned to Japan after a two-year stint in his home country, because the wife wished to be closer to her natal family to raise their child.

The discussion suggests that the life cycle impacts quite differently on the migratory decisions of the two sexes. European single women around age thirty and above are torn between the wish to extend their life abroad on the one hand and their desire for children on the other. Karina's account underlines the insecurities involved in either decision. Staying with her Thai boyfriend in Asia constitutes a major challenge if they want to have a family. With her parents being far away, Karina doubts that it would be possible to raise children and to pursue a professional career. On the other hand, for the first time during her five years in Asia, she is in a serious relationship with a man

she loves. 34 years old and anxious to postpone pregnancy for too long, she feels pressured to take a decision but is concerned about either outcome.

8.2. The Mobile Identity and Multiple Belongings

In the first part of this chapter I identified different constellations of intimacy in or outside of romantic relationships. These are first of all, European migrants who have a same-country partner or spouse and exercise their mobility together. They plan their migration as a couple and think of themselves as a unit. This however does not necessarily mean they always move and live together. Secondly, those with a host-country partner or spouse are more profoundly embedded in the host society. Migrants, however, are ambivalent about their identity. They fear to lose the very same otherness which singles them out. Being different allows them to maintain multiple identities. Their conflicting feelings capture the dilemma of the inability to be accepted into Japanese society without assimilation.

Thirdly, some of the young Europeans find a partner from a third country. These couples enjoy their life in an Asian global city for the time being but insecurities over their future loom in the back of their minds. Finally, single migrants are torn between the joy of independence and the longing for a serious relationship. Age and gender significantly affect migrants' perception of the feasibility to find a partner abroad and shape their rationale towards continued migration or return.

Single migrants describe their independence and spontaneity with shining eyes. Yet, with increasing time abroad many admit that friends cannot make up for an intimate relationship. They become increasingly conscious of the times they 'stay put'.

With neither a partner nor family members around who randomly call or wake them up when the alarm clock crashes they always weigh their options. ‘Free to move, maybe somewhere else is better?’ is the notion sweeping through their narratives. Awareness of the freedom to leave makes it hard to stay as Sandra’s accounts evidences. Her utterance– “Europe [as] my home but [not] the place to be” – opened this dissertation and her reflection on mobility seems suitable to close the main part.

The young Irish-American woman in grey business attire gazes over Singapore’s cloudy skyline. From our armchairs in the visitor lounge on the 28th floor of her office tower the city sprawls out below us and Sandra’s pensive expression evidences that Singapore, for her, is not ‘home.’ Sandra tells me that she hopes to “break the cycle of running away - Why do I keep moving? You know, I’m obviously seeking something that I haven’t found yet.” As so many times before, the young woman is anxious that others could leave her present place of residence before her and contemplates her next destination. What sounds like a luxury problem is also alarming. The celebration of mobility and the appeal to embrace the world might have uprooted some of the young adults. Remarks like Marcos’, a Portuguese who sees himself as a “citizen of the world”, make one think so.

> I’m turning 35 and I’m not married or have a family – I don’t mind moving to a nice, interesting new challenge but to start all over again with friends etc., I don’t think it’s that easy. […] At the same time, you tend to become a little bit a nomadic person. I have been here for 5 years and lately I am criticising– not criticising but I feel my time here is done.

This is where the longitudinal study bears fruits. Marcos is still wandering. He might even keep moving. There are singles who indeed appear to be fulfilled with their

bachelor life. Nevertheless, the majority of my interviewees, and probably most human beings, long for someone to care about – and in times of crisis even for – them in an intimate romantic relationship. Sandra, Andras, and most others have found partners meanwhile and with them, a sort of roots. These roots are not necessarily bound to a place. Yet, against the image of the floating, unbound lives of the mobile professional, these roots do anchor the young migrants.

The difference between experiencing life in Asia as part of a group of foreigners, as I illustrated in the previous chapter, and in a stable romantic relationship is that the former group is constantly changing and ties are only temporary. Sandra's account demonstrates that as long as the Europeans fear emotional loss – for instance by friends who leave and make them feel left behind – they might not dare to confide in someone. In contrast, the couple relationship is more persistent. Migrants create a home through the relationship, a home which they can take with them. After years of a "gypsy lifestyle", as Andras calls it, he built a "home" in Hong Kong together with his Filipina wife. The home, however, is not their apartment nor Hong Kong, which they might leave again, but their relationship and his decision to end his runaway lifestyle. In Leavitt's (1996:527) words, then, "affective or felt associations […] are collective as well as individual."

In this chapter I demonstrated that for many of the migrants mobility has become an intrinsic part of their lives, almost a part of their identity. While they might feel at home somewhere, they seldom rule out the possibility to leave again. Singles have a higher sense of mobility. They enjoy their independence and the excitement of living abroad but it also makes them move on, feeling both liberated and insecure about where their life is heading. Without someone to root them, the temptation to keep looking for

better options is strong. Nevertheless, couples do not stay put. After all, they have two careers to match and repeatedly, an unforeseen job opportunity for one partner triggers the move of both.

Their examples demonstrate that mobility is different from deracination. When visa regulations or labour market conditions alter or migrants' personal situations demand change, the couples move on, taking with them the core of what home means to them. Mobility and roots, and thus the possibility to have a home abroad without settling down, do not contradict. However, it is necessary to review the understanding of roots. Conceptualising them as an attachment to someone with whom one has built life abroad rather than attachment to a physical place, appears useful to understand these Europeans' feelings of belonging.

That said, there is a qualitative difference with regards to place. In the case of those in Tokyo with Japanese partners, or TCN partners from East Asian countries, a specific place plays a central role. Japan, and Tokyo in particular, is the place these couples are bound to for practical reasons. As such, place gradually becomes something worth of more profound investment as migrants' home-making practices and investment plans demonstrated. While the European partners often sustain multiple homes through transnational practices, their cases stand out from the narrative of mobility displayed by the majority of the geographically mobile informants.

To conclude, for the majority mobility has become normative. For these young adults, mobility is increasingly a tool for sustaining a middle-class living standard and an upward mobile career in the uncertain times of a globalised world and the opportunities and risks of an integrating European Union. Their middle-class background, tertiary degrees, EU passports and the availability of modern

communication and transport technology all facilitate their geographical mobility. Along a neoliberal logic, they see mobility as one of the – or maybe the only – promising and for many the most rewarding solution for a satisfying life. At the same time, inconsistencies and ambivalent feelings abound. Reluctance if not avoidance to tackle issues of planning the future and eventual settling down underline migrants' ambiguous experiences and struggles to manage their multiple identities.

9. Conclusion

In the opening to this dissertation, the meaning of young Europeans' migration to Asia in the 21st century was set as subject. As chapter two revealed, two different streams of literature have looked at related migration flows. The one observes atypical migration in the European free movement space, the other European expatriation in Asia. While the latter scholarship lays the basis for the migration phenomenon of this dissertation, it cannot explain the motivations, channels of movements, work experiences and identity formation of highly educated European millennials to Asian cities. In short, the generational point of view and the "worklife pathways" approach unravel a migration phenomenon that is specific of its times and context. That is, Generation Erasmus is determined as a group of young professionals who design their lives as a project, supported by and oriented at geographical and organisational mobility.

On the remaining pages, I discuss how and to which extent mobility has taken on an identity-shaping significance for the young adults. Reviewing the findings of chapters four to eight, I test the idea of mobility as an orientation towards life. By this I wish to elucidate how 'mobile' strategies and practices can construct a coherent life narrative. I then propose to consider these young Europeans as a group that displays a new form of individualism that has not been attributed to European migrants so far. They present one possible version of managing one's career and sustaining middle-class living standard in a globalised, increasingly connected but all the more complex world. At the same time, migrants' trajectories bring out the limits of a life oriented towards mobility. I close by suggesting that theirs is a case of the gradual approximation of the young and educated middle classes around the world, a consequence of a reconfiguration of the Western concepts of core and periphery in the 21st world.

9.1 Summary and Discussion

In chapter four, I argued that the generational perspective helps to discern the distinctive conditions under which the young Europeans came of age. Despite political, cultural and economic differences between the European Union's member states, the frame of the millennial generation enables one to see common features across countries and to define the highly educated middle-class European graduates with previous mobility experience as Generation Erasmus. After a carefree childhood in Europe's relatively peaceful and prosperous 1990s, the young adults reach out for the manifold opportunities which open up once they start to consider employment. With rising competition on EU labour markets and the availability of alternative options, this choice involves considerations of less conventional middle-class pathways and far-away places of residence. The dissertation revealed that the young adults embark on overseas employment often without a clear career or life plan in mind; yet, they gradually come to scrutinise their choice, as well as its irreversibility.

On the basis of this comprehensive feature of the group, I differentiated four ideal types of migration motivations. These types accentuate the differences between migrants who move to either Singapore or Tokyo. They differently emphasise work and lifestyle aspects, and based on their purpose of moving, differently 'prepare' for their acceptance as global talents in the respective host society. That said, I suggest that their motivations for moving can only be conceptualised by the interrelatedness, as opposed to the separation, of economic or non-economic motives, for which the "worklife pathways" concept provides a suitable framework.

Global professionals are the prototype of the mobile self. They see the global city as a reference point for their professional and personal trajectories. In opposition to *cultural enthusiasts* and *lifestyle migrants*, *global professionals*, and to some extent *economic refugees*, do not target at a specific country in which they plan to stay (as the *cultural enthusiasts* do regarding Japan) or a specific region as a temporary adventure before they envisage return to Europe (*lifestyle migrants* concerning 'Southeast Asia'). Yet, even *economic refugees* could have found some sort of job in their home countries or in other European countries. However, they value the Asian global cities for their high living standard, employment opportunities and an internationally minded community of young culturally and ethnically diverse professionals.

Chapter five unravelled several paths of European labour migration to Asia. The existence of poorly understood institutional channels and the rising numbers of those who compete with the native population for local jobs hint at a new trend within skilled labour migration. As such, these Europeans' independent migration patterns offer an intriguing case of the reconfiguration of core and periphery in the globalized world.

Related to this finding, the dissertation illuminates the transformation and decrease of white privilege. The two field sites, different as they are, offer a fascinating insight into the changing layout of historical power relations. A comparison demonstrates context-specific nuances of the changing meaning of whiteness in Singapore and Tokyo but also unravels a general trend. Generation Erasmus still benefit from the structures created by their forebears. The remnants of Western hegemony materialise in long-established as well as more recent European governmental and cultural institutions in Singapore and Tokyo. Europeans' symbolic capital renders them

attractive candidates for entry-level positions in the global labour market in Singapore, Tokyo or elsewhere.

That said, the young Europeans' status and positioning in Asia clearly differs from that of earlier European migrants. They hold junior positions with correspondingly moderate salaries. Their contracts usually are local and stipulate working conditions typical of the host country such as less paid annual holidays than in most of Europe. In short, they experience what it means to be at the lower end of organisational hierarchies, social status and political protection.

This is highlighted by migrants' diverse employment patterns in the two global cities. As chapter six revealed, these Europeans' professional trajectories include repeated job transfers. Both migrants' differing migration motivations and differences in the East Asian capitalist systems affect employment strategies and job transfers. In addition to that, racial and gender issues shape European migrants' employment patterns. As Western and predominantly white employees, who at least initially are non-managerial, the migrants stick out in the Asian workplaces. They sometimes meet suspicion and feel marginalised or alienated. While this diminishes their satisfaction on the job, it seldom constrains career advancement, at least on the non-managerial level.

The situation looks different when considered under the aspect of gender. It also marks the biggest difference of the two field sites. European women in Singapore perceive their professional opportunities to be better than in Europe's often more gender biased corporate structures. Women in Tokyo, on the other hand, realise how their "double otherness" as foreigners and women work against them. They face the same obstacles which continue to constrain Japanese women in Japanese corporations and, in

addition to that, they experience the disadvantaged position of being foreigners in Japanese firms.

Overall, the young migrants in both cities, while grateful for gaining overseas work experience, feel highly insecure concerning their future prospects and thus attempt to upgrade their skills and to professionalise themselves. Some Europeans stepwise integrate into the host country domestic labour market. This is more often the case in Tokyo where a long-established organisational culture and Japanese as main working language require employees to 'commit' to the particularities of the labour market.

That said, the chapter revealed that many Europeans continue to struggle in Tokyo workplaces. Their cases show clearly that Japanese firms are still reluctant to accept changes to their decade-long organisational practices. This is especially obvious when contrasted to the Singaporean labour market where migrants see opportunities for career advancement. In Tokyo, even those who prepared for years to fit in often become disillusioned and eventually leave, causing a brain drain of those internationally-minded global talents Japan has lately been able to attract, yet not to retain. As such, the comparative lens underlines the peculiar intersections of categories of difference. Neither is it the organisational culture alone that obstructs foreigners' effective incorporation in the Japanese labour market nor can race or gender fully account for migrants' struggles at their workplaces. Examining migrants' strategies and practices in depth and contrasting them with the Singaporean case then allows to capture a more nuanced picture of the difficulties to incorporate foreigners in the Japanese labour market.

Chapter seven and eight complemented the discussion on these Europeans' multidimensional experiences by examining migrants' social world and romantic

relationships. The young adults in both field sites struggle to carve out their own space in the host society and engage in complex place-making practices. They contest existing hierarchies which stipulate Westerners to be senior and affluent expatriates, temporary visitors who do not seek deeper interaction with the local population. The young Europeans try painstakingly to differentiate themselves from the post-colonial image of the classic European expatriate in Asia. Their boundary work shows two diametrical dynamics. They erect vertical boundaries which separate them from their co-ethnics who are "above" them in terms of age, income and status. At the same time, they, to some extent, cross ethnic boundaries horizontally.

Migrants' socialising also demonstrates the multi-faceted nature of their relations. It accentuates divisions inside the group of the young European migrants. Some socialise more in their mother language while others count more diverse ethnic and linguistic networks to their immediate friend circles. The discussion shows that to some extent socio-economic and cultural differences between the EU member states travel to Asia. Thus, it is all the more intriguing to observe how such intra-European differences become less pronounced when migrants mingle with ethnically different migrants and locals in the receiving cities as I argue below.

Everyday interactions show the existence of different social hierarchies and ethnic communities in the two cities. In Singapore, a clear class-boundary and the presence of a large community of skilled migrants from all around the world means that the young Europeans mainly socialise with other foreign talents of various backgrounds. This feeling of belonging to an in-group demonstrates that membership is defined by generation, class and mobility experience rather than nationality, ethnicity or culture. At the same time, the Europeans in Singapore only count few locals among their friends,

namely those who show similar professional and cosmopolitan aspirations. The major ethnic communities of Singapore's citizen population have little other than instrumental contact to foreign talents. This has to do with Singaporeans' 'privileged' image of European and white people, their belief that foreigners only stay temporarily but also the Europeans' preference for a community which shares their experience of mobility and of being foreigners.

Since the majority of the Europeans in Tokyo are more or less proficient in Japanese, and many of the East Asian foreigners in Tokyo speak Japanese better than English, the young migrants usually have same-aged Japanese and a few East Asian friends. Yet, they sense barriers to deepening these friendships. This is a source of frustration and disappointment and means that by the time many Europeans socialise in two separate communities, a foreign, mostly European one and a Japanese one. This constantly reminds them of the lack of possibilities to integrate as much as many of them hoped initially. Gradually, most of the Japanese-speaking Europeans resemble their non-Japanese speaking peers who display similar socialising patterns as the ones in Singapore: in a community of mobility-experienced young professionals from around the globe.

Nevertheless, only one third of these Europeans has left Singapore or Tokyo meanwhile (appendices I and II). The community of mobility-experienced young professionals offers a satisfying life, at least temporarily. To understand repeated migration or potential settling better, chapter eight then discussed intimacy, another crucial dimension of migrants' lives abroad.

Patterns of intimacy shape the young Europeans' geographical mobility in various ways. Age and gender significantly affect their perception of the possibility to find a

partner abroad. Moreover, the Europeans traverse several life stages in the period studied: from student to full-time employee, from independent early-career employee to an adult in one's thirties, where marriage and sometimes children become an issue. This considerably affects their rationale towards continued migration or return and has clear gender-related implications.

Of all migrants, single women above 30 ponder most about the life cycle. They expect difficulties to find a partner in Asia or to raise children abroad. Couples who live in a country where both partners are foreigners – no matter if they hold the same nationality or not – build a new home through the joint experience of daily interactions and engagements with their surroundings. Once children become an issue women, regardless nationality and background, feel the urge to return home. However, the cases of some same-nationality couples who continue to stay in Asia as a family prove a new dimension of independent European migration to Asia with the long-term commitment to a migratory life.

Furthermore, the comparative perspective reveals significant differences of the receiving cities when studied under the aspect of intimacy. Europeans in Tokyo generally migrated at a younger age and more of them are married to locals than in the case of Singapore. The fact that their Japanese spouses are seldom capable or willing to work abroad entails that a fair number have worked in Tokyo for years. While intimacy has induced them to stay for the time being, the particularities of the Japanese labour market continue to suppress diversity and put pressure on the migrants. This partly explains the earlier finding of repeated job transfers since migrants hope to find a workplace that allows them to be different. They see limits in what they can achieve professionally and socially in Japan and as such continue to entertain the idea of

becoming mobile again – an idea of which they know it will be difficult to realise with their Japanese spouses.

In Singapore, on the other hand, the notion of the fluid hub discourages the Europeans to envision their future in the city-state. Professionally, the majority is fairly satisfied which contrasts to the situation in Tokyo. Personally, many are embedded in wide friendship networks, too. Yet, the clear-cut separation from local society and the uncertainty regarding the tightening visa regulations allow only few of the migrants to imagine settlement. The TCN couples generally appreciate the high quality of life and sophisticated labour market situation which enables both partners to develop their careers. Thus, Singapore neither seems to be a place to stay.

As such, the chapter rounded off the dissertation by emphasising the necessity of the life course perspective for understanding migration. By connecting the findings of the thematic chapters one can understand the multiple facets of the migration experience and how these affect geographical mobility over time.

9.2 Mobility as an Orientation: The Life Narrative of the Millennial Migrants

I demonstrated that for many of the migrants mobility has become an intrinsic part of their lives, almost a part of their identity. While many feel at home in their present place of residence, they seldom rule out the possibility to leave again. Singles have a heightened sense of mobility. They enjoy their independence and the excitement of living abroad but it also pushes them to move on, feeling both free and insecure about where their life is heading. The temptation to keep looking for better options is strong. Nevertheless, couples do not necessarily stay put. After all, they have two careers to

match and repeatedly an unforeseen job opportunity for one partner triggers the move of both.

Mobility and roots – thus the possibility to have a home abroad without permanently settling down – do not contradict each other. Conceptualising belonging as an attachment to someone with whom one has built life abroad rather than only the attachment to a physical place broadens the meaning of a sense of home. Along their logic of the benefits of living abroad, the young adults see mobility as one of the – or maybe the only – route to a satisfying life.

Abroad, however, is not a different European country. These European millennials took Generation Erasmus – the understanding of being the ideal EU citizens equipped with the credentials offered by the European free movement space – farer than the confined borders of the EU territory. For them, Asia is attractive particularly because it is *not* Europe and *not* the West. The chapters revealed that for these European millennials moving out and challenging themselves in Asia is a necessary step in early adulthood. It is a way of distinction that is no longer possible through intra-European movement since the EU's celebration of free movement has rendered mobility in the EU something close to normative, at least for the highly-educated middle class and young professionals. This initial move is as often driven by curiosity and desire for cultural stimulation as it is by the need of or aspiration for more attractive professional opportunities. It is often thought of as an adventure or the once-in-a-lifetime gap year conceptualized by others as "rites of passage."

Yet, in a world where some speak of "the decline of the West" (Fischer 2018; Shetler-Jones 2018) and others speak of the "Asian century" (Lee 2017; Mahbubani 2017; West 2018) these millennial Europeans' view of the world has shifted. The

dissertation revealed that despite initially rather short-term plans – or no plans beyond the move itself at all – many end up to stay and become 'real' labour migrants in Asia. They believe in a global citizenship which allows them to live alongside others of diverse backgrounds and work towards a better life.

An increasing part of the young Europeans take for granted that this process entails their status as labour migrants who are on par with and not so different from other people who migrate for fulfilling their dreams. They have come to see other skilled migrants of the millennial cohort as their peers, though more so in Singapore where foreign talents are numerous than in Tokyo where the Europeans socialise more with Japanese citizens of their age. These peers are highly-educated middle classes from around the globe who, similar to the Europeans, have motility, the means and credentials to move to wherever they see the chance to succeed.

In this, they quite significantly differ from those who move within the EU territory. The intra-European movers do not need to qualify for working visa and are thus freer to choose their occupation since they do not need to comply with the regulations stipulated by states' immigration policies. For the middling transnationals in Europe (King et al. 2016; Krings et al. 2013; Parutis 2014; Triandafyllidou and Gropas 2014) or the Eurostars of the prime European cities (Favell 2008), geographical mobility is a personal or professional opportunity, or often both. However, the EU is attractive particularly because it provides a borderless territory, a perceived familiarity with 'how things work' and the spatial proximity to migrants' home countries, factors which in their combination considerably encourage and facilitate migration.

This is how we might consider the theoretical contribution of the case of European millennial migration to Asia. With the shift in their legal and social status and

the coming to terms with the fact that a substantial part of their early career and a crucial part of their adult life might unfold in Asia, we can also observe a qualitative shift in values: They are in pursuit of a good life in a sense often ascribed to lifestyle migrants, yet their strategies and practices reveal that they strive to attain this good life via an identity as mobile professionals. Neither do they draw from neoliberal scripts exclusively nor do they invoke an ideal cosmopolitanism which might direct their paths to any destination such as developing countries.

Similar to their peers in Europe, they navigate their lives as middle-class professionals and identify as EU citizens, but their horizon is different. These mobile Europeans assess their options against a global rather than a national or regional frame which they deem both more rational and more rewarding than a life confined to European borders. At the same time, inconsistencies and ambivalent feelings abound. Reluctance if not avoidance to tackle issues of planning the future and eventual settling down underline the Europeans' ambiguous experiences and struggles to manage their multiple identities.

For many, mobility becomes an *orientation*. Studying Generation Erasmus' "worklife pathways" in this line enables the reader to see the path dependency of the mobility experience. The dissertation illuminates that few migrants pursue a clear goal such as a specific place of residence or a linear upward career with a determined title at its end. Rather, their strategies and practices are influenced and directed by previous mobility experiences and skills they have accumulated on the way.

Migrants invoke the cultural repertoire they have developed since their first move abroad as exchange students, graduate students, interns, working holiday makers or the like. Depending on situational and contextual needs, they draw from a set of tacit

knowledge, skills and experiences flexibly. To compete against others in job interviews abroad, to make friends in a foreign language, professional reorientation in a selective immigration system or to activate one's transnational network upon repeated migration – all of these are moments when the young migrants use their repertoire in creative ways to, in Swidler's (1986:284) words, "build lines of action."

The dissertation demonstrates the range of outcomes their mobile practices have. With every move – organisational or geographical – migrants become more confident of their qualifications. By doing so, migrants rely on networks they themselves have developed over the years, on their own foreign language proficiency and professional experience. Such networks certainly are not free of historical power structures and often, Westernness, Europeanness or whiteness are dominant categories. Yet, this feature is rather a sign of fading Western or white power in institutions of a globalised world than their unchallenged hegemony. After all, while some informants entirely focus on Western institutions and seek Western friends, the majority of the migrants become more comfortable with moving between a range of social networks and assembling work experience in Asian, European and third-country businesses.

Taken together, very few regard their home countries as a given place of return. Instead, they craft their multiple identities by the very fact that even continued life abroad or an eventually repeated move is in line with the values of their generation. For the highly educated middle classes they meet in the Asian global cities mobility is both a necessity and a gift in order to forge satisfactory adult lives and the presence of similarly mobile friends and sometimes a like-minded spouse reassures them and provides some stability. These young adults understand 'rootedness' in an extended sense: They feel connected to and partly rooted in their European home, the rural village

or capital city in which they were born, the friendships they have made along their migratory pathways and their local neighbourhood in Singapore or Tokyo.

Therefore, this migratory phenomenon is more than a “rite of passage” (e.g. Bell 2002; Inkson et al. 1999). The migrants of this dissertation have graduated from the life stage of youth meanwhile. They have developed careers, started families and many relocated once or multiple times. However, only few left from the mobile “worklife pathways.” Their repertoire, once cultivated, induces them to continuously pursue pathways that are oriented at, if not defined by, mobility. Some have roots in several countries or have migrated already pre-employment. Others might be new to a migrant life, but earlier ‘touchpoints’ to mobility have shaped their dispositions.

Mobility constitutes a discourse, a norm, an object of desire. It promises access to cosmopolitan lifestyles and to a brighter future. Most importantly, however, mobility allows to weave an individual life narrative at a time when these young adults were uncertain how to weave such a narrative in their home countries. This is at the core of Generation Erasmus’ striving. Their “worklife pathways” to, across and beyond Asia enable them to design a biography which allows to reconcile their professional aspirations with their cosmopolitan orientation. Proud of having reached the status of a professional after some years abroad, they might even pity their peers at home. Their migratory trajectories imply that many prefer changing the industry or the country to returning home. This, however, unravels these young adults’ dilemma: They less and less perceive life at home as mundane as they did when they left Europe in order to find a more stimulating life in Asia. Rather, they doubt if they could ever fit into the local structures again which they left as youth when they had different dispositions, aspirations and skills.

9.3 Beyond Europe: Chosen Biographies in the Global Context

The orientation towards mobility is not only a tool to navigate and sustain ever complex middle-class life paths. It also puts those who actively shape their lives in precarious situations. Life abroad causes marginality, legal or financial insecurity at times. Thus, these migrants might not be, and probably will not represent the next European generations to come. Why that is so and how to understand the wider implications of these millennial Europeans' mobility is the focus of the final section.

The young adults choose emigration to Asia as a means for self-differentiation. At the same time they engage in practices of middle-class reproduction. Depending on their home country's economic situation, they are concerned of a constraining labour market at home or they doubt that the high social welfare contributions will ever pay off in form of retirement benefits. More often, however, it is a combination of the two factors above and the belief that the European labour market and the lifestyle they imagine within EU borders do not satisfy their cosmopolitan or professional aspirations. In the light of a 'EU in crisis' and the economic growth of Asia-Pacific, then, Generation Erasmus seek alternative routes to a satisfying life. More than that, their trajectories prove their strategies to achieve upward mobility by outward mobility or, as I suggest more often is the case, to access a more stimulating life without risking downward mobility in the crisis-ridden EU.

This is what distinguishes them from their peers at home but also from that type of ideal careerists who follow a neoliberal logic to get ahead. If it was only about a steep career they would have moved elsewhere or pursued different majors at university and career tracks altogether. The destination choices and ongoing migratory trajectories

reveal something else about these young Europeans' positioning in their home countries. While they are highly educated and middle class, they are not the elite. Very few started out in prestigious companies or with highly paying jobs. Those who migrated as recent graduates or as students seldom had a clear specialization that would directly lead into a specific profession. Thus, they did not miss out on a promising career path when they decided to leave Europe.

Moreover, while only mentioned in passing in the dissertation, it is important to recognise that some of the Europeans were not able to enter their desired migration destinations. Those in question ultimately had to give up in the US or Australia because of the perceived or actual difficulty to receive a professional work visa. Despite their tertiary degrees and middle-class backgrounds, these European millennials are not the elite of their countries. While they are able to secure positions in sophisticated Asian labour markets they see few chances to succeed in the 'prime' destinations, especially the US. The majority, however, never considered the typical Western global cities.

This unravels that these young Europeans have an alternative vision of their life and slightly different values than the intra-European movers and previous European generations. In many ways, it is a standard middle-class life to which they aspire: A partner or family, friends and jobs with intrinsic meaning beyond providing for economic stability alone. Yet, they are convinced that the route to achieve such life has been carved out by globalizing labour markets and has become accessible through the internationally recognised credentials they have acquired. Furthermore, these young adults anticipate more stimulating social networks and lifestyle elsewhere than in Europe and other Western destinations which until recently constituted the prime destinations for highly-educated Europeans.

The dissertation accentuated that although migrants feel the insecurities surrounding their mobility very intensely at times, they seldom abandon the migratory life altogether. Setbacks and successes alike prompt the young adults to adopt mobility as an orientation; as an asset which can always yield something better, but increasingly also as a necessity to sustain the professional, financial status they have gained through mobility in the first place – or, what is important for a fair number of migrants, as a necessity to sustain their multiple identities. Their still relatively young age and their independence allow them to adjust themselves flexibly and to react to job market needs or attractive vacancies elsewhere spontaneously.

The dissertation is no attempt to evaluate if these young Europeans' rationales regarding opportunities at home or abroad are right or wrong. Instead, it demonstrates that there is a general feeling that staying in the EU, especially under its current circumstances, might not allow them to make the most of their lives. The young adults of this study are aware of the concerns expressed by the European public, the media and political leaders around the globe. In the globalized world and the "Asian century" (Lee 2017; Mahbubani 2017; West 2018), they decide to reap the fruits of their upbringing in an integrating EU which has encouraged them to become mobile, cosmopolitan European citizens.

Over the years abroad, however, the migrants have matured and have adopted a quite different view of the world than the one they held when they emigrated from Europe. They also developed and accumulated their professional skills and credentials. They see themselves as citizens of a globalised world across whose links they find like-minded millennials. This narrative sustains their mobile pathways. As demonstrated, the majority do not pursue ideal neoliberal or careerist goals. The fact that as migrants they

are dependent on work visa in their countries of residence forces them to concentrate on some sort of officially recognised career. This gives evidence of the continued power of states over their migratory pathways even if rarely mentioned in these Europeans' narratives.

Over the time and with increasing confidence, work experience and social networks abroad, migrants creatively contest the boundaries of the definition of a professional career. It is worth recalling here that only one of the 70 informants followed the classic careerist path in banking and consulting in a US firm. Others rather adopted a second job in their personal field of interest or left their original profession: sometimes lifestyle inspired, sometimes in the form of an entrepreneurial venture with friends or after obtaining training in a different field. It is the combination of an interesting job – something in which they find intrinsic meaning – and a stimulating private life that guides these millennials' lives abroad and underlines what they are after: a similar life to that which their peers at home are seeking. The difference is that these millennial migrants are convinced that both the scope of available jobs and the social networks and lifestyle are more varied and more stimulating outside of the familiar West whose golden times they deem to be over.

In sum, Generation Erasmus perceive mobility as both liberating and unsettling. Their narratives elucidate uncertainty and underline that their orientation towards mobility is also a necessity. It is necessary in order to secure their life abroad. This does not mean they will never return to their home countries. But, and this is striking, they certainly do not want to return because of lack of other options. This would, as their narratives elucidate, equal personal failure. Moreover, they would lose what their life narrative is all about: Life abroad as a way of distinction in the first place but after years

abroad increasingly also as mode of life they regard as normal. Mobility, therefore, guides the young adults through their experiences and practices of being migrants in Asia and sometimes in other parts of the world. It allows them to construct a coherent narrative which encompasses the multiple identities they have developed with the time.

These identities are situational and contextual. At times, migrants display a strong European identity. This happens when their social identity, for instance as a female professional in a patriarchal Japanese workplace, marginalises them. In addition to that, they reserve a place for intimate family ties in their heart. Deep inside, they feel European and also as members of the family and neighbourhood or the city in which they were born. Yet, everyday their reality – from their jobs to acquaintances to activities they associate with rest, relaxation or fun – takes place in their city of residence in Asia or the greater Asia-Pacific region. As to their identity as professionals, but also pretty much as social persons, the majority identify with an international community of aspiring young professionals of various national, ethnic and religious affiliations. In many aspects, these are the people who understand their present sorrows and hopes best, better than friends and family at home, the more senior co-ethnic or co-national expatriate community or local colleagues and friends.

However, those whose private lives or careers stagnate fear immobility. A return home comes close to failure since they fear losing what they acquired by living outside of the EU: a broader horizon, the possibility to learn from and exchange with more diverse approaches than those considered the norm in their home countries or the EU. The very fact that the few who have returned are disappointed about the life they find hints at a questionable outcome of the mobility experience. These people constantly reflect if their decision was wrong. Things are different with those who moved to

Europe’s global cities such as London, which they understand as another step in their migratory biography. A few others intend to settle in their partner’s home country by establishing their position in the domestic labour market. Even then, ambivalence towards giving up the mobile narrative and doubt of the possibility to integrate is current in their stories.

After all, these migrants’ journey is not a smooth one. Despite their privileges as (mostly white) EU citizens, they still constantly struggle against restrictive migration regimes, nationalistic policies and cultural obstacles. Even the ones who seem to forge their “worklife pathways” without structural constraints carry an emotional burden: the awareness of the irreversibility of their mobile life path and with it, the impossibility to return to a sheltered European home and to re-establish in the local communities in which they grew up. Their initial longing for differentiation has led to their own and their childhood peers’ and communities’ definition of them as others. Moments of reflection on the potential consequences of their mobility are unsettling. Therefore, the young adults suppress their conflicting thoughts while heading towards an uncertain mid-life stage.

Over the course of the dissertation I demonstrated how the young Europeans have internalised the logic of pursuing mobile “worklife pathways.” While they have become capable of doing so, they are also increasingly tied to this life narrative of mobility. Manoeuvring the global labour market provides a route, or an orientation for Generation Erasmus and other young mobile professionals. They regard the challenges of the unfamiliar as making the most of living in a globalised world. They appreciate their European roots and the values along which they have been raised. However, having encountered different cultures, work styles and ways of thinking they have also

concluded that they should draw from this diverse set of ideas and values reflexively. These young adults compare themselves with their peers from around the world and believe that they are in the same boat; that the path towards a satisfying life is a joint one, though certainly one only open to the highly educated middle-classes. It will thus be worth following if and to what extent the lines between Generation Erasmus and young mobile professionals from other countries start to blur.

This is not to say that the young Europeans are the perfect cosmopolitans and that they have overcome racist or nationalist attitudes or ethno-cultural thinking. Yet, they have learned along their ways overseas that theirs is not always the right idea; that European citizenship and whiteness will not always lead them towards their goal; and that those who understand them best are sometimes Asians (or others) of different religious, cultural and linguistic background. As such, they have not chosen the smoothest route through life. Nevertheless, the path dependency means that it is difficult to break the chosen biography of the mobile lifepaths.

For the majority of their peers and of the global educated middle class, such mobile “worklife pathways” appear much less attractive. This becomes clear if we acknowledge the fact that the majority of Europe’s educated millennials forge their lives in their home countries. Recognising mobility as a life narrative and the irreversibility of the pathways many migrants pursue, demands a re-thinking of the celebration of mobility and independence, but also of easily matching alternative professional mobilities with neoliberal self-management or a renunciation of one’s roots.

All but few of the Europeans in this study take Europe with them in their hearts. Nevertheless, the way they grew up and the rhetoric of being internationally competitive and of reaping opportunities encouraged them to step out of the familiar confines of the

EU and, more generally, of the West. This alienated them from a settled life in Europe or elsewhere but it does not entail uprooting or commitment to purely neoliberal careerist goals. These millennials' presence in Asia heralds one of the potential outcomes of European bureaucrats' dreams of the ideal European citizen. One might doubt, however, whether this is what Europeanisation policies intended.

Ultimately, the mobility phenomenon at stake hints at one distinctive new form of individualism. It is characterised by the response to the anxieties of entering adulthood in the precarious times of the early 21st century but also by positive notions of openness towards the new, maybe even alien, something increasingly rare in the hostile attitudes sweeping throughout European politics and media. The shift of centres and peripheries in the 21st century globalised world has fuelled tensions in the West and among its citizens. The case of Generation Erasmus is *one* of the possible outcomes of this development. Despite the challenges their mobile "worklife pathways" entail these young Europeans' experiences also point to the bright sight of their pursuits of life overseas.

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Appendix I: Demographic Profile, Informants Singapore

	Name	Nationality	Sex	Age*	Years in Singapore**	Place of residence in 2018***
1	Andras	Hungarian	M	35-39	4.5	Hong Kong
2	Andre	Portuguese	M	25-29	6	Singapore
3	Artemis	Greek/American	M	25-29	2.5	Singapore
4	Bettina	German	F	25-29	3	Singapore
5	Boris	Czech	M	25-29	3	USA
6	Carol	Belge	F	25-29	2.5	London
7	Caspar	French	M	35-39	6	Singapore
8	Chantal	French	F	25-29	4	London
9	Charles	French	M	30-34	4	London
10	Christina	German/ Singaporean	F	25-29	5	Singapore
11	Deborah	Greek	F	30-34	8	Singapore
12	Ernesto	Italian	M	25-29	4	Singapore
13	Florence	French	F	25-29	2	Berlin
14	Giacomo	Italian	M	25-29	3.5	Singapore
15	Hannah	French/Japanese	F	30-34	9	Singapore
16	Hector	Portuguese	M	30-34	6	Singapore
17	Hubert	German	M	30-34	5	Germany (HC)
18	Isabelle	French	F	25-29	1.5	France (HC)
19	John	British	M	20-24	4.5	Singapore
20	Julia	German	F	30-34	7.5	Singapore
21	Kate	Greek/British	F	25-29	2.5	London
22	Linda	Dutch	F	25-29	3.5	Hong Kong
23	Lorena	Italian	F	30-34	2	Milan (HC)
24	Marcos	Portuguese	M	30-34	6	Singapore
25	Mona	Italian	F	25-29	5	Singapore
26	Naomi	Portuguese/ African****	F	25-29	3.5	Singapore
27	Nico	Portuguese	M	30-34	9	Singapore
28	Paul	French	M	30-34	4	Singapore

29	Renato	Italian	M	35-39	7	Manila
30	Sandra	Irish/American	F	25-29	1.5	Wellington
31	Severin	French	M	25-29	3.5	Singapore
32	Stella	Italian/Swiss	F	25-29	4.5	Singapore
33	Verena	German/Greek	F	25-29	3.5	Singapore
34	Viktor	Polish	M	25-29	7	Singapore
35	Jakob	Greek/Belgian	M	25-29	3.5	Singapore

*Age at time of (work-related) migration to Singapore

** Total time (of employment) in Singapore so far or before having left

*** Current city of residence, in case of minor cities/rural areas current country of residence

**** No further specification in order to protect informant's anonymity.

Appendix II: Demographic Profile, Informants Tokyo

	Name	**Nationality**	**Sex**	**Age***	**Years in Tokyo****	**Place of residence in 2018*****
1	Alex	Czech	M	25-29	2	Dublin
2	Alexiou	Greek	M	25-29	6.5	Tokyo
3	Anita	Romanian	F	20-24	4	Tokyo
4	Ann	Dutch	F	25-29	2	Singapore
5	Berna	Italian	F	25-29	2	Paris
6	Cecile	North European	F	30-34	2	Northern Eu. (HC)
7	Claire	French	F	25-29	2	Singapore
8	Dirk	German	M	25-29	1	Tokyo
9	Emilio	Italian	M	25-29	5	Tokyo
10	Federica	Italian	F	25-29	4.5	Brussels
11	Jeremy	French	M	25-29	7	Tokyo
12	Jonatan	Spanish	M	25-29	7	Fukuoka

13	Karina	Greek	F	30-34	0.5	London
14	Kerstin	German	F	25-29	2	Tokyo****
15	Leila	German	F	25-29	8	Tokyo
16	Lena	German	F	20-24	4	Berlin (HC)
17	Madeleine	French	F	20-24	4	Tokyo
18	Marc	British	M	20-24	4.5	Tokyo
19	Natascha	German	F	25-29	3	Tokyo
20	Nils	German	M	25-29	3	Buenos Aires
21	Olaf	Baltic	M	25-29	2.5	Tokyo
22	Olga	Baltic	F	20-24	3	Tokyo
23	Pauline	North European	F	30-34	3	Tokyo
24	Rico	Portuguese	M	25-29	5	Tokyo
25	Rita	Romanian	F	25-29	5	Sydney
26	Sophie	German	F	25-29	3.5	Tokyo****
27	Stefan	French	M	25-29	4.5	Tokyo
28	Thomas	French	M	20-24	4.5	Tokyo
29	Tim	Dutch	M	25-29	5	Tokyo
30	Tobi	German	M	25-29	4.5	Brussels
31	Tom	German	M	25-29	4.5	Tokyo
32	Torben	North European	M	25-29	6	Tokyo****
33	Vincenzo	Italian	M	30-34	3.5	Tokyo
34	Yasmin	French	F	25-29	6	Tokyo
35	Yiannis	Greek	M	25-29	5.5	Singapore

HC: Home country

Informants 10 and 30 are a couple and thus moved together to a country which is neither of their home country.

*Age at time of (work-related) migration to Tokyo. Study time in Japan excluded, in few cases other city in Japan than Tokyo.

**Total time (of employment) in Tokyo (Japan) so far or before having left

*** Current city of residence, in case of minor cities/rural areas current country of residence

****These three informants temporarily returned to either their home country or worked in a third country before having returned to Tokyo where they live at present.