



Figure 30. Home in Shanghai: Mia's Room, Prepared for the Next Move. Photo by Mia.

PART V

Moving On

The final part of this ethnography, "Moving On," returns to the expatriate youths' experience of Shanghai as a transient space. The first chapter centers on the students from the German school and analyzes their ways of managing the imminent move away from Shanghai. It focuses on their graduation and its related festivities as a means to say goodbye to Shanghai and examines their plans, anticipations, and anxieties regarding their next stop: university. The second chapter concludes this work by revisiting the German students two years after they have left Shanghai and returned to Germany, focusing on their new beginnings there. It presents the students' perspectives and reflections on transnational mobility and explores how their experience of "returning" is linked to the overall findings of this ethnography.

CHAPTER 1

Goodbyes and Graduation

PETER: *Well, it's strange because I don't even know anymore what it is like to live in Germany. And you have, as I said, these stable points that you are focused on and that you rely on. And you have gotten this routine. And you have to rebuild all this again. Because every human being needs some kind of routine, I think. And I also need that. <L> And now this is ... Because I live in a hotel and I don't have my things, and I don't have my things anywhere else <L> that means that, right now, I'm in the middle of nowhere.¹*

After days of packing, Peter describes his situation as being “in the middle of nowhere.” Peter’s belongings are now in a container that will be shipped to Germany, and he and his family have moved into a hotel, where they will stay for the remainder of their time in Shanghai. Prior to moving out of his family’s home, Peter’s room probably looked similar to that of Mia (Figure 30) when she prepared for her move to Germany. Interestingly, she sent this image to me paired with a picture of her room as it looked when she lived in it (see Figure 11, in Part III, Chapter 2.2) as a response to my question of what “home” (in Shanghai) meant to her. Evidently, for Mia, home meant both her room in Shanghai and the routine of packing and leaving it behind. This transitory experience is shared by all students featured in this ethnography. Their complex notion of home, as illustrated by Mia’s pictures, has been succinctly conceptualized by Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier, and Mimi Scheller’s (2003) idea of “uprootings/regroundings,” which allows one to consider home and migration to be not mutually exclusive. I have already discussed the issue of home-making or “regrounding” in Part III, Chapter 2, and throughout this ethnography, but this final chapter is concerned with the other, concomitant aspect, “uprooting,” and how the students experienced the move away from Shanghai.

1 German original: PETER: *Ja, ist schon komisch. Weil ich weiß gar nicht mehr wie es ist in Deutschland zu leben. Und man hat, wie gesagt, seine festen Punkte worauf man sich drauf fixiert hat und wo man sich drauf verlässt. Und halt diese Routine bekommen hat. Und das muss man erstmal alles wieder aufbauen. Weil eine gewisse Routine braucht, glaube ich, jeder Mensch. Und ich brauch die auch. <L> Und die ist jetzt erst mal ... Weil ich wohn im Hotel und ich hab meine Sachen nicht. Und ich hab nirgendwo anders meine Sachen. <L> Das heißt ich bin gerade irgendwie so mitten im nowhere.*

For the majority of expatriate youths, graduation from school coincides with leaving China. While some of the teenagers' families stay in Shanghai, others only wait for their children to complete school before moving on. Consequently, for some students, even their place of return—the family home—shifts and, as a result, will make future visits to Shanghai impossible or difficult. Therefore, in comparison to youths whose parents remain in a more or less stable location, graduation is also a closing ceremony for, as Olivia from Belgium puts it, the “Shanghai-chapter” of their lives.

I returned to Shanghai for two weeks in May and June of 2012, to observe the students from the German school during this period of change. It was also my final visit to Shanghai, and thus my own farewell: to the city, to my friends, and to “my field,” which was slowly dissolving since the majority of the actors that inform my study were about to move on. During this very intense fortnight, the students and I bonded over the common theme of saying goodbye and having to face the question “What next?”

The morning after my arrival in Shanghai, I visit the German school to find some of the students gathered for their final oral exams. They are nervously going through their notes, rehearsing topics with each other, explaining matters that might somehow be related to their exam topics, and trying to calm each other down at the same time. This cycle repeats itself the following day, when the other half of the students sit their exams. I am happy to see all of them again and to catch up on the latest news, especially on their plans for the coming days: exams, the announcement of the final results, parties, dinners, club visits, the commencement ceremony and festivities, the much-anticipated graduation ball, the ball's after-party, and a farewell barbecue at “the shop.” We go on final shopping tours at the fabric and glass markets and simply hang out at the students' homes. In-between observing and occasionally participating in these joyful events, I meet ten students for individual, hour-long follow-up interviews to discuss their future plans, the decision-making process that led to moving away, their feelings about leaving Shanghai and finishing school, as well as their anticipation and any anxiety they have about entering university. These matters are presented in detail in the following three subsections.

1.1 Leaving Shanghai

Andrea and I are sitting outside, on the narrow pavement in front of the same café where we met for our first interview, just around the corner from her parents' apartment. It is our third interview and, by now, she knows the procedure. The street noise level occasionally requires us to shout at each other, but we enjoy our ginger lemon tea nonetheless. We start talking about the stressful exam period, the celebrations surrounding graduation, and her plans for the summer and beyond. When I inquire how she feels about leaving Shanghai, it is apparent that she is still sorting out her thoughts and emotions about moving.

ANDREA: *It's okay. I mean, it's just normal that you move somewhere else for your studies, that you somehow move on. And I've been here for seven years now.*

INTERVIEWER: *Seven years.*

ANDREA: *Yes, quite a while. And, I mean it, erm, has been home for seven years. But I am, my opinion is ... [Pause] Okay, well I am of the opinion that ... Well, yes, I will miss it. Very much. I will also cry, probably, once I'm sitting on the plane.²*

Andrea is still trying to forge her narrative of moving on—caught between the normality of moving away from home for college and her sadness about leaving Shanghai, possibly for good.

Mia expresses similar feelings about saying goodbye to Shanghai when she and I meet to discuss her upcoming departure. We sit on her bed, drinking water, in contemplative silence—quite unlike the street noise in the background during my conversation with Andrea. Eventually Mia formulates her feelings:

MIA: *[Leaving feels] strange. [...] I've spent most of my life in Shanghai. [...] I was away now and then and so on, but I've been here for six years in total, and everywhere else I've only spent two or three years. And that's why this is really my home. It is ... Here, I know my way around best, I know the people; the people know me. Here, even though I only speak a little Chinese, I manage. [...] Yes, when I walk through the city, I know where I am, I know how to get where I want to go. [...] Even if you've been here for a long time, it never gets boring. [...] And sure, on the one hand, I'm also looking [forward to new things.] On the other hand, nevertheless, I could stay. I wouldn't have a problem with that. [...] Actually, I don't want to leave.³*

2 German original: ANDREA: *Auch okay. Ich mein, also es ist ja normal, dass man zum Studium dann woanders hingeht, dass man irgendwie weitergeht. Und ich war jetzt sieben Jahre hier. INTERVIEWER: Sieben Jahre. ANDREA: Ja, schon lange. Und, ich mein, es ist eh, Zuhause, gewesen, sieben Jahre. Aber ich bin, meine Meinung ist. [Pause]. Okay, also ich bin halt der Meinung, dass, ... Also ja ich werd es schon vermissen. Sehr. Ich werd auch weinen, wahrscheinlich, wenn ich dann so im Flieger sitz.*

3 German original: MIA: *[Wegzugehen ist] komisch. [...] Ich hab die längste Zeit meines Lebens in Shanghai gewohnt. [...] Zwischendurch war ich ja weg und so, aber insgesamt war ich ja sechs Jahre hier, und überall anders war ich so zwei, drei. Und deswegen, hier ist wirklich mein Zuhause. Es ist ... Hier kenne ich mich am Besten aus, hier kenne ich die Leute, hier kennen die Leute mich. Hier, selbst wenn ich Chinesisch nur bröckchenhaft spreche, ich komme zurecht. [...] Wenn ich durch die Stadt laufe, ich weiß wo ich bin, ich weiß wie ich da hinkomme wo ich hin will. [...] Selbst wenn man schon so lange hier ist, es wird einfach nicht langweilig. [...] Und klar freue ich mich auch [auf Neues] einerseits. Aber andererseits, trotzdem, könnte ich auch noch bleiben, da hätte ich kein Problem mit. [...] Also ich will eigentlich nicht weg.*

Mia has mixed feelings about the imminent changes. Leaving Shanghai means leaving the familiar behind. For Andrea and Mia, there will be no family home in Shanghai to return to during university breaks, nor for Olivia, who summarizes her sentiments about leaving in an interview at the French café close to her school:

OLIVIA: *Well, the school in Shanghai is the one I went to the longest, ever. That's why I find it hard. Because I have so many memories, especially because I've spent my youth here. That's what you always like to remember. Yes, good friends, first love, bla bla bla—all that existed. Yes, I will have a lot of memories here. And it is difficult to suddenly ... I mean, I can't decide upon leaving now, I have to [leave]. My dad has to move because of work. That's why I don't really have a choice. And, well, the farewell is difficult for me.*⁴

Interestingly, even after graduation, Olivia feels she has no choice of staying on in Shanghai and decides to move to Belgium with her family. Some students' families, such as Antonia's, Xia's, Bjorn's, Charlie's, and Kressi's will stay in Shanghai. For some students, as in Giovanni's case, one parent will stay for work and the other will return "home" with the younger siblings, but for the students whose families are about to leave Shanghai altogether, graduation is not only a goodbye to their peers and the school, but also to their house and the city. The possibility of returning for visits is therefore rather uncertain.

MIA: *I have no idea when I will come back here. And I know that, by then, everything will have changed anyway. Well, I hope that I will make it [back] some time in the next school year, because then there will still be people here that I know.*⁵

4 German original: OLIVIA: *Also [in] Shanghai ist die Schule wo ich am längsten drauf war, je. Deswegen, das fällt mir schon schwer. Weil ich hab hier total viele memories, vor allem weil ich meine Jugend hier verbracht hab. Da erinnert man sich ja immer gerne dran. Ja, gute Freunde, erste Liebe, bla bla bla - das gab's halt. Also doch, ich werde schon viele memories hier haben. Und es ist schon schwer, das alles so auf einmal... Ich meine ich kann es ja nicht entscheiden, dass ich hier jetzt weggehe, ich muss ja. Mein Papa muss ja umziehen wegen der Arbeit. Deswegen hab ich ja nicht wirklich eine Wahl. Und, also der Abschied fällt mir schon schwer.*

5 German original: MIA: *Ich habe keine Ahnung wann ich wieder hierherkomme. Und ich weiß ja, bis dahin ist eh wieder alles anders. Also ich hoffe halt noch, dass ich es irgendwann im nächsten Schuljahr noch schaffe, weil dann sind noch Leute da, die ich kenne.*

1.2 Celebrating twice: graduation and goodbyes

The students expend many resources and efforts on shaping their final weeks in Shanghai and their final days at school. Graduation, for them, involves preparing several events and memorabilia. The major event is the graduation ball, which the students traditionally organize themselves. Preparations include finding ways to fund the event, choosing and renting a suitable venue, organizing a caterer and decorations, and creating the program for the evening. Furthermore, the class is busy writing, designing, and getting their “Abibuch” (a special graduation yearbook) printed, as well as preparing an after-party, which will take place at another downtown location, after the formal ball. The 31 students estimate that they spend about RMB 300,000 (€33,000) on these celebrations. Part of this sizable amount comes from ticket sales for the ball, which cost RMB 400 (€44) each, yearbooks, which cost RMB 100 (€11) each, and fundraising activities, such as bake sales, that took place at the school during the last term. Several foreign companies also sponsored the event for a sum amounting to around RMB 160,000 (€17,600). The celebratory events like the ball will take place in addition to the official commencement ceremony that is organized by and will be held at the school. The students shape this event to some extent, too, since they contribute a few musical performances and a student speech.

The importance of this official ceremony, which values students’ achievements and celebrates their graduation, becomes apparent in Mia’s anticipation a few days prior to the event:

MIA: *I am really looking forward to it. I am sure it will be really beautiful. I think I will be really sad. When you just notice that, well, school is over now. Really! If you think back... It is the only thing you remember! The time before school [...] well, I personally don't recall that anymore. And even if you were in pre-school before and in Kindergarten before that, you had something every day. And the time before that—you really can't remember! That's why. Really strange, I think. Really weird.*⁶

Mia ponders the school routine, and the significance of losing something that has accompanied her throughout her life. The end of this period is met with anticipation and joy, as well as sadness. However, it is not only the end of school, but also the end of their time in Shanghai that the expatriate community celebrates with these ritual festivities.

6 German original: MIA: *Ich freu mich richtig drauf. Das wird bestimmt richtig schön. Ich werde glaube ich total am Ende sein. Wenn man einfach merkt, so, ja, jetzt ist die Schule vorbei. Es ist wirklich so! Wenn man zurückdenkt ... Das ist das Einzige woran man sich erinnern kann. An die Zeit vor der Schule [...] also, ich persönlich weiß es nicht mehr. [...] Und selbst wenn, davor war man in der Vorschule und davor im Kindergarten. Das heißt auch da hatte man täglich was. Und an die Zeit davor erinnert man sich ja wirklich nicht! Deswegen. Richtig seltsam, finde ich. Richtig komisch.*

Graduation ceremonies are rites of passage which, for the students in Shanghai, are part of a larger farewell ceremony. According to ethnographer Arnold van Gennep ([1960] 1992, 11), who introduced the notion of important, life-changing rituals as “rites of passage” with the general aim of insuring a “change of condition or a passage from one magico-religious or secular group to another,” such processes undergo three different phases: the preliminal or separation phase, the liminal or transitional phase, and the postliminal or incorporation phase. Van Gennep, however, noted that not all rituals consist of all phases and that it is impossible to “achieve as rigid a classification as the botanists have” (ibid.).

The commencement ceremony that I attended at the German school can be seen as an essential element of the first part of these rites of passage—the separation phase, as well as of a process of the students’ change in status from high school to university student, and an opening to the transitional phase—a phase that is celebrated after the graduation ceremony at the graduation dance and the students’ after-party. Because the commencement ceremony was undertaken in a routine way that I—and seemingly everyone else attending—was familiar with and had anticipated, I will not fully analyze that ritual here.⁷ Neither will I focus on a theoretical discussion of the graduation ball or the after-party. Instead, in the passages which follow, I will illustrate the overall mood of the festivities I attended, as well as the thoughts of the students and the school community they are a part of, to further underline the challenges, emotions, and possibilities this moment of leaving Shanghai holds for expatriate youths. Nevertheless, Van Gennep’s notion of the rites of passage helps us to understand the importance of such festivities in guiding students’ transition from high school to university, and from Shanghai to elsewhere.

THE COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY

It is the day of commencement and I am sitting next to Bjorn’s brother and the rest of his family. The soon-to-be graduates are seated in neat rows of chairs on both sides of a stage. They are attired for the occasion: the girls in dresses, the boys in suits. Equipped with a camera and my field notebook, I wait among the parents, siblings, and students’ friends, for the event to start. We all read the small program, which helpers from the school have distributed on the long rows of mats that have been used to convert the steps in the piazza into seats. The evening begins with music and a welcome by the school principal. A small group of students from the elementary school leads us through the evening; their announcements repeatedly amuse the audience. The school’s mu-

7 Magolda (2003) describes, concerning college commencement ceremonies in the US, how these formal celebrations follow a rather strict pattern.

sical stars, various prize winners, play and sing between the different speeches. The German consul general talks about the high level of the exams, about the opportunities and challenges of being an expat, and cites the current federal president of Germany, Joachim Gauck, who calls for commitment to society. A representative for the German industry and commerce in Shanghai follows with a humorous but also political speech and—probably with an eye on his preceding speaker—thanks the German ministry of foreign affairs, hereby stressing the importance of their financial support, which is always contested. The two head teachers of the graduating class give a speech that evokes much laughter and is accompanied by photos of all the students on class outings.

Then, after a musical intermission, the school principal gives his full speech before the diplomas are handed out. Starting with political explanations and concerns about changes and lessened interest from the German government in financing German schools abroad, the principal appeals to parents and German companies to make their needs of this support heard. After this political digression, he announces the average grades and is proud of the results that are, as he emphasizes, above the German average. He then recounts various school events (trips, arts, and sporting events) to stress how important it is to be involved in such social activities, in addition to earning good grades. Finally, he cites Johann Wolfgang von Goethe who, according to him, said that “parents should give roots and wings to children” (*Wurzeln und Flügel soll man den Kindern mitgeben*). He elaborates on the relations students have to different places and how many will move to Germany, Switzerland, or wherever their roots are. However, he declares “one part of your roots is also our school” (*aber ein Teil eurer Wurzeln ist auch unsere Schule*), naming a few students who have been in Shanghai since kindergarten. He then turns to the second part of Goethe’s suggestion for educating children—the wings:

Your wings are—not only because of all the miles that you have already travelled up in the air—much stronger and more flexible than those of your future classmates at university. They will carry you. You will realize: you, as the graduates of a German school abroad [...], are special. This should not be a reason to become arrogant—and you aren’t. Public-spirited, cool, and nice young people exist everywhere. You will nonetheless attract attention. Because the experiences one brings along, the things you know and are familiar with, stick to you like a second skin. And something else is sticking to you that is different to most other youths—namely, a certain familiarity with the world, a familiarity with things that are different and foreign to others. Due to your experiences in the world, you are in some respects more independent, flexible, and open and therefore you will see and grasp more opportunities. However, others also have special expectations of you. I am

sure—we are sure—you will be able to meet these. We are sure you will fly.⁸

This sentiment, which I have tried to reconstruct here from my frenetically-scribbled notes, marks the end of the principal's speech and is met with enthusiastic applause. Interestingly, it mirrors the narrative of privilege and pressure that I came across in students' descriptions of international schooling that was highlighted in Part III, Chapter 3.4.

After the school principal's speech—marking the separation phase of the ritual (Van Gennep [1960] 1992)—the diplomas are handed out to all the students in alphabetical order. Applause greets the students when their names are called and as they step out onto the stage, receiving handshakes, diplomas, gifts, and a photo. After the diplomas are distributed, a few parents gather on stage to sing a song (not as perfectly as their children) and, finally, three female students—Mia and Antonia among them—give the last speech of the evening.

The three girls first start recalling their last years as students. In a humorous way, they describe conflicts and debates, as well as positive memories. One after the other, their classmates step onto the stage, according to their arrival time in Shanghai, to create a timeline which ranges from kindergarten until 2010, only two years prior. After sharing these memories, the students' speech culminates in thanking parents, teachers, siblings, the school principal, and the technician responsible that evening. "We are all only here because of our parents and, at this point, we want to say thank you for that."⁹ This line is met with laughter, applause, and cheers from the audience, which consists primarily of family members. This response in particular shows how important this statement is for many parents. Their children's acknowledgment of the beneficial aspects of their experience in Shanghai may alleviate any remaining feelings of anger or guilt that the move initially prompted (see Part II). As they continue with their speech, the graduates combine a farewell to their high school days with a farewell to Shanghai. Contemplating the uncertainties of the future

8 German original: *Die Flügel sind bei euch – und nicht nur wegen der vielen Flugmeilen, die ihr alle schon zurückgelegt habt –, sind bei euch stärker und flexibler ausgeprägt als bei euren zukünftigen Kommilitonen an den Unis. Sie werden euch tragen. Ihr werdet das merken. Ihr seid als Absolventen einer deutschen Auslandsschule [...] besonders. Das soll kein Grund sein, überheblich zu werden – und das seid ihr auch nicht. Engagierte, coole und nette junge Leute gibt es überall. Ihr werdet trotzdem auffallen. Weil einem das, was man an Erfahrungen mitbringt und was man kennt und was einem vertraut ist wie eine zweite Haut anhaftet. Und euch haftet anderes an als den meisten anderen Jugendlichen – nämlich eine gewisse Vertrautheit mit der Welt, Vertrautheit mit dem, was anders ist und was anderen fremd ist. Weil ihr aufgrund eurer Erfahrungen in der Welt in mancher Hinsicht selbständiger, flexibler und offener seid, werdet ihr auch mehr Chancen sehen und wahrnehmen können. Man wird aber vielleicht auch besondere Erwartungen an euch richten. Ich bin sicher, wir sind sicher, ihr werdet dem gerecht werden können. Wir sind sicher, ihr werdet fliegen.*

9 German original: *Wir alle sind nur wegen unserer Eltern hier und möchten uns an dieser Stelle dafür bedanken.*

and the difficulties of choosing a career path, they end on a cheerful note, which is followed by much applause: “But one thing we do understand: Namely, what we have to celebrate. To have been a student yesterday, to be almost an adult tomorrow, but especially that today we are young.”¹⁰

This last line of the girls’ address can be seen as a transition into what Van Gennep ([1960] 1992) conceptualized as the second phase of a rite of passage—the liminal or transition phase. Victor Turner, who continued developing and illustrating Van Gennep’s notion of liminality in rite-of-passage processes, describes the liminal phase as a condition where people “slip through the network of classification” and are “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” ([1969] 2008, 95). Likewise, as the speech given by the three girls indicates, being young is understood as both being free from the obligations of high school as well as of those of adulthood. “Young” here means celebrating without having greater responsibilities. The last line is a call for the start of these celebrations, now that the youths have their diplomas in hand. Based on Van Gennep’s ([1960] 1992) and Victor Turner’s ([1969] 2008) understanding of liminality in the ritual process, social anthropologist Allan Sande (2002) describes this phase of partying among recent graduates in Norway as a phase that allows youths to behave in ways that are against the cultural norm and that break moral rules. Sande, who particularly illustrates the role of alcohol and intoxication in Norwegian graduation celebrations, suggests that the youths become detached from society during that time, to then be ascribed adult status once this liminal phase is over.

Following the graduation ceremony, a dinner is hosted for everyone at the school. After eating at the buffet and conversing with parents, taking photos, and receiving congratulations, the students leave for Mural. This is the first unofficial party that everyone joins, but it is also a time for reminiscing and bidding farewell to their favorite party location. Siblings and friends who used to live in Shanghai and, like me, came from Germany to be part of the celebrations, join in. Parents and teachers are not part of this club visit. However, they participate to an extent in the graduation ball and after party that take place the following day.

THE GRADUATION BALL AND AFTER-PARTY

The next day, I meet some of “the girls” at noon at a hairdresser located in the same compound where Olivia lives. Olivia, Charlie, and Mia have appointments to get their hair done for the graduation ball. I take photos and watch them get styled. Back at Olivia’s house, the three girls and I put

10 German original: *Aber eins verstehen wir. Ganz sicher. Nämlich, was wir feiern müssen: Gestern Schüler gewesen zu sein. Morgen fast erwachsen zu werden. Vor allem aber, dass wir heute jung sind.*

on make-up and slip into our dresses. Mascara and eye shadow are passed around as we all get excited about the upcoming evening. Olivia's parents are also there and are very supportive. In the late afternoon, their driver takes us to the event location on the South Bund. We have to get there early, because the students have one more practice for a dance choreography they will be performing that evening. I watch them rehearse, scribble a few notes in my diary, and take photos. By now, I am shivering in my evening dress, in the freezer-like, empty, air-conditioned hall. I am glad to see the first guests arrive; we gather upstairs in the rooftop bar for our first drink of the evening. Here, the temperature of an early-summer evening in Shanghai feels comfortable and the breathtaking view of the Pudong skyline and the passing ships on the Bund leaves everyone in awe (Figure 31).



Figure 31. Impressions from the Graduation Ball: View of the Bund. Photo by M. Sander.

Everyone, including me, takes pictures of the well-dressed people, the sunset, and the view; there is also a professional photographer, whom the students hired for the night. The setting clearly distinguishes the event from graduation balls in Germany. While the latter mostly take place in gymnasiums or auditoriums, the chosen location in Shanghai is a former warehouse that has been converted to a very high standard. Many guests congratulate the students for their great choice of this venue right by the docks that combines a marvelous view with simple elegance. Eventually, the guests move inside and are seated at large round tables according to a seating order the students have discussed for months. I join a table with some older siblings, friends, and former students of the school. The

graduates all sit at a long table in the center of the hall. The evening features a buffet dinner, several talks, the students' dance, and a few pranks and games, including a high-heel-shoe running contest with the teachers. The graduates also show a home-made movie that features them talking about their classmates and their future plans, as well as saying thank you. I mingle and take photos (Figure 32).

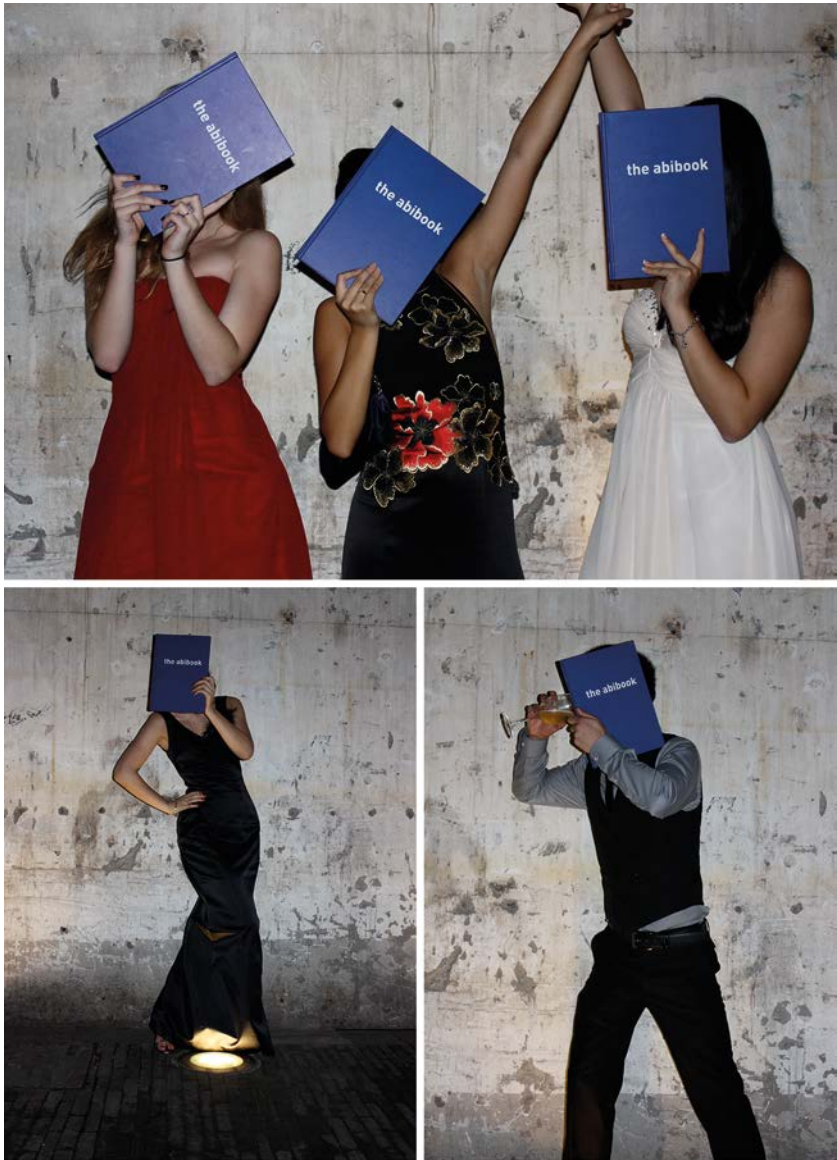


Figure 32: Students Posing at their Graduation Ball. Photo by M. Sander.

Around midnight, the students get ready to leave the location and invite everyone to move to the after-party location: a lounge bar in the heart of Shanghai's former French concession that the graduates rented for the occasion. The tickets for the graduation ball come with a lace band wrapped around them, indicating each guest's table number in Chinese characters. Later, if you wear the band around your wrist at the after-party, all drinks at the bar are free. Only the students, their friends and siblings, and several teachers come along. Parents are nowhere to be seen.

Now, intoxication and partying, which Sande (2002) describes as important parts of this rite of passage, are in full swing. Drinking and dancing with (now former) teachers creates a generally euphoric atmosphere as old barriers are torn down. The girls have all changed out of their long evening gowns and into short cocktail dresses; many pairs of high heels have been replaced by ballet flats. I busy myself with taking pictures and, after a while, students begin to ask me to take photos of them with their friends. I am happy to replace the photographer who has left by now, but also use the time to chat with various students. As the evening wears on, more and more students are found outside, in a small alley behind the club, sitting on the ground, talking to their friends, and enjoying the last of "their" night.

1.3 Moving on: anticipation and anxieties

During my final visit to Shanghai, the students and I bonded over the shared feeling of an unknown future and the difficulty of choosing a career path. Mia's description of her struggle to make such a choice illustrates feelings expressed by the majority of the students I talked to:

MIA: *That was already a topic a year ago: "And what are your plans after graduation?" "Hmm." That is so ... At least I always had an answer, but it has changed a lot during the last year [...].*

INTERVIEWER: *And why did you actually abandon the idea of studying design?*

MIA: *I don't know [...]. It was always like [...] actually, I shouldn't mind, but there were always two possible answers. Some always said: "Oh, great!" and the others always said: "Hmm. Well, you can't really earn a lot with that" or something similar. It was not necessarily about money, but simply like, you just can't really ... So many people do that. Well, there were always these kinds of reactions and somehow that made me think again. And then, one day, I was sitting, well, that was during Chinese New Year holidays, just before the written exams ... I was sitting downstairs with my mother and we were talking and then I said, "Yes, actually I could also do something else." On a sheet of paper on the table I wrote down everything that I find interesting. There were ten different things on it, some actually*

going into very different directions. [...] And then I thought, okay, I can take a look again at what I want to do. There are so many opportunities [...]. Shouldn't underestimate that. And that's why I am still looking and then I will apply.¹¹

Trying to find a path into the future, Mia weighs her interests, the opinions of friends and parents, and future job opportunities as well as possible income. Many scholarly explanations for youths' career choices and their employment histories have shifted their focus "towards poststructuralist accounts in which individuals' choices and their ability to judge and negotiate risk are seen as important in shaping their biographies" (Valentine 2003, 41). Despite this individualization, social networks as "product[s] of specific social and physical environments," still play a major role in "providing information about employment opportunities [...] and in developing social and cultural capital" (ibid.) As Mia's account demonstrates, this influence of the social network on career choices can also be observed among expatriate teenagers in Shanghai. For many of the students, the choice of a university program also goes along with the decision to relocate. Some set their priorities according to the likelihood of being accepted at a specific university, while others chose a location that appeals to them and then consider the different options for studying there. Olivia, for instance, wants to move back to her parents' home town in Belgium.

OLIVIA: I've been abroad for some time now. And my parents have always hinted at, pointed out that they would like it if I came with them to Belgium to study there. And that I then would do the exact same thing that they did back then—to study in [their city]. Well, I still know a few people in Belgium. They are all going to [study there] as well, so I will also see them again

11 German original: MIA: *Das war schon vor einem Jahr so: "Und was hast du für Pläne nach dem Abitur?" "Hmm" Das ist halt immer so ... Ich hatte halt wenigstens immer eine Antwort, aber es hat sich halt innerhalb des letzten Jahres stark gewandelt. [...]* INTERVIEWER: *Und wieso bist du dann von Design eigentlich abgekommen, so?* MIA: *Ich weiß nicht. [...] Also, es war immer so, [...] eigentlich sollte es mich nicht wirklich stören, aber es gab immer zwei mögliche Antworten: Die einen haben immer gesagt „Oh, super toll!“ Und die anderen immer so: „Hmm. Ja, da kann man jetzt eher nicht so viel mit verdienen“ oder so. [Es ging] noch nicht einmal unbedingt ums Geld, sondern einfach so, du kannst halt nicht so ... Das machen so viele Leute. Ja, und dann waren da immer solche Reaktionen und irgendwie hat mich das dann noch mal ins Nachdenken gebracht. Und dann saß ich irgendwann, also in den Chinese Newyear Ferien war das, also kurz vor dem schriftlichen Abitur ... Da saß ich so unten mit meiner Mutter und [wir] haben uns so unterhalten und dann meinte ich: „Ja, eigentlich kann ich auch was anderes machen.“ So Zettel rausgeholt und alles aufgeschrieben was mich interessiert. Da standen dann, glaube ich, irgendwie zehn Dinge, die teilweise echt in verschiedene Richtungen gingen. [...] Ja. Und dann dachte ich, okay, dann kann ich ja noch einmal gucken, was ich jetzt mache. Es gibt so viele Möglichkeiten. [...] Sollte man nicht unterschätzen. Und deswegen bin ich jetzt immer noch am Gucken und dann werd ich mich bewerben.*

there. And the girls, my friends from Shanghai, [...] they also study close to where I will go. So I will get to know Belgium a little. Because, I mean, I was very young when I left Belgium. [...] I would like to get to know Belgium a little, well, Europe in general. And that's why, yes, I want to move to Belgium.¹²

Olivia's quote not only reveals her parents' influence on her choice of university location, but also her own desire to reconnect with her past, her broader family, and her national culture and mother tongue. It is these manifold desires and influences that the students must now negotiate when leaving Shanghai and choosing their next step—and stop—in their lives. Based on their ethnographic work with young people in Finland, Elina Lahelma and Tuula Gordon (2003, 381) argue that “moving away from home is full of ambivalence for young people. Most of them talk about it with terms of hopes, but also with terms of fear.” Although “home” is a flexible, rhizomatic network of locations, practices, and ideas for most expatriate youths in my study (see Part III, Chapter 2), this is true for them as well. Furthermore, for the students in Shanghai, moving away from their family home often coincides with this home no longer existing. The following sections therefore highlight their specific fears and hopes.

THE CHALLENGE OF EVERYDAY PRACTICALITIES

Many of the students I interviewed grew up with housekeeping staff at home and parents who demanded that their children focus on school rather than concerning themselves with the chores and demands of a household. Consequently, a few of the young people's accounts reflect a fear that their future homes will lack the necessary equipment for preparing food or doing laundry, or that they themselves lack the skills to handle those tasks. Additionally, the students are nervous about unfamiliar lifestyles, such as student life in Germany. Peter, for instance, uses our interview to bombard me with questions about living in a shared flat with other students in Germany.

12 German original: OLIVIA: *Ich bin jetzt ja schon eine Weile im Ausland. Und meine Eltern haben immer so, so kleine Anspielungen drauf gemacht, also immer so ein bisschen drauf hingedeutet, dass sie es toll finden würden wenn ich mit nach Belgien käme und da studieren würde. Und dass ich dann halt auch genau das mache, was sie damals gemacht haben – also in [Name der Stadt] studieren. Und, ja, ich kenn ja auch noch ein paar Leute in Belgien. Die gehen halt auch alle nach [Name der Stadt], dass heißt die sehe ich da auch wieder. Und die Mädels, also die Freunde aus Shanghai, [...] die studieren ja auch in der Nähe von da wo ich hingeh. Damit ich auch ein bisschen Belgien kenne. Weil ich meine, ich war sehr jung wo ich weggezogen bin aus Belgien. [...] Ich würd schon gern auch Belgien ein bisschen kennenlernen, also allgemein Europa. Und deswegen ja, also ich will schon nach Belgien gehen.*

PETER: *How is it to shop as a collective? Do you label your things? [...] Does everyone clean all the rooms or does everyone individually clean their own rooms? [...] What about dishes? Does everyone bring their own?*¹³

Peter is not alone in his questions and concerns. When I meet Xia, the Chinese national whose story I described in detail in Part I, Chapter 4, to discuss his plans for the summer, he reports that he wants to prepare for his studies. When I inquire what these preparations include, he explains:

XIA: *Searching for an apartment. And learning how to cook.*

INTERVIEWER: *Learning how to cook? <L>*

XIA: *Actually, I've been wanting to learn how to cook for a while now. But I didn't manage to. I will try in the summer.*

INTERVIEWER: *And who will teach you?*

XIA: *My mother. But I already thought: Well, I will get lunch at university. In the mornings and evenings, I will eat rice and, erm, I don't know what else. Bread and sandwiches, because that seems easier than Chinese meals, where everything needs to be cooked. That is easier to prepare.*

INTERVIEWER: *Well, cheese, bread, stick it together—that is of course easier.*

XIA: *The food could be tasty. In the past, I couldn't get used to cheese, but now I actually like it, if it is well-prepared, has a good filling. Sandwiches.*¹⁴

When I comment that learning how to prepare Chinese dishes might be nice, as they may not be readily available in Germany, Xia shares his worries about missing China and Chinese food by relating the experience of several friends:

XIA: *I am in touch with other people who graduated last year or the year prior from our school. Mostly Chinese people. Chinese connection. And one girl told me that after half a year she was homesick for China. She found that, in China, people are much*

13 German original PETER: *Wie ist das in der WG einzukaufen? Markierst du da deine Sachen? [...] Hat dann auch jeder die Zimmer gemacht? Oder macht das Zimmer jeder einzeln? [...] Wie ist das denn mit dem Geschirr? Hat da jeder seins?*

14 German original: XIA: *Wohnungssuche. Und kochen lernen.* INTERVIEWER: *Kochen lernen? <L>* XIA: *Eigentlich wollte ich schon lange kochen lernen. Aber ich hab das nicht geschafft. Im Sommer werd ich's mal versuchen.* INTERVIEWER: *Und wer wird dir das beibringen?* XIA: *Meine Mutter. Aber ich hab mir schon gedacht: Also Mittagessen gibt es an der Uni. Morgens, abends, gibt es dann Reis und ehm. Ich weiß nicht was es dann sonst noch gibt. Mit Abendbrot und Sandwiches. Weil das kommt mir irgendwie einfacher vor als chinesisches Essen, wo alles gekocht wird. Das ist einfacher vorzubereiten so.* INTERVIEWER: *Also Käse, Brot, patsch zusammen – das ist natürlich einfacher.* XIA: *Das Essen könnte ganz lecker sein. Also früher konnte ich [mich] an Käse nicht gewöhnen, aber jetzt mag ich das eigentlich, wenn es gut zubereitet, gut belegt ist. Brötchen.*

*more open than in Germany. And the other said she was homesick for Chinese vegetables. In Germany there is only salad. In China there are so many different varieties of vegetables.*¹⁵

While many freshmen will experience similar concerns (whether they have had the advantage of an *ayi* or not), Xia's fear is compounded by the knowledge that he will also lack access to the necessary ingredients to prepare his favorite foods. In other words, Xia's concerns about not being able to take care of himself in Germany are not limited to household practicalities, but also to simply feeling comfortable there. For expatriate youths, anxiety about moving on—or, in some cases, moving “back”—parallels larger anxieties about missing familiar things and the fear of not being able to fit in.

THE FEAR OF NOT FITTING IN

ANTONIA: *And I also don't know how I will fit in in Germany, because I am not really German. I am also not really Chinese, but I am really not German. I think I will have a few problems. A few.*¹⁶

Charlie shares Antonia's fears about not fitting in upon her move to Germany. When we sit in a noisy coffee shop over breakfast, Charlie describes how, for her, this fear is particularly tied to prior experiences of racism and “othering” that she has endured due to her Asian phenotype.

CHARLIE: *We always think that, in Germany, everyone stares at us. [...] But it could be that we just simply imagine all that.*

INTERVIEWER: *Sure, you stand out. <x> I do believe that there is still a lot of racism in Germany.*

CHARLIE: *But I think those are the uneducated people. It will be different at university. [...] I am used to it. Kindergarten and elementary school and so on. Although not actually in kindergarten. The small children don't notice. For them everyone looks the same. [...] At elementary school, like in fourth grade, it starts. With*

15 German original: XIA: *Ich hab ja auch Kontakt zu anderen Leuten, die letztes Jahr, vorletztes Jahr an der Schule absolviert haben. Meistens auch chinesische Leute. Chinese Connection. Und ein Mädchen hat schon gemeint, nach einem halben Jahr hatte sie schon Heimweh nach China. Sie meinte in China sind die Leute viel offener als in Deutschland. Und die andere meinte Heimweh nach chinesischen Gemüsen. In Deutschland gibt es nur Salat. In China gibt es so viele verschiedene Arten von Gemüsen.*

16 German original: ANTONIA: *Und ich weiß auch nicht wie ich in Deutschland reinpassen werde, weil ich bin auch nicht wirklich deutsch. Ich bin auch nicht wirklich chinesisch, aber ich bin wirklich nicht wirklich deutsch. Ich glaub ich werd ein bisschen Probleme haben. So ein bisschen.*

*jokes and so on. Okay. But I think everyone has gone through something similar. Almost everyone.*¹⁷

The prospect of moving to Germany reminds Charlie of painful experiences of exclusion from her past. Moving on is connected to the complicated negotiations of home and cultural belonging that I explore throughout this ethnography, particularly in the introduction and Part III, Chapter 2. Simultaneously, Charlie's anxiety about not fitting in is also linked to the fear of not being able to share the positive experiences of her time in Shanghai:

CHARLIE: *But I also heard that sometimes people at university are not really tolerant when you say you come from Shanghai. They think that you want to brag or something. That you want to get attention. Antonia, I believe, has experienced this. [...] She described how great Shanghai is, maybe exaggerated a bit, but isn't it normal that you tell how beautiful the city is and so on? And then there are people who are jealous or something. That is unfortunate.*¹⁸

Nonetheless, all these concerns are accompanied by a sense of anticipation and hope.

HOPES AND ANTICIPATION

While, for some students, leaving Shanghai brings with it a greater physical distance from family, a few teenagers look forward to reconnecting with family members "back home."

OLIVIA: *On the other hand, I am really happy. I like changes. I like to get to know new people, new cultures, new cities; that's what I'm looking forward to very much. I only know Belgium from*

17 German original: CHARLIE: *Wir denken immer in Deutschland schauen uns alle doof an. [...] Aber kann sein, dass wir uns das alles einbilden.* INTERVIEWER: *Klar, ihr fällt halt auf. <x> Ich glaube schon, dass es immer noch sehr viel Rassismus in Deutschland gibt.* CHARLIE: *Aber das sind glaube ich die ungebildeten Leute. An der Uni wird das anders sein. [...] Bin ich ja schon dran gewöhnt. Kindergarten und Grundschule und so. Obwohl Kindergarten eigentlich nicht. Die kleinen Kinder, die checken das nicht. Für die sehen alle gleich aus. [...] An der Grundschule, so vierte Klasse, geht es dann los. Mit Witzen und so was. Okay. Aber ich denk jeder hat mal so was Ähnliches durchgemacht. Fast jeder.*

18 German original: CHARLIE: *Aber ich hab auch gehört, dass manchmal so Leute an Unis halt auch nicht so tolerant sind, dass wenn du sagst du kommst aus Shanghai, denken die halt, dass man sich wichtig tut oder so was. Dass man halt Aufmerksamkeit will. Antonia hat glaub ich die Erfahrung mal gemacht. [...] Und sie hat halt erzählt wie toll Shanghai ist, vielleicht hat sie ein bisschen übertrieben, aber das ist doch normal, dass man erzählt, wie schön die Stadt ist und so. Und dann gibt es Leute, die sind halt so neidisch oder so. Das ist natürlich auch doof.*

holidays and having been there repeatedly for two months, and also the first seven years of my life. I think I will get to know Belgium anew. So I'm very much looking forward to it. New people. I'm also moving closer to my family. I will see my grandparents more often, which makes them really happy, I think. They miss us a lot, I believe.¹⁹

Olivia's anticipation lies in rediscovering Belgium, re-establishing old ties, and making new friends. Peter similarly hopes to find new contacts and to explore student life in his future university town. Sitting outside in the French Café, eating sandwiches, he answers my question about what he looks forward to the most very pragmatically:

PETER: *Well, for the short term, to a fridge full of Edeka [German supermarket chain] items. For the fairly long term, I also [look forward], as I said, to the city and what will come. Because it's mad how much there is coming my way. I hope to make friends in [the city] and to be accepted by the university. That all this will halfway work out. And that's the greatest happiness I hope to find right now.²⁰*

Moving on offers the opportunity to indulge in things that were missed in Shanghai, as Peter's mention of German groceries illustrates; it is also connected to ending what Van Gennep ([1960]1992) described as "the liminal phase," and to being integrated into a new social world—for Peter, this process is associated with making new friends and getting accepted by the university he has applied to. Peter is aware that this is a process and hopes that, over time, "this will halfway work out."

Moving on is therefore associated with a mixture of reconnecting with old memories, places, and people, as well as an opportunity to make new friends and walk new paths, either alone for the first time, or with the help of friends and family. Antonia also sees her upcoming move as a way to escape from the sometimes restrictive expatriate bubble:

19 German original: OLIVIA: *Andererseits freu ich mich sehr. Ich mag Veränderung. Ich mag es wenn ich neue Leute kennenlerne, neue Kulturen kennenlerne, neue Städte, deswegen, darauf freu ich mich sehr. Ich kenn Belgien vom Urlaub und immer mal wieder da zwei Monate zu sein und meine ersten sieben Lebensjahre. Ich glaube ich werde Belgien komplett neu kennenlernen. Also doch darauf freue ich mich sehr. Neue Leute. Ich ziehe auch wieder mehr zu meiner Familie. Also meine Großeltern werde ich jetzt mehr sehen, was sie glaube ich auch total freut. Also die vermissen uns glaube ich so sehr.*

20 German original: PETER: *Also, kurzfristig erstmal auf einen Kühlschrank der voll ist mit Edeka-Artikeln. Aber langfristig eigentlich auch, wie gesagt, auf die Stadt, und eben auf was kommt. Weil das ist ja wirklich krass was vor einem liegt. Ich hoffe guten Anschluss zu kriegen in [der Stadt]. Und einen Studienplatz, dass das alles halbwegs klappt. Und das ist eigentlich das größte Glück, was ich jetzt hoffe zu finden.*

ANTONIA: *Somehow, the time has come to get away, not only from school, but also from home, from everything, from all the people. It is time somehow to go away. It feels really great.*²¹

1.4 Reflections on leaving Shanghai and what lies ahead

All the students featured in this work see their move away from Shanghai as a crucial point in their lives and as the end of an important phase. Because leaving Shanghai is related to their graduation from high school, they have to make numerous decisions about their future, their career choices, and their new residence in particular. The young people I interviewed approach this move with mixed feelings. While some youths' parents stayed in Shanghai, others moved on to different destinations than their children. Only Olivia jointly relocated with her parents; her schoolmates' families, in contrast, are spread out across various locations, which means that from now on, these students will have to cross great distances to see their families.

My ethnographic material illustrates clearly how the collective rituals surrounding the traditional celebrations of the Abitur graduation offer a vital opportunity for students to cope as a group with these transitions: they combine the celebration of their academic achievements and the end of high school with bidding Shanghai farewell. Conversations with Matthias and a friend of Antonia, who both left the city prior to graduation and thus did not get to experience these combined rituals, suggest that this kind of closure makes moving on easier for those students who remain in Shanghai through graduation. The ceremonies, traditions, and parties that mark the end of students' school life and their time in Shanghai evolve from a mixture of German school traditions and Shanghai-specific memories. It is not surprising, therefore, that the students chose their all-time favorite club Mural, the converted warehouse with its spectacular view of the Bund, and a bar in the former French concession to commemorate their graduation as well as to say their "goodbyes" to the city.

The move away from Shanghai, which for the majority of the students means moving back to Germany, is also met with thoughts about what is to come. Final destinations are often vague until responses from universities—which are awaited with anxious anticipation—are received. For many, university life means making a dream (such as Antonia's goal of studying medicine) come true, but also evokes a fear of feeling lost in a new location. The youths particularly voiced their worries about navigat-

21 German original: ANTONIA: *Es ist irgendwie, es wird Zeit, dass man wekommt. Also, nicht nur [von der] Schule, auch von zu Hause, von allem, von den Leuten. Also, es ist Zeit irgendwie, wegzukommen. Es fühlt sich echt gut an.*

ing everyday practicalities in their new home, and their reservations about whether they would be able to fit in.

The expatriate teenagers' plans to move sound rather definite. Although recent research has shown an increase in young people who move back and forth between their own and their parent's homes (for more information on what has been dubbed the "boomerang phenomenon," see Molgat 2002, 135), few of the students in this work considered returning to their parental home to be an option. This is not surprising, given that for the majority of them, the parental home was also dissolved in the next move, and is therefore not a fixed place that they can return to. Some students said they hoped to come back to Shanghai one day, but these ideas were never concretely formulated and never involved a specific plan, apart from the vague possibility of maybe receiving an expat post one day, too. While it remains to be seen whether these youths will ultimately follow in their parents' footsteps by living highly-mobile lives, the next chapter concludes this ethnography by investigating how the students fared after moving back to Germany, their new beginnings there, and their reflections on their time in Shanghai.

CHAPTER 2

New Beginnings and Concluding Thoughts

After graduation, the majority of the teenagers from the German school chose to “return” to their “home” country, which many of them only knew from early childhood or holidays, and enroll at universities. Only Kressi and Bjorn opted to stay in Shanghai to take a Chinese language course, while two other boys moved to Germany to carry out their military service and plan to attend university afterwards. The students chose Germany as a destination because of its respected and free university system, to reconnect with the country as such, and, as was mentioned previously, to explore German student life and the associated cultural practices in general. For the expatriate teenagers moving “back” also meant leaving their family homes, which by now are out of reach or no longer exist. Many of them began to pursue studies in engineering, business, or, in Antonia’s case, medicine.

I keep in touch with Antonia and some of her peers and occasionally even meet with them at birthday parties, sightseeing trips, or for lunch or coffee. In our conversations I sense how much they enjoy exploring Germany, which is simultaneously a familiar, yet foreign country. Being privy to their initial struggles, but also their success and their joy in discovering new things and making new friends, I begin to realize just how complicated their “return” turns out to be.

In November 2012, I pick up Antonia at her new place to go out for lunch. Back in Shanghai we would hang out at her place, but now she does not ask me to come in, because—she apologizes—her room looks too chaotic. She is studying constantly and has no time to clean up. Besides, she admits, she still has not gotten used to doing such things yet, as her *ayi* always took care of housework. After lunch we get a coffee at Starbucks. While I am reminded of Shanghai’s Starbucks coffee shops and ponder the continuity these global chains seem to provide, Antonia tells me she feels that she moved out too early, having just turned eighteen. Her parents are still in Shanghai. It is difficult for her to suddenly be on her own.

Eventually, in the summer of 2014—two years after their graduation—I conduct structured interviews with Antonia and Mia to discuss their experiences. In our follow-up interview, Antonia sits in my office and, with the voice recorder and questionnaire in front of us, she remembers her move to Germany and her initial feelings:

ANTONIA: *Moving itself went relatively, well, went really fast. I was travelling in America after graduation and then I went on a trip through Europe. And during the Europe-trip I got accepted at university. I came back and had to find a flat within one week. And then my parents came and we moved everything and so on. I didn't even think about it that much, and then university already started. [...] So somehow all this went super fast.*

INTERVIEWER: *Hmm.*

ANTONIA: *Thrown in at the deep end. Erm, and the most difficult thing in the beginning wasn't being in Germany, but being alone. So moving out itself. I think that's pretty universal that you ... [...] Well, the first week, I remember, I had so much to do during the day. That was great. I met so many new people. And in the evenings I called Charlie or Mia and we cried together.*

INTERVIEWER: *Oh.*

ANTONIA: *<L> Because somehow we were all lonely, sad. And away from home.*

INTERVIEWER: *Yes.*

ANTONIA: *And erm, it actually went on like that fort the whole first semester. [...] Only stuyding and that was it.*

INTERVIEWER: *Hmm.*

ANTONIA: *And I also lived alone. It was also quite lonesome there. Yes. [Pause]. There was a difference between my fellow students and me: I couldn't go home on the weekends.²²*

Although very experienced in moving, Antonia's former classmate Mia shares similar stories of loneliness during her first months in Germany. Both their narratives echo the students' retrospective accounts of what it was like to move to Shanghai that this book analyzed in Part II, Chapter 1.

22 German original: ANTONIA: *Der Umzug an sich ging relativ, also es ging halt sehr schnell. Ich war ja reisen in Amerika nach dem Abitur und dann war ich ja noch auf Europareise. Und auf der Europareise habe ich die Zusage für die Uni bekommen. Kam zurück und hab dann innerhalb von einer Woche eine Wohnung gesucht. Dann kamen meine Eltern, dann haben wir halt den Umzug gemacht und so weiter. Gar nicht viel drüber nachgedacht, dann fing schon die Uni an. [...] Also irgendwie ging das alles so super schnell.* INTERVIEWER: *Hmm.* ANTONIA: *Voll reingeworfen, voll reingestürzt. Ehm, und ich glaub am Anfang war das Schwierigste nicht so, dass ich jetzt in Deutschland bin, sondern dass ich alleine bin. Also, das Ausziehen an sich. Also ich glaube das ist ziemlich universell, dass man dann halt ... [...] Also, die erste Woche, das weiß ich noch, also ich hatte tagsüber megaviel zu tun. Das war voll schön. Ich hab ganz viele neue Leute kennengelernt. Und abends habe ich Charlie oder Mia angerufen und mit denen geheult.* INTERVIEWER: *Oh.* ANTONIA: *<L> Weil einfach irgendwie so, alle irgendwie einsam waren, traurig waren. Und weg waren von zu Hause.* INTERVIEWER: *Ja.* ANTONIA: *Und, ehm, das ging halt das ganze erste Semester eigentlich so. [...] Also es war auch alles überschattet, so von der Uni. [...] Also nur lernen und das wars.* INTERVIEWER: *Hmm.* ANTONIA: *Und ich hab auch alleine gewohnt. Da war es auch ziemlich einsam. Ja. [Pause] Was ein Unterschied war, von mir zu meinen Kommilitonen, dass ich halt nicht am Wochenende nach Hause fahren konnte.*

However, there is a significant difference: in 2012, Antonia and Mia decided themselves to move to Germany for their studies, while years earlier, many of the teenagers had not only felt disregarded in their family's decision-making process to move to China but had often been reluctant, or initially even against the idea of going abroad.

Faced with the family's relocation, the children were caught between the desire to stay with their peers and the wish to be with their parents. They were actively weighing their parents' and their own interests. While the possibilities to explore new things with their family were exciting, they also feared the unpredictable experiences of moving to a new, unknown city. Many students therefore recalled having angrily confronted their parents, urging them to forgo the move. Other students said that their parents felt guilty for moving them out of their familiar environment, against their choice. Consequently, the move to Shanghai brought with it emotional challenges. This process was analysed in Part II, Chapter 2 as "culture shock:" students' reactions to an unfamiliar urban environment, new sensorial experiences combined with the lack of friends and extended family, and problems within the family related to the move.

MAKING A HOME AGAIN

Students' everyday practices upon arrival in Shanghai were primarily concerned with making Shanghai their new home and with becoming part of a new community, as I described in Part III, Chapter 1, which conveyed the continuous process of making sense of the city, not only in terms of navigation and sensory experience, but also in terms of positioning oneself within it—as consumers, inhabitants, or someone overwhelmed by the urban, sensorial landscape of Shanghai. Managing the city meant managing everyday life and the migration experience, for instance by learning how to navigate between spaces of everyday practices and consumption, by giving spaces a social meaning, or by dividing Shanghai into manageable, familiar areas and "the rest of the city." In these analyses practices of a retreat into familiarity already became apparent. Part III, Chapter 2 was concerned with notions of home. After providing a description of expatriate housing spaces—gated communities—it identified youths' small-scale home-making practices, such as decorating their rooms, or having regular family dinners, as well as larger processes of locating "home(s)" in their transnational networks. It demonstrated that, due to the expatriate teenagers' experiences of mobility, home was thought of as multiple and fluid, and tied to various places, items, and people. It became evident that making and (re)imagining homes, and collecting things to produce a sense of belonging helped the teenagers to cope with feelings of loneliness and enable the rhizomatic home to "start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 9).

For Mia, who moved with her family several times within Asia and between Asia and Germany, this (re)imagining and creating a home in Shanghai, as Part III, Chapter 2 showcased, also included family routines. She had always considered her immediate family and the shared domestic life as the main ingredient for her feelings of being at home.

Coming back to Germany after graduation is Mia's first move without immediate family:

MIA: *Well, I've moved many times, but when I came home, my parents and siblings were always there and asked: "How are you? How was it?" And here I came home to empty rooms.*

INTERVIEWER: *Oh.*

MIA: *And erm, yes, that really wasn't nice. [...] As soon as I went out, it wasn't a problem at all. I knew what it was like to be new. But, as I said, coming home felt somehow, felt really strange.*²³

Furthermore, for Mia and her friends, the move to Germany is not only a first step of being on their own, but also a move out of the supportive expatriate "bubble." Throughout their stay in Shanghai, the youths were surrounded by a community that shared experiences of moving. The international youths' resulting perceptions of Shanghai as a space of transit (see Introduction) were accompanied by feelings of belonging to an expatriate community that shared spatial and social practices and maintained various collective ways of managing migration processes.

SHANGHAI'S EXPAT COMMUNITY AND ITS SUPPORT

A central role in this community is played by international schools, as described in Part III, Chapter 3, which are sites for the continuous everyday routine for expatriate youths, as well as a place for meeting new friends. There, collective expatriate identities were negotiated and mediated on an everyday basis—through community events, the communal valuing of the school for the youths' (cosmopolitan) formation, and through the admission process that required the "right" financial means or jobs, the "right" passports, and the "right" grades. Chinese nationals could only enroll in rare exceptions. Hence the schools brought together students from various international backgrounds, but—as with the gated communities

23 German original: MIA: *Also, ich bin ja so oft umgezogen, aber wenn ich nach Hause gekommen bin, waren halt immer meine Eltern da und meine Geschwister und haben mich halt gefragt: „Ja wie geht's dir? Wie war's?“ Und so kam man dann nach Hause und einen haben halt so leere Zimmer empfangen.* INTERVIEWER: *Oh.* MIA: *Und ehm, ja das war irgendwie echt nicht so schön. [...] Sobald ich unterwegs war, war's überhaupt nicht das Problem. Das kannte ich ja, ich wusste wie es ist, neu zu sein. Aber, wie gesagt dieses Nach-Hause-Kommen fand ich irgendwie, fand ich ganz komisch.*

described in Part II, Chapter 2—this diversity was highly controlled. The schools also offered parents an entrance to Shanghai's expatria and fostered the development of a sense of community for many of the students and their families.

In Germany, Antonia describes how she now experiences how difficult it can be to discuss the experience of moving and of growing up in Shanghai outside of this community.

ANTONIA: *Yes. And I notice now that, in the beginning, I talked so much about Shanghai. I don't do that anymore.*

INTERVIEWER: <L>

ANTONIA: *Erm, [I did that] so much that my new friends here were annoyed, I believe. The people I just got to know here. Because the people [...] who are just getting to know me, they don't think that I come from abroad. [...] I don't look like it and I don't talk like it. And I'm not from there. That there are differences for me, somehow, I've always tried to stress that in the beginning. Because they didn't understand it, although I always said that I'm from Shanghai. For example [...] my flatmate, for her that was completely, she couldn't imagine that. "What do you mean Shanghai?" And then she just ignored that.*

INTERVIEWER: *Like you were there simply on a holiday?* <L>

ANTONIA: *They just didn't realize that I come from a different country. And then I emphasized it so much until they were all annoyed. Because it is so unthinkable. Because it isn't really Chinese, because it was such a strange society in which we lived in Shanghai. So I always tried to describe [...] what it was like. Because they don't understand what it was like. Well. I somehow tried to explain the differences and the commonalities and so on, I tried to explain myself.²⁴*

24 German original: ANTONIA: *Ja. Und was mir jetzt auch noch auffällt, ist dass ich am Anfang sehr viel von Shanghai geredet habe. Also das mache ich jetzt nicht mehr.* INTERVIEWER: <L> ANTONIA: *Ehm, so viel, dass es meine neuen Freunde hier glaube ich auch genervt hat. Also die Leute, die ich neu kennengelernt hab. Weil, also die Leute [...], die mich gerade kennenlernen, die kommen nicht auf die Idee, dass ich aus dem Ausland komme. [...] Ich sehe ja nicht so aus, und ich rede ja auch nicht so. Und komme halt auch nicht daher. Dass es da Unterschiede für mich gibt, irgendwie, habe ich das anfangs immer versucht zu betonen, weil die es nicht verstanden haben, auch wenn ich immer gesagt habe: „Ich bin aus Shanghai.“ Also zum Beispiel [...] meine Mitbewohnerin, das war für sie total, das konnte sie sich gar nicht vorstellen. „Was, wie Shanghai?“ Und dann hat sie das einfach so, ignoriert.* INTERVIEWER: *Wie nach dem Motto: „Da warst du mal im Urlaub?“* <L> ANTONIA: *Das haben die einfach nicht realisiert, dass ich aus einem anderen Land komme. Und dann habe ich das so lange betont, bis ich die alle genervt habe. Weil es auch so unvorstellbar ist also. Weil es ja auch nicht richtig chinesisch ist, weil das war ja so eine komische Gesellschaft in der wir in Shanghai gelebt haben. Das habe ich auch immer versucht zu beschreiben wie es war. Weil die einfach nicht verstehen wie es war. Also. Dass ich irgendwie versucht habe [...] die Unterschiede und die Gemeinsamkeiten und so weiter, dass ich versucht habe mich zu erklären.*

For Mia and Antonia returning to Germany meant leaving the expatriate world and the supportive environment of friends—who all shared their experiences—behind. Now in Germany, Mia realizes that these shared experiences also influenced her ways of forming friendships, as her comparison to her new social circle in Germany shows:

MIA: *Yes, I also found friends for sure, good friends, and, erm, you do a lot together. It's actually constant and everywhere, but at the same time the friendships are, well it's different [...]. It all takes more time, somehow.*

INTERVIEWER: *Hmm.*

MIA: *Until you, erm, feel that you know each other well. That didn't go that fast. Because in Shanghai it was always like, everyone knew what it was like to be new.*

INTERVIEWER: *Yes.*

MIA: *And erm, everyone was new at one point. [...] There was constant change, erm, so everyone knew how it works to make friends fast, because you knew, okay, if you take two years to make close friends, then that person will already be gone again. [...] So the whole thing somehow worked faster. [...] While here it is like, [...], well sure, everyone is looking for new people in the beginning, [...] because you just don't know anyone [...]. That's why you do find new people quite fast, but it's not like you're close and intimate [like in Shanghai]. Because everyone comes from different backgrounds, different, erm, situations, experienced different things. Although everyone is quite open with one another, it's [...] difficult, it takes more time. I really don't know how to describe it, but [...] it is just not that intimate so quickly.²⁵*

25 German original: MIA: *Ja und ich hab auch auf jeden Fall Freunde, also gute Freunde gefunden, und ehm, man macht dann auch viel, es ist eigentlich wie immer und überall, aber gleichzeitig sind die Freundschaften halt doch irgendwie, also es ist anders [...]. Es dauert alles irgendwie länger.* INTERVIEWER: *Hmm.* MIA: *Bis man, ehm, das Gefühl hat [...], dass man sich besser kennt. Das ging nicht so schnell. Weil halt einfach in Shanghai immer dieses Ding war, jeder weiß wie es ist, neu zu sein.* INTERVIEWER: *Ja.* MIA: *Und ehm, jeder war mal neu. [...] Es war ja sowieso so ein konstanter Wechsel, und ehm, dadurch wusste man irgendwie, wie es geht, Freundschaften schneller zu schließen, weil man genau wusste, okay, wenn du jetzt erst mal zwei Jahre brauchst, bis du gut befreundet bist, dann ist die Person ja schon wieder weg. [...] Das Ganze ging dann irgendwie schneller. [...] Während hier ist es so, [...] im Endeffekt sucht am Anfang jeder ja auch nach neuen Leuten, weil, [...] man kennt ja niemanden. [...] Deswegen ist es dann schon so, dass, ehm, man da schnell Leute findet, aber es ist halt nicht so schnell, so, so eng und vertraut [wie in Shanghai]. Weil irgendwie kommen doch alle aus anderen Verhältnissen, und aus anderen ehm, Situationen, haben verschiedene Dinge erlebt [...]. Auch wenn dann alle offen zueinander sind, ist es trotzdem so, dass es [...] irgendwie schwierig ist, dass [es] dann länger dauert. Ich weiß überhaupt nicht wirklich, wie ich das beschreiben soll, aber es ist halt [...] nicht so schnell so vertraut.*

Mia explains how forming new acquaintances and friends in Germany cannot offer strategies for dealing with high mobility and being new. Friendships take longer to form. From her time in the transit space of Shanghai, however, Mia and the other expatriate youths learned how to come to terms with initially unknown surroundings: by finding new things to do.

EXPLORING ACTIVITIES AND SPACES

In Shanghai, students like Antonia and Mia actively sought out and claimed their own spaces outside the gated communities and schools, which determined most of their everyday routines. Constructing collective age identities and exploring related spaces were crucial for the teenagers to gain meaning and agency in their migration experience, as was shown in Part IV, Chapter 2 on nightlife and Part IV, Chapter 3 on the hangout spot called “the shop.”

To make a new home at university in Germany, Mia and Antonia apply this eagerness to explore new spaces and activities. Antonia, for instance, learned how to play the German card game Skat with her new fellow students and taught herself vegan cooking and baking. These activities also include reviving or strengthening old memories, habits, or ties to old friends or extended family in Germany. Food and family are aspects that occasionally evoke feelings of “return” and continuity mainly because these were also practiced as part of the rhizomatic home during the students’ time in Shanghai and elsewhere (see Part III, Chapter 2).

FEELING OR LOOKING FOREIGN

During their first few months in Germany, Antonia and Mia also come to terms with the incongruity of not being recognizably foreign at first sight, while often feeling alien. When Mia and I meet in early summer 2013—almost a year after her move—she talks about everyday incidents where she has to ask for help or information, for instance buying tram or train tickets, and feels local citizens are annoyed and do not understand how she could possibly not know these things. Other students share her experiences. Her former schoolmate Andrea remembers feeling awkward at the post office for not knowing the different forms or courier services available in Germany, and for later having to ask a friend where to put the address on the envelope. Students experience that the people in their new surroundings expect them to know these things, simply because they look German and speak the language fluently. Such stories juxtapose students’ experiences of otherness in Shanghai, which I highlighted in Part IV, Chapter 4. In China, these white expatriate youths consciously experienced their physical difference as whites—many for the first time. This new and often uncomfortable feeling of difference promoted a preference for locations in

Shanghai that were predominantly occupied by other whites. Many of their spatial practices therefore led to accepting or strengthening the exclusion of “China” from their everyday lives. Accompanied by special (and often preferential) treatment from Chinese citizens and a lack of interaction with Chinese youths, their foreign appearance fuelled their feelings of merely being “guests” in China. The new narratives of being not recognizably foreign in Germany can hence also be understood as a loss of the special—often experienced as privileged—treatment they received in Shanghai.

Antonia and Mia’s reflections on their time in Shanghai and how they think it influenced them warrants a return to this ethnography’s initial questions that I raised in the Introduction: what are the experiences and consequences of growing up on the move? To reach a differentiated answer to this complex and difficult question, the theoretical foundations on which this study is built favor transcultural theories and their application to ethnographic research on privileged migrant youths, challenging the simplistic concept of TCKs that, for some time, was the common approach to categorizing youths like those that inform this work.

THE ROLE OF AGE IN THE YOUTHS’ OWN PERSPECTIVES, DEPENDENCY, AND AGENCY

My first research aim was to understand the youths’ own perspectives on global mobility. Although teenagers experienced their move to Shanghai in many ways similar to the adult community, there was also a range of different, age-specific experiences.

The students were minors whose move depended (solely) on the decisions of their parents. Their memories of leaving, examined in Part II, showed that students’ dependence on their family and their lack of choice was always clear to them. Furthermore, their prescribed everyday school lives left little time and space for the expression of individual agency. Because they regularly shared spaces—for example the international schools (see Part III, Chapter 3)—with peers of the same age and with similar experiences, collective forms of coping with the move and the new environment could be forged. Together, students developed a social space distinct from the adult community. The teenagers claimed and frequented a variety of social meeting places including Shanghai’s nightclubs, or spaces that lay in-between different social worlds and authorities, such as the hangout place called “the shop.” Collectively exploring and shaping these spaces proved to be age-specific ways of managing the move while still remaining in a relationship of dependency from parents. Furthermore, youths—constantly confronted with the idea of development, of becoming an adult—seemed to reflect more than adults on the impact that moving and living in several places had on them and how this shaped their points of view and future. These reflections illustrate the second point of my investigation, the expatriate youths’ negotiations of identity.

IDENTITY NEGOTIATIONS: DEMARCATION AND GLOBALITY
VERSUS TRANSCULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

The youths' own perspectives illustrated throughout this ethnography, for instance in Part I, Chapter 4, show that common notions of home, belonging, or cultural identity are too limited to capture the complexities of their childhoods abroad. Expatriate youths live in a highly mobile and culturally complex environment and the teenagers found myriad ways to negotiate, forge, perform, and contest their forms of belonging and positions in their social worlds. My ethnographic work examined these ways and revealed two seemingly contradictory tendencies in their everyday practices. On the one hand, there are those daily activities and ways of living that maintain rigid cultural and class divisions, often tied to a wish for comfort and continuity, but also to feelings of superiority and hopes for status creation and future benefits; on the other hand, there are practices informed by curiosity and self-reflexivity allowing and fostering the emergence of transcultural perspectives.

These first practices of demarcation and distinction became very apparent in the youths' spatial divisions of the city into expat and non-expat places as described in Part III, Chapter 1, which are also succinctly illustrated in the students' mental maps (such as in Figure 8). These practices are also evident in the absence of friendships or even contact with Chinese youths (see Part IV, Chapter 4). This lack of exchange with local teenagers—or local citizens in general—is fostered by the withdrawal into gated communities with a high percentage of foreigners (see Part III, Chapter 2) as well as by the fact that international schools are not allowed to take in Chinese students due to prohibitive rules by the Chinese government (see Part III, Chapter 3). Engaged in practices of demarcation from the local environment, the young privileged migrants, nevertheless, claimed urban and cosmopolitan identities. My study shows that for expatriate youths, as Hindman (2009a, 250) observed of adult expatriates in Nepal, "culture is important as a means of justifying their presence abroad," but difference is often only allowed in a prescribed, safe "niche" and in a "commodifiable form" (*ibid.*, 267). Similar to Brosius' (2010) investigation of the everyday lives of India's middle class, such cosmopolitanism can be seen as "a practice of status-creation" (2010, 26). Shanghai's urban environment often only provides the backdrop for learning and claiming cosmopolitanism or expatriateness. The skills acquired through the experiences in Shanghai bring status and competencies or, as Binder (2005) calls it, "globality," to the youths. This globality must be seen as a cultural resource in the Bourdieusian sense—as capital. The ways in which students imagine their future careers proved this particularly well. Growing up abroad and receiving an international education are considered by expatriate students (see Part III, Chapter 3) and the community—as the graduation speech held by the principle of the German school illustrated in the previous chapter—to be clear benefits of global mobility. In Shanghai, the international schools

consider providing, fostering, and ultimately transforming their students' global experiences into globality and capital, to be part of their educational duties. Globality is a community marker and value. However, while international schools foster an international community that sees itself as open-minded, diverse, and cosmopolitan, they do so without including the local neighborhood, Shanghai, or China as a whole. While expatriate youths and their families create their own communities, often revolving around these schools, they demarcate themselves from Shanghai "locals" as well as from those back "home"—both are perceived as lacking international experience. The performance of a collective expatriate identity is thus not only tied to aspiring to and learning cosmopolitan values, but simultaneously connected to practices of demarcation from "others" perceived as less mobile, globally connected, and educated.

Nevertheless, looking at these processes, the age-specific context has to be kept in mind: parents play the major role in planning their children's lives and making decisions in their "best interest" (see Ackers and Stalford 2004; Hutchins 2011), as exemplified in youths' retrospectives on leaving in Part II, Chapter 1.

In my view, many "expatriates' places" in Shanghai were not spaces that particularly fostered the process of transculturation because transculturation means a process of allowing space for difference (Hoerder, Hébert, and Schmitt 2005), rather than leaving difference outside the walls, putting it in a "niche," or staging it as the "other." These demarcation processes, which circumscribe so much of the teenagers' lives in Shanghai, could render the application of the term "transcultural" to the accumulation of experiences that I identified as globality far-fetched. After all, "transculturation is the process of individuals and societies changing themselves by integrating diverse cultural life-ways into dynamic new ones" (Hoerder, Hébert, and Schmitt 2005, 13).

However, my ethnography revealed that the young migrants' activities and viewpoints were significantly informed by curiosity and self-reflexivity, thus allowing and fostering the emergence of transcultural perspectives. When spending time with youths and listening to their subjective experiences of their transient stays in Shanghai, I encountered many reflections that were concerned with culturally complex entanglements, experiences, and challenges that forced these teenagers to position themselves in a world that others often culturally divide for them. These subjective experiences of in-between positions linked to processes of transculturation complicated and challenged the focus on demarcation and status-gain that I had witnessed and which other studies on expatriates have focused on. The examined processes of identity positioning and the meaning of the stay for different expatriate teenagers, as highlighted in Part I, Chapter 4, as well as their fluid, translocal, and multiple conceptions of home and belonging, as analyzed in Part III, Chapter 2, showed that the generation of expatriate teenagers that I worked with was often forced to negotiate difference, regardless of how hermetic the expat "bubble" may have seemed.

In contrast to their parents, some children lacked a deep understanding of their “home culture,” since some of them had only been born in their “home country” but left it at a very early age; others only knew “their” country from the occasional holiday spent there with family. Furthermore, many of the youths came from mixed marriages or were second generation migrants who had become mobile again and “returned” to China for a certain period. Many of the expatriate teenagers I met therefore had to find ways to bridge differences between parents, or school and parents, on a daily basis, and from an early age. Additionally, being in China provoked reflections on social practices and shared values. Some students, like Karina, who after her stay chose to major in Chinese at college, or those like Antonia, Charlie, Don, or Arnaud, who had Chinese family backgrounds, continuously reflected upon their own “Chineseness.” In short, the specificity of China mattered.

Furthermore, the move’s impact on relationship networks—such as being away from extended family and friends—triggered all the students to think about themselves, their cultural identities, and what was important for them to feel at home. Some reflected on cultural or educational influences (see for example Paul’s thoughts in the Introduction, or those of Antonia, Xia, and Arnaud in Part IV, Chapter 1), while others considered mostly class and their expatriate status (see Bjorn’s comments, also in Part IV, Chapter 1). While my influence as an ethnographer cannot be denied, these findings resonate with Melissa Butcher’s description of Australian transnational professionals and their experiences in Asia: “Transnational movement subsequently engenders a process of identity re-evaluation as mobility, and inevitable contact with difference, disrupt the familiar cultural frames of reference that underpin identities, including established relationship networks” (Butcher 2009, 1354).

My ethnography, therefore, recognizes the students’ emerging abilities to cope with changes and difference as part of the development of a transcultural perspective. It is this transcultural perspective that enabled them to reflect upon their culturally complex environment and its meanings for and influences on their own positions and narratives of the self. These transcultural perspectives functioned as tools to re-find spaces and moments of comfort in diverse and mobile cultural contexts, whether at an American or German school, an expatriate nightlife location, at Chinese grandparents’ homes, or in mixed-marriage family life.

SPATIAL PRACTICES AND EMPLACED EXPERIENCES

My third research aim was to analyze expatriate youths’ everyday spatial practices and their (dis)engagement with the “local.” Dynamic relations between spatial boundaries, their transgressions, and the claiming of expatriate and age identities were brought sharply to the fore in my examination of students’ everyday practices of social space. Youths in Shanghai

experienced less spatial and social constraints than youths in Europe, particularly regarding access to restaurants, bars, and nightclubs (see Part IV). Despite this relative sense of freedom, Shanghai students experienced most of the everyday spaces they frequented as highly regulated due to the strict processes of demarcation that the expatriate community undertook to define for itself; examples are the spaces of the gated communities and the international schools (Part III).

Students' practices in these spaces were diverse and contradictory. Looking at "diaspora space" (Brah 1996) in Shanghai—the encounters and moments of entanglement between the privileged migrants and those who stayed in Shanghai—it became clear that a strong local-expat divide was maintained, making the transgressions difficult for expatriate teenagers in general. Only a few locations, like the shop, provided a shared space for locals and expat youths. But while the shop played a central role, it is set outside the glamorous image of the metropolis, and it is this image, rather than any direct, unregulated involvement with its actual inhabitants and spaces, that led to students' identifications with Shanghai. Nevertheless, the teenagers' turning towards the city's transnational spaces and aiming to be part of the city's cosmopolitan image still professes, at least to some extent, their engagement with the contemporary situation in China's megapolis. The relationship between expatriate youths and their physical environment shapes their everyday lives as much as the expatriate networks that they belong to. Their interaction with their immediate surroundings offers a way to not only cope with the difficulties of the overall migration experience, but also to represent this experience as worthwhile and successful. Shanghai's urban environment provided students with the backdrop for learning and claiming certain forms of cosmopolitan identity that I have identified specifically as "expatriateness" (see Part III, Chapter 3).

RETURNING TO WHERE?

Although Shanghai is an exciting city, the majority of the teenagers from the German school chose to "return" to their "home" country, which many of them only knew from early childhood or holidays. However, as Antonia and Mia's accounts show, there is no simple homecoming to a certain, stable status quo. The idea of "home," as I argue throughout this ethnography, is a complicated matter and is tied to various emotions and places. Home is also a matter of perspective.

Two years after leaving China, the idea of "return," for Mia and Antonia, is becoming linked to Shanghai: the city is still a connecting place in their friendships to which they frequently retreat—imagined, virtually, or physically—to strengthen their ties and to find emotional support. During an interview in the summer of 2014, Mia and I are sitting in her room in a shared student flat and I inquire about her current relationship to Shanghai. Mia explains when and how she and her friends remember the city:

MIA: *When, for example, I'm in contact with Antonia, Charlie, and so on, that is a group in which everyone has very strong ties to Shanghai. [...] Because we all lived there for such a long time, and were together in this group, we all were always so, we completely hyped it. [...].*

INTERVIEWER: <L>

MIA: *That we keep saying: "Oh, we want to go back and everything was so great." [...] A few of them still have parents who live there, so they are there quite often. [...] And then you talk a lot about it, you send photos back and forth, and that's why, at these times, when someone is visiting, it is particularly strong. But we generally talk a lot about it.*

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MIA: *Yes, especially when we see each other. It's, I don't know ... Did Antonia show you the poem I wrote?*

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Yes.

MIA: *I wrote these [lines] about, well, how we drink to a city that we love, and that is somehow ...*

INTERVIEWER: *It really made me think of concrete situations in which we actually did that.*

MIA: *True, and it is always like that when we see each other. [...] In that respect, there is certainly a very strong connection. [...] I often look at old pictures, but at the same time that somehow depresses me a bit. I don't know, it's always like, I am simply homesick. [...] I think about it a lot, and I have many things in my room that remind me of it. [...] When you drink tea, you drink it out of a Shanghai Starbucks mug. [...] This kind of connection is always there, really, pretty much every day. But of course it is sometimes stronger and sometimes weaker. But, erm, for example if you, if friends who still live there, if they post pictures, then you're always like, "oh, how beautiful," and then I really enjoy looking at these. Also from people who I don't know, or only vaguely.*

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MIA: *And then, if you follow them on Instagram, and then you see, "ah, didn't they post a nice picture of the skyline." [...] I really like looking at those.*

INTERVIEWER: <L>

MIA: *Yes, I simply enjoyed living there, and it's just simply, you don't forget that right away.²⁶*

26 German original: MIA: *Wenn ich zum Beispiel mit Antonia, Charlie und so weiter Kontakt hab, das ist ja total so 'ne ganze Gruppe wo wir alle 'nen sehr starken Shanghai-Bezug haben. [...] Dadurch dass wir da alle so lange gelebt haben und in dieser Konstellation so zusammen waren, waren wir alle auch immer so, dass wir das einfach total gehypt haben [...].* INTERVIEWER: <L> MIA: *Also, dass wir halt immer sagen: „Oh, wir möchten zurück und es war alles so toll.“ [...] Von ein paar von denen*

To former expatriate youths “returning” is a practice of remembering and reviving old connections while simultaneously establishing new ones and exploring new places, rather than moving back to a fixed geographical location or network.

Despite a “return” to Germany, their lives are still characterized by ties to diverse locations and by global mobility. Consequently, although feelings of belonging to the new environment are being established, they are often also experienced as contested. For expatriate youths spaces of “home” and notions of “return” also remain extremely mobile—or perhaps especially after leaving the transit space of Shanghai and moving to those countries that issued their passports.

MY PERSONAL STANCE

The narratives of the teenagers’ experience as they passed through Shanghai have often touched me. Their simultaneous ignorance, acceptance, and unwarranted transgressions of cultural boundaries at times irritated me, and their occasional lack of interest in Chinese society shocked me. Their attempts and abilities to cope with constant change and difference impressed me, and their honest reflections upon and willingness to share their own lives enlightened me. To capture their positions, which are on the one hand marked by privilege, and on the other by extreme dependence and painful uprootings, was a personal and academic challenge; as I have shown, the characteristics and the varieties of teenagers’ experiences of privileged migration are very diverse. But all these youths considered

wohnen ja noch die Eltern da, das heißt die sind dann auch öfter da. [...] Und dann redet man ja auch viel darüber, und dann schickt man Fotos hin und her, und deswegen, also zu den Zeiten ist es immer besonders stark, wenn halt da grade jemand zu Besuch ist. Aber auch sonst reden wir schon viel darüber. INTERVIEWER: Ja. MIA: Ja oder besonders auch wenn wir uns sehen. Also es ist, ich weiss nicht, hatte Antonia dir eigentlich dieses Gedicht gezeigt, was ich geschrieben hatte? INTERVIEWER: Ja, ja. MIA: Ja, und da hatt ich ja auch diese [Zeilen] geschrieben von wegen, ja wir trinken auf eine Stadt die wir lieben, so ein bisschen, und das ist halt auch irgendwie ... INTERVIEWER: Da musste ich auch wirklich an so konkrete Situationen denken, wo wir das gemacht haben. MIA: Genau, und so ist es halt immer, wenn wir uns sehen. [...] Also in der Hinsicht ist auf jeden Fall ein sehr starker Bezug da. [...] Ich kuck mir halt auch wirklich sehr oft alte Bilder an, aber gleichzeitig deprimiert mich das auch irgendwie so ein bisschen. Ich weiß nicht, das ist immer so, es ist halt einfach Heimweh dann [...]. Ich denke viel darüber nach und ich hab ja auch viele Sachen in meinem Zimmer die mich irgendwie daran erinnern [...]. Wenn man Tee trinkt, trinkt man halt aus so 'ner Shanghai Starbucks-Tasse. [...] Also so ein Bezug ist auf jeden Fall immer da, also wirklich auch jeden Tag. [...] Aber natürlich ist es mal mehr, mal weniger. Aber ehm, zum Beispiel auch wenn man dann von Freunden die da noch wohnen, wenn die dann Fotos posten, dann ist man immer so: „Aah, wie schön,“ und das kuck ich mir dann auch wirklich gern an. Oder von Leuten die ich dann nicht kenne, sondern nur um zwei Ecken. INTERVIEWER: Ja. MIA: Wenn du dann irgendwie auf Instagram denen folgen kannst, und dann siehst du, „Ach was haben die nicht wieder für ein schönes Foto von der Skyline gepostet.“ [...] So was kuck ich mir schon echt gerne an. INTERVIEWER: <L> MIA: [...] Ja ich hab da einfach gerne gewohnt, und dann ist das dann so, dass man das nicht so schnell vergisst.

passing through Shanghai a chance to gain a new outlook. It remains to be seen if, in time, these transcultural perspectives will manifest themselves either in rigid identity positions that claim cosmopolitanism or globality solely for themselves (see my argumentation against the concept of TCKs in the Introduction), or if they will instead be able to keep their flexibility and creative ways of incorporating difference.

It is beyond the aim of this ethnography to make concrete recommendations on extended family stays abroad, but the stories in this book suggest—at least to me—that it is wise to involve children in the decision-making process and, once the decision is made, in the preparations for the move. Furthermore, while it is important to create a familiar comfort zone, parents can also set an example of how to engage with new environments by not simply withdrawing into “bubbles.” I am convinced that open-mindedness and a shared eagerness to explore can help all family members make their stay more meaningful than the advancement of the breadwinner’s career alone ever could. Such an attitude can support children in forging new experiences into self-reflective transcultural perspectives that are based on an empathy for and appreciation of differences, and to help overcome the rigid divisions of nationality, gender, class, or ethnicity that are still present in all our lives.

FUTURE STUDIES

Many questions remain unanswered. I want to address four points that are worth, even crucial to, exploration in further research.

First, now that I have traced the “here-and-now” (Bucholtz 2002, 532) of students’ migration experiences, their future paths could be explored. A longitudinal approach is necessary to trace the impact of growing up on the move on their future careers and lifestyle choices. The influence of the teenager’s social situations on their educational and career trajectories has long been caught in a conundrum of structure versus agency (Milner 2004, 15–17). As suggested earlier, following the ways in which expatriate children, such as my informants, exercise their privileged upbringing and what kind of rigid or mobile subjectivities they would choose to keep as identity references will be a worthwhile endeavour.

Second, I agree with Fechter and Walsh (2010, 1207), who point to the need to “produce research that does engage with locals’ perspectives on expatriates in a variety of contexts.” For studies looking at expatriates in China, this means we need a focus on Chinese locals’ points of view on expatriates to flesh out issues such as demarcations between the communities and the lack of contact between locals and expatriates, or to investigate the complex dynamics of race in everyday life in China.

Third, the question of what role China specifically played in the students’ development remains partly unanswered and also constitutes a significant concern for further research on the topic of expatriate youths.

To address this concern meaningfully, comparative research on expatriate youths' experiences in other locations is needed. Although Chinese or Shanghainese particularities have been pointed out in the present study, it is not possible to determine the extent to which the "host" country influenced the age-specific experience of these privileged migrants. While the practices of demarcation and boundary drawing, for instance, seem to be very similar to those adult expatriate communities—whether in Jakarta (Fechter 2007a; Fechter 2007b), Dubai (Walsh 2006a; Walsh 2006b; Walsh 2008; Walsh 2011), Singapore (Beaverstock 2002; Beaverstock 2011), Nepal (Hindman 2009a; Hindman 2009b), Hong Kong (Yeoh and Willis 2005; Willis and Yeoh 2008), Sao Paulo (Dobeneck 2010), or Saudi Arabia (Glasze 2006)—the youths' experiences can vary greatly in respect to the schools they attend. Different school systems and the enrollment of local students in other countries could make mixing with "local" youths easier elsewhere than it is in Shanghai where the spaces to interact are particularly limited.

Lastly, a study that brings together experiences of privileged and less privileged forms of youth migration would undoubtedly yield important insights into children's strategies of coping with family migration generally. Combining these research fields, which until now have been approached separately, can, for example, highlight the challenges, but also the strengths and capabilities of young migrants from less privileged backgrounds, who are often marginalized because of their circumstances and whose skills often remain unacknowledged. The longing for continuity and reminders of "home" that expatriate youths experience can provide a much-needed bridge to understanding practices of migration that are perceived as foreign or not adapted enough—something which politicians or media in western societies tend to dismiss as leading towards a "parallel society." In this context, combined research into the various forms of youth migration can elucidate the important role played by institutional support, for example from schools.

The teenagers I accompanied were privileged in many ways and their advantaged positions, which allowed them to compensate for the losses and anxieties that moving brought with it, are in stark, even shocking contrast to the hundreds of thousands of refugees that are currently seeking asylum in Europe. Comparing these different circumstances, along with the agency that children and teenagers can develop by coming to terms with them, could inform policies and services that help migrant children and youths with the challenges they have to face. The resulting insights could contribute to establishing adequate assistance at schools and community centers and to creating shared spaces that encourage self-reflection and the development of the transcultural perspectives needed to manage the consequences of global mobility.