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**Global Women at  
Risk:  
Psychological Landscape of  
Young South Korean Women  
Studying and Working in London**

**2020**

**MPhil Thesis**

**Cho, Chang-Eun**

**Media and Communication**

**Goldsmiths College, University of London**

Declaration of Authorship I, Cho, Chang-Eun (Apple), hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Cho, Chang-Eun (Apple) 27 Jan 2020

## Abstract

This thesis will argue that the strategic reconstruction of intimacy in the private sphere leaves young female South Korean educational migrants participating in the global meritocracy in ever increasing numbers emotionally and psychologically vulnerable. Using in-depth interviews and mobile ethnography, this dissertation contemplates the everyday life experiences and psychological landscape of 19 young female South Korean educational migrants in London to understand their motivations for migration and the outcomes. Although the women in this study come from different backgrounds, they had all migrated to London in order to gain economic, social, and cultural resources, that is, flexible citizenships, to ensure their upward mobility in the global meritocracy. They went believing opportunities were accorded based on individual capacity, but even in the newly reconstructed spaces of globalised universities and transnational companies, they found the cosmopolitan structure to be biased. As a result, many women in my study felt isolated, enduring varying degrees of loneliness and depression that they couldn't adjust during their migration. These negative feelings from isolation to depression that they experienced are entangled with this flawed structure and demonstrate that the meritocracy is unequal in terms of gender, class, cultural background/ethnicity/race, and nationality. To counterbalance the inequality and achieve the initial goal of educational migration, that is, legal, social, and cultural flexible citizenships, they rationalised and instrumentalised intimacy and emotion in romantic relationships, friendships and social relationships, and familial relationships. However, these contractual relationships deprived them of the important bonds that build on trust, loyalty, reciprocity, and commitment, resulting in a lack of emotional support and inner energy and thus a disorganisation of their private sphere. As such, this study challenges previous women migration studies that claim participation in the global meritocracy emancipates and empowers women instead finding it takes a toll on women, causing disorganisation of the private sphere and consequently emotional vulnerability.

Key words: young South Korean women, educational migration, global meritocracy, cosmopolitanism, reconstruction of intimacy, instrumentalisation of emotion, disorganisation of the private sphere

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

After all the interviews I conducted researching the migration experience and all the time I spent with young South Korean women who had migrated for higher education and work in London, I still I had one unanswered question on my mind. Why were they psychologically vulnerable and fragile when they had successfully migrated to the UK? Evidence emerged of the psychological strain that was so damaging to their mental health that I had to wonder why these young women stayed. Once I had really started to analyse the raw data, I realised these women were a mass of contradictions.

They proved their bravery, adventurousness, and independence when they flew for 11 hours to live in London alone for education and work. But, as I got to know them better, I saw a vulnerable and fragile side to their psyche. On the one hand, most of them were high achievers at university and in their careers, very much the picture of the modern woman creating her own happiness. On the other hand, they were plagued by feelings of loneliness and depression (not clinical but situational). But most contradictory of all, they were in fact very much dependent on their mothers, to the extent that it made me wonder if it would be possible for them to pursue their goals in London without their mothers helping them. In order to find the answer to my question, I started to pair these contradictions, their independence and dependence, their show of happiness to mask feelings of depression, their progressive spirit and adherence to traditional norms, and their sociability and loneliness. This thesis is the result of this these comparisons.

To begin, though, this thesis analyses the psychological landscape of 19 young South Korean single women who migrated to London for higher education, work, and to participate in the global meritocracy in the last 20 years. The women in this research believed that through their capacity and achievement they could join the “global class” or become “global elites”. The aspects of being global elites that appealed to them most was the free mobility, social privilege, and the opportunity for a new lifestyle that includes uninhibited consumption. With that belief firmly in mind, they migrated to institutions of higher education, making use of a migration channel that would allow them to later seek employment in London or elsewhere. Those who sought to avail themselves of the freedom, potential, and capacities “legal, social, and cultural flexible citizenships” (Ong 1999; Fong 2011) provide planned to used their educational migration



as a stepping-stone to other cities and countries. Those educational migrants who decided to return home took with them the knowledge, skills, language proficiency, and the self-discipline that set them apart as social and cultural citizens of the developed country (Fong 2011: location 350 of 5584). Their abilities and talents are especially valued in countries such as South Korea that have embraced the global neoliberal system.

However, their seemingly positive and glamorous migration life came at the expense of their psychological well-being and feelings of security. Their feelings of insecurity and vulnerability sprang from their reconstruction of intimacy, a reconstruction that saw them rationalise emotion and instrumentalise the private sphere. Once realising the perils of migration characteristic of frequent mobility and short-term stays, the women in this research attempted to optimise romantic partners. Seeking those who would be helpful for their career so that they could 'have-it-all' in education, work, romance, and love, they would evaluate the people they met as social capital and rate how beneficial they might be to them. Instead of seeing people as potential friends, partners, or trusted colleagues and building a relationship based on trust and commitment, they saw assets. They even instrumentalised relationships with family members all with the goal of achieving social mobility and securing upward mobility for themselves through education in a developed country and a global career. Unlike their friendships and intimate relationships, however, these young women's families would also benefit from their elevated status in the world. In the end, the happiness and satisfaction they expected from leading exciting, cosmopolitan lives fell short of what they had imagined. Their disappointment was made worse by the fact that they hadn't nurtured their inner selves, leaving them easy prey to depression. These "disorganizations of the private sphere" (Furedi 2013:218) consequently caused these young women to be confused by their disappointment and vulnerable to feelings of futility.

It is difficult to plot an evolution that might explain these women's feeling since most migration studies on highly educated or skilled migrants so far have concentrated almost exclusively on men (Kofman 2000; Mahler 2001). To date, migration studies focusing on women migrants have concentrated on the trailing spouses of skilled male migrants or the marriage migration of women from lower classes or 'the third world'. As a result, these studies have entirely ignored the worldwide phenomenon of new and diverse migration patterns, as well as the experiences of 'new women' who migrate for higher education and skilled work. To help rectify this dearth of information and lack of diversity, I interviewed women from diverse backgrounds and different stages of life in researching the educational migration of the young, single South Korean women.

Though on the surface they may appear a homogenous group – all highly educated, single women – there were differences. Their financial situations ranged from living in luxury to working as low-skilled workers. And though my interviewees were all single and their migration was constrained by “marriageability” (Willis and Yeoh 2013: location 2272 of 4592), their views and choices regarding marriage varied greatly as well.

Though all my interviewees were short-term migrants or “serial migrants” (Ossman 2013) who continuously came and went between their home country or on to other countries, I saw some shared experiences when I consulted research on permanent immigrants. By combining existing research with my new findings, I will present empirical data about the diverse layers of this recent ‘new migration’ of young South Korean women. Gradually more recent migration studies on women are researching highly educated or skilled women migrants. They mainly focus on the economic perspective and quantitative statistics, or their agency and strategies. Agency studies interpret migration as an opportunity for women to expand their lives and become empowered as actors in their own migration plan. Thus, these studies interpret agency as a resistance to their oppressed position (in the sending country). However, the agency of women migrants does not always result in emancipation or empowerment, and their strategy of resistance can become a new trap. This research examines not only their experiences, agency, and strategy, but also the women’s emotional well-being and the psychological aspects of migration. By doing so, this thesis will challenge the argument that studies on agency and women’s migration have recently made. Interviewing a cross section of young South Korean women who relocated to escape their marginalised position as women in Korea, I will prove that their strategy of educational migration left them emotionally exhausted and exposed them to negative feelings. Ironically their relocation forced them into an even more vulnerable and oppressed situation. Providing empirical evidence, this thesis will argue that women migrants’ agency and strategy do not so much expand their life opportunities as impoverish their lives.

Moreover, this thesis will challenge the utopian ideal of cosmopolitanism by providing evidence that migration in the global meritocratic system is differently and unequally experienced in terms of gender, class, cultural background/ethnicity/race, and nationality. Cosmopolitanism is the liberal concept, even an utopian ideal, that everyone can and should freely move and encounter others on an equal footing and no one should be limited for any reason. However, this research observes how that non-white and non-European women migrants (in some cases in economic predicaments) are plagued with higher levels of physical and emotional exhaustion and fatigue. I

document their profound negative feelings such as depression, loneliness, alienation, and critical perfectionism, and their vulnerability due to impoverished intimacy. Relatedness, emotional closeness, and empathy are especially important for women in forming self-identity and maintaining a positive self-image more so than for men, regardless of whether they are socially constructed or naturally different. This research goes on to reveal that the psychological aspects of cosmopolitanism are in reality unbalanced and unequally constructed in relation to gender, although the material reality might be equal. The evidence proves that impoverished intimacy is the cost one pays for the opportunity to participate in the global meritocracy.

### **Participation of Young, Single South Korean Women in the Global Meritocracy**

Student mobility has started to rack up significant figures in regards to global migration in recent years. The number of mobile students has increased from 300,000 to 500,000 between 2004 and 2013 (British Council 2015b). South Korea is well-known for sending their students abroad with an estimated 200,000 students in 2016 spending over 220,000 million dollars studying abroad (Statistics Korea 2017). In 2016, 63,710 Korean students moved to the US to pursue a higher education and take language courses; 66,672 to China; 16,251 to Australia; 15,279 to Japan; 10,889 to Canada (Ministry of Education Korea [MOE Korea] 2017). It is estimated that 5,190 South Korean students moved to institutions of higher learning in the UK (HESA 2017), but if students studying in the private language courses were to be included the number could be as high as 11,885 (MOE Korea 2017). The number of South Korean students in the UK is expected to increase to 200,000 by 2020, a number that naturally includes female students (British Council 2015a). Most importantly though, especially to this research, is the fact that an estimated 60% of the South Koreans studying abroad are women (Kim, Y.N. 2013:1).

Globalisation and mobility are not new, but the fact that young, single South Korean women are participating en masse is. They are inclined to participate in educational migration based on the belief that this move guarantees free movement and social prestige based on their capabilities and achievements, knowledge and skills, and youth and self-discipline. They are buying into the notion of global meritocracy, the idea that free

movement and social privilege are possible according to individuals' capacities and self-disciplines (or self-help). Global meritocracy is underlying goal in the phenomenon of "student mobility", "movement of young intelligent people" (Favell 2008), "high-skilled migration" or "race for the talent" (Shachar 2006), or even "millionaire migrations" (Ley 2011). Small though still considerable numbers of East-Asian young South Korean women and students have recently started participating in the global meritocratic movement (Kim, Y.N. 2013; Ono and Piper 2004).

The educational migration of young South Korean women was a way for them to participate in the global meritocracy. Newly reconstructed globalised cosmopolitan institutes of higher education, especially top-tier universities, have become an embedded part of the mobility culture and are the starting point for international career trajectories that are the hallmark of global meritocracy. But unlike the early days of South Korean educational migration that was open only to the elite, this group was made up of different subjects with different aims. Nowadays, young South Korean women took their admittance to the public sphere and the right to education and work for granted while postponing intimacy and marriage. Instead of seeing an advantageous marriage for their daughters, parents were now attempting to leverage social and class mobility for the family through their daughters' education and global career. Even the Korean government got in on the act, endeavouring to mobilise globally competent persons capable of competing in the neoliberal globalisation system. The UK government (or EU) played a role too, setting out to attract high skilled migrants in order to remain globally competitive and improve the domestic high-skilled labour market. The newly reconstructed globalised higher education/industry benefitted from the economic boost international student fees provided, and transnational companies benefitted from flexible and competent workers with strong ethics grounded in self-development and self-help. These different subjects with different aims combined to form a complicated migration structure in which these young women are propelled out into the world.

And many went willingly because in South Korea women still faced terrible discrimination. Some women in this research had gone into the South Korean job market armed with higher education and a strong work ethic only to find that they were either underemployed or overqualified. What was worse was that they faced unstable working conditions due to gender discrimination in the workplace. They realised they would have better success by joining of the "global class", seeking employment in foreign companies in Korea, companies in the developed countries, and transnational companies where

their achievements would be rewarded according to their capabilities regardless of gender. In addition, youth unemployment in the era of ‘growth without employment’ forced them to study abroad in order to be competitive in a tight job market. The young women in my research grew up observing the restructuring and mass unemployment under the influence of IMF (International Monetary Fund) and no longer trusted the nation to have their best interests at heart. As a result, they set up their own survival strategy. As neoliberal subjects, they have come to embody the ethics of self-responsibility and self-development. Caught between “global desire and global anxiety” (Kang, Y.J. 2006), young South Korean women strategically planned their educational migration in order to rise above their circumstances, as well as to overcome the oppression they faced as women by using their abilities and intelligences.

Positioned as I am as an insider researcher of the same gender and who is of the same class, generation, cultural background/ethnicity/race, and nationality, as well as having experience as an educational migrant in London, I do not judge them hastily or view them as victims or adherents of capitalism and dynamic global relations. Instead, I aim to analyse the influence of their educational migration as it interacted with the specific political-economic and social-cultural context in South Korea.

### **Vulnerability in a global meritocratic system**

Does the reality of the global meritocracy system that rewards and promotes according to ability meet the expectations of young South Korean women? Providing empirical data, this thesis will argue that the global meritocracy system is not equally experienced or “flat” as stated by a popular journalist and globaliser Tomas Friedman (Friedman 2000). Rather, it is differently experienced and constrained according to social factors such as gender, class, cultural background/ethnicity/race, and nationality.

On campus when young South Korean women were included, it was often only done to visibly uphold the universities’ diversity policy. Once these young women understood the role they were meant to play, this led them to believe that they were there just to raise the university’s profile and not truly wanted for themselves. This then led to feelings of disaffection and a gradual withdrawal from school activities. University officials regarded this lack of participation to be a deficiency on the individual’s part rather recognising it for what it is: a reflection of the structural issue of a poorly equipped

learning environment that was inhospitable to ‘global students’.

In some cases, a lack of participation could be directly attributed to a lack of time, which aggravated an already challenging learning environment. Unlike their upper middle-class peers who could rely on financial support from their families, young South Korean female students from low-income families were in a more precarious situation. These young women had to work to support themselves while still finding the time to study and apply for and complete an internship (usually unpaid). This extra complication limited the time they could dedicate to their studies, and as a result, their school performance suffered and many failed their exams. They were more likely to be physically and emotionally exhausted than their upper middle-class peers and more likely to experience negative feelings such as low self-efficacy, shame, and depression.

After graduation, these young South Korean women, these skilled ‘global workers’, were apt to be overqualified, compliant, and workaholics in order to obtain the right to remain. In the workplace, just in order to continuously project a self-assured and positive image while speaking English, they had to engage in “emotional labour” to manage their feelings so that outwardly they appeared self-confident. The emotional labour they practiced, however, wasn’t so much for the benefit of other people but a way to reassure themselves and bolster their self-confidence while speaking English and improving their proficiency and fluency. They were not only being judged on their English fluency, however, and realised the subtle divisions in the unofficial sphere based on cultural background/ethnicity/race/nationality could directly or indirectly affect their job opportunities and chances for promotion. To ensure they had an edge, they had to make an extra effort to build up their social networks. The women in my research struggled to maintain a precarious sense of equilibrium on the tightrope that is global meritocracy, especially when they were unbalanced by hidden elements to achieving success that had nothing to do with their capacities. For all their education, experience and work ethic, young South Korean women are in general apt to be excluded even in the newly reconstructed globalised and cosmopolitan spaces due to holdovers of a past discriminatory system based on class, cultural background/ethnicity/ race, and nationality.

This thesis shows their unequal experience in terms of gender by tracing how young women reconstructed intimacy during migration. Reconstructed intimacy or how one builds relationships in the private sphere is now being affected by the public sphere and the new economy. Due to the new economy’s way of doing business, work schedules have

been restructured, resulting in part-time, irregular work, and project-based jobs that have replaced the Monday to Friday 40-hour week. This has weakened bonds based on trust, loyalty, and commitment. Bonds that would normally be gradually established over a prolonged period of time. In this new economy of short-term and temporary jobs, individuals who form and sustain a sense of self through relationships with others are at risk of feeling disenfranchised (Sennett 1998:27). Alternatively, self-serving individuals who wouldn't reveal their weaknesses in the public or even private sphere thrive under these circumstances, building purely strategic alliances with others without investing emotionally. Regardless of personality type, the new economy leads to a "disorganization of the private sphere" that causes the self to become diminished and in some cases vulnerable (Furedi 2004: 104-105). The deteriorating relationships and the disorganization of the private sphere described by sociologist Frank Furedi run parallel to the "rationalization of emotion" or "commercialization of emotion" that sociologist Eva Illouz conceptualised (2007). In discussing the increasingly intertwined relationship between economic activity and emotion in the new economy, Illouz notes that romance and love have become something people manage and control with economic rationality. According to her, there are unprecedented possibilities for relationships as technology develops, but "rationalization and instrumentalization" of the private sphere will in the end drain people of their emotional resources (111).

Educational and serial migration significantly contribute to the drain on emotional resources. Educational migration intentionally moulds (prospective) skilled workers to fit into the new economy. Adding to this, serial migration forms spatial-temporal sites where the characteristics of the new economy such as frequent relocations, short-term stays in a one place, long distances from family and old friends, and short-term shallow interactions with new people become entrenched. The young South Korean single women in this study chose educational migration as an extension of their wish to move into the public sphere, unlike the previous generations of women that remained in the private sphere and maintained long-lasting relationships. In order to have some semblance of balance between the public and the private sphere, they rationalised emotions so that they could reconstruct intimacy in such a way that they felt that they had control. They attempted to instrumentalise their emotions and sought romantic partners who would help them achieve a balance between education/work and romance/love. They made strategic alliances with their family members, especially their mothers, to obtain financial support. To an outsider it would appear that they had everything anyone could hope for.

However, did their agency enable them to acquire everything they wanted from their education, work, romance, and love? Did their strategic alliances with people and instrumentalised filial duty make them as free and happy as they expected to be after obtaining flexible citizenship? What is sure is that their strategy ironically made them more vulnerable by weakening the relationships that provide emotional security and inner resources. Though their alliances were strategic, they tended to be superficial and based on what a person could offer them. Since their relationships were so shallow, they could not fully trust others, which inevitably hindered them from freely expressing their emotions and feelings. By fearing to frankly reveal their inner selves, this diminished their emotional life and disorganised their private sphere by making it difficult to form bonds based on trust and loyalty (Furedi 2004:82-83). In fact, the majority of young South Korean single women I interviewed confessed to feeling continuously lonely during their time in London. But rather than find companionship in romantic relationships, they would sooner avoid them entirely if there was a risk that they would interfere in their education and career. The strategy to rationalise and instrumentalise intimacy consequently left them lonely even in the company of others. This absence of emotional security had them clinging to family for emotional support and craving approval of their achievements. With no other close relationships, they could only ever feel free to be themselves with their family. It became a Catch-22 in that they needed to make connections quickly in the host country, but the quickness of making the connections left them feeling vulnerable. Their vulnerability is not a physical one but an emotional one caused by the superficiality of the social construct of migration that has become an embedded element in the achievement-oriented meritocracy. Frank Furedi is one who has examined the vulnerability these new relationships bring especially in relation to the influence of medicalisation on modern society. Building on his theory, this thesis examines the influence a migration system centred on achievement and capacity has on neoliberal subjects and the impoverished psychological landscapes it creates.

Even though there are a few positive and successful cases, this research has intentionally focused on the adversities and sufferings many female educational migrants experience in order to reveal the dark side of educational migration. The side that the media tends to conceal by focusing on and celebrating successful educational migrants. Viewing the images of educational migration as a path to attain that 'global fantasy' through the rose-tinted lens of the media is how so many young women are misled. These pleasing but overall vague articles give so little useful information that



young women in South Korea are unaware of the risks of crossing borders. A move that often sees them trade the oppression of a patriarchy for the oppression of educational systems.

It is almost as if there is a conspiracy to conceal the negativity of educational migration and how vulnerable it leaves the migrants. Yet young South Korean women, often victimised during their migration, unwittingly contribute to the coverup. In order to preserve the veneer of social and cultural prestige that educational migration lends them, they tend not to speak about their suffering to family and friends back home. Even in the UK, the media only reports on the fortunate educational migrants from East Asia who have rich parents and are able to study abroad in style and comfort. This research attempted to closely examine the harsh reality of migration and expose the dangers of educational migration. I hope to mitigate even just a little of the damage the deluge of positive images of educational migration in the media has created. From the global education industry to the governments that need “global talents” to a global neoliberal system that needs to mobilise women to be mobile, flexible, and self-disciplined workers, the profits from the educational migration system are extensive. Something the media doesn't report.

### **Who are these young women?**

I applied post-feminist Anita Harris' methodology (2004a) to help categorise the young women in this research. In her studies, Harris has drawn attention to some of the contemporary ways that an imagined common experience of girlhood is constructed. She has also paid attention to the strategies used in making particular versions of young female identity seem normal, universal, and equally available to all. In addition, she has emphasised both the global image of girlhood and the specific and local meanings that contribute to the creation of this image. Applying Harris' methodology, this research defines young women in the global economy as sharing a specific global femininity that is based on an emphasis on higher education and work. According to scholars, public institutions and nations, each individual woman has attributes that qualify her to be a member of many different groups. This implies that young women should not be categorised or constrained by age or a developmental stage of life. That said, for the

purposes of my study, I limited the women I interviewed to those who were in their twenties or thirties during the time of my research. I purposely limited the age range so that the young women would have experiences in common at a local level, such as enduring the fallout from the IMF (International Monetary Fund) crisis and South Korean globalisation policies, and new media literacy.

In order to clarify that this research is about young women from the Republic of Korea, I used the term South Korea, which is more commonly used in the UK, instead of that of Korea, which is usually used within South Korean society. All interviews were conducted in Korean and all the transcripts cited in this research are my translation to English.

## **Chapter Breakdown**

Chapter 2 is a literature review and an examination of the discussions around transnationalism and gendered migration. This will be followed by reviews on South Korea's specific political-economic context based on familism culture and the 'new femininities' of young South Korean women. I will also examine the issue of "serial migration", which provides insights into the migration patterns and psychological landscape of the female migrants. Chapter 3 explains the methodology I used in my research. I will discuss the in-depth interviews I conducted with 19 people between 2008 and 2016, and of those 19 people, the 10 I selected for additional follow-up interviews during their migration period and after. This chapter outlines my recruiting methods, the interview summaries and the interviewees' biographies. Chapter 4 will scrutinise the power dynamics and the push-and-pull factors influencing the migration of young South Korean women for higher education and global careers. Their migration was constructed in the complicated interest relations of diverse actors: Korean and UK governments, globalised higher education/industry, the families of the young South Korean women, and the women themselves. Chapter 5 illustrates how young South Korean women experience migration according to cultural background, ethnicity, race, and nationality, as 'global students' in cosmopolitan universities newly modernised to have global appeal and skilled 'global workers' in transnational companies. By also examining the reality of the emotional vulnerability young women in economic predicaments face in the fields of academia and consumption, this chapter shows how the migration reality is

differently and unequally experienced according to class. Chapter 6 will examine how the strategy to instrumentalise emotion renders the women in this study psychologically vulnerable. Their strategy to rationalise emotion in intimate relationships such as romantic, social, and familial relations, ironically leaves them emotionally exhausted and susceptible to negative feelings such as depression, loneliness, and low self-esteem. In opposition to recent studies on migrant women, this chapter shows that the agency of migrant women does not so much increase as decrease their opportunities and life choices. Chapter 7 is the final chapter and the conclusion of this thesis. Here I present summaries of the other chapters and argue that the instrumentalization of intimacy goes hand in hand with global femininity in a world where young women's identities are formed around education and work as well as frequent travel.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

### Introduction

In order to construct a departure point for my thesis, I will review literature on the political-economic structure of the migration regime, migration institution, and individual migrant experiences, and then relate that to young South Korean women's migration. To start, I will briefly discuss the theories and realities of globalisation, transnational mobility, and cosmopolitanism. Then, I will move on to discussions of "new femininities" and intimacy, which will be followed by migration intersected with gender. To close this chapter, I will examine the effect of the South Korean economic, social and cultural context on young women, family, and studying abroad.

### Frameworks of globalisation

For the past three decades globalisation has been developing at a rapid rate, but some argue that the modern globalisation we see today started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (O'Rourke and Williamson 2002). Even though historians debate when, why and how globalisation truly started, for the most part they can agree that modern-day globalisation is distinct from previous centuries and can be summarised as "the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness about the world as a whole" (Robertson 1992:8). Zygmunt Bauman (1998) believes this temporal-spatial compression leads to the establishment of denser interconnected capitalism and increased mobility of capitals. According to Tomas Friedman (2000), integration of the global market and development of communication networks have "flattened" the world in such a way that nation-states must compete against each other as equal players. In his book titled *Risk Society*, Ulrich Beck (1992) writes that socially interconnecting vulnerabilities, such as the "risks" of environmental problems, terrorism, refugees and asylum seekers, and the necessity of taking action at the global level make the interdependence of discrete societies more acknowledged. Several scholars on globalisation hold that similarities among societies and collective exposure to the integrated process evoke the emergence of identity politics among different cultural groups, which leads to the "glocalization" of products that appeal to local identities

(Morley 2013; J. Friedman 1994; Robertson and White 2003). While opponents of internationalisation argue the merits of regionalisation (see i.e. Hirst 1996), globalisers view economic, political, social, and culturally intensified interconnectedness as “the emergence of one integrated world of rapid communication, transnational networks, and global financial capital”, as well as “hybridities and cosmopolitan orientations as an outcome of intensified interaction” (Eriksen 2014 [2007]: location 359 of 5493). However, of the many who have carefully examined globalisation, I have chosen to concentrate on and review the works of two scholars: Richard Sennett and Arjun Appadurai.

I will look specifically at Richard Sennett’s *The Corrosion of Character* and *The Culture of New Capitalism* where he examines the changes wrought by the neoliberal system in terms of global labour circulation and personal relationships (Sennett 2001 [1998], 2009 [2006 English version]). Sennett (2006) explores how this new form of capitalism has taken the antiquated rigid work structure and deconstructed it, introducing flexibility so that people and jobs are interchangeable. While this approach undermines a worker’s capacity to accumulate experience and become an expert in one field, new capitalism values the ability to quickly learn new skills, move fluidly between jobs, and adjust to an ever-changing rotation of short-term projects. These new evaluations of workers’ capabilities have instituted an unofficial scale that rates the workers from developing countries and their desirability in the meritocracy system based on their reputation for being mobile, self-disciplined, strongly motivated and highly educated. Those nations’ workers who have proved to embody all these qualities to a high degree are the ones most in demand in developed countries (2012:110). However, as much as new capitalism’s approach benefits companies and countries, these spurts of short-term employment hinder people from building up trust with colleagues and loyalty at work, inhibiting reciprocity with others that can grow from long-term relationships in the informal sphere at work. Since they are not forming relationships and building trust, they are not confident enough in their colleagues’ support to honestly reveal themselves as imperfect creatures. This loss of connection tends to make people feel vulnerable and insecure and as if there is no one they can rely on when needed.

Sennett’s theory of new capitalism is derived from his study of global workers’ mobility as a result of the fear of dismissal and the ensuing anxiety in developed countries. Although his study is focused on global workers, his hypotheses can easily be applied to the reasons young South Korean women have for moving to London for

higher education and work. His theory is eminently applicable not only in the examination of the global circulation of skilled South Korean young women in my study but in the reconstruction of intimacy in the changing world. Moreover, his contemplation of the reconstruction of intimate relationships in a changing world provides an insight to how the women in my study engage in relatively short-term intimate relationships with others during transitory migrations that are too brief to develop trustful relationships. I will use his arguments as a framework to explain the formation of global meritocracy my interviewees participate in and contribute to, as well as the reconstructed intimacy they practise in globalised spaces.

To help explain the uncertain, complicated, and unexpected characteristics of the global cultural economy, I refer to Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Here, Appadurai criticises the neoliberal hegemony that presumes the homogeneous process of globalisation and argues that due to global pressure the production of locality is continually challenged and only survives through constant 'struggle'. South Koreans have witnessed the effects of globalisation and global pressure first-hand, and for this reason so many young Koreans travel abroad for study and work. To help define the globalised spaces where the young women in my study come to reside, I will borrow to the term "ethnoscape" (2004[1996]:61-65), which was coined by Appadurai. In one word, Appadurai succinctly encapsulates the phenomenon of groups of people or individuals crossing borders and cultures in a way that alters the landscape in which they live. This concept most accurately defines the landscape that the young South Korean women in my study shape once they arrive in London. Young South Korean women are subjects who create their own global landscape by interacting with others in the host country and by interpreting their own migration experiences by themselves. This research focuses on the journey young South Korean women undertake as subjects and the new landscape they produce through their migration experience between Korea and London.

### **Transnational mobility**

One of the most significant works on the formation of transnational mobility from a macro perspective is Saskia Sassen's theories on the formation of global cities (1991). According to her, high-tech urban centres with well-established telecommunications conduct knowledge-intensive projects in fields such as finance and science to lure high-

skilled workers from all over the world to relocate to their cities. These “global cities” also attract low-skilled workers who maintain the cities’ infrastructures and provide services for high-skilled workers in the private sphere, such as childcare and housekeeping. The formation of these circuits of migration both at the high-skilled level and at the lower level is a result of transnational mobility. While Sassen (1991) focuses primarily on the city, Smith (2001) believes that transnational mobility should also be studied from an agency perspective. However, Sassen’s work can still be referenced to explain the lure of a global city such as London in regards to the transnational mobility of young South Korean women. It not only has the infrastructure for high-tech telecommunications, but it also has the facilities for higher education and training, enticing young and intelligent people to relocate there from all over the world. These highly recognised institutions of education and training function as an academic incubator where students can acquire the qualifications required to become knowledge-intensive workers and secure future employment in a high-skilled labour market in a large cosmopolitan city like London. However, while institutions of higher education and training in London are legal routes students take in pursuing transnational mobility and high-skilled jobs, there is the low-skilled labour market in London as well that provides them with part-time jobs and a way to earn a living during their education and training.

As such, students straddle the line between high-skilled aspirations and low-skilled labour, rendering their transnational mobility more complicated and multi-layered than those who travel abroad solely for work. Russell King and Parvati Raghuram point out that students’ mobility is not represented simply by the one-dimensional identity of scholar alone (King and Raghuram 2013:134-136). Students as migrants are often hybrid subjects of student-worker or student-refugee (they come as refugees and become students in the host society), and thus, those studying abroad should not be indiscriminately linked with the concept of privilege. King works to deconstruct the seemingly bipolar aspects of transnational mobility, such as process versus production, domestic versus international, voluntary versus involuntary, temporary versus permanent, and legal versus illegal. He points out that this complex and intricate assemblage of contrasts becomes blurred in the real-life fields of temporal-spatial flexibility, flow of globalisation, and motivations and positions of migrants (King 2002). Here, King’s discussions on blurred dichotomies in migration and transnational mobility provide an insight to the complex lives of young South Korean women during migration, from student-worker to voluntary-involuntary participant in the global meritocracy to single-possibly married (in the future) student-worker.

It should be noted that although Sassen only discusses the economic power that transnational mobility generates, these discussions in fact contribute to explaining social status and cultural capital as well. According to Alejandro Portes, who is a pioneer in studies of transnational mobility, new forms of resources and social power are created outside the nation-state's regulation within these spaces of international non-states. By being a citizen of one country and a citizen or denizen of two or more societies at once, transnational individuals are able to conduct transnational business, have the right of vote in two societies, and, for instance, promote democratisation in their homeland. As such, they develop economic, political, and cultural activities that create conditions necessary for successful social mobility, achieving a new kind of cross-national understanding and competence of living and working in different countries (Portes 1995). I find Portes' theory most helpful in understanding the characteristics that shape the migration of the young South Korean women in my study. These young women were not only attempting to communicate with family and friends at home but were working to create and belong to a network linking two or more countries at the same time. For instance, by establishing social networks in London, the women in my study could more easily find a job or access the information needed to navigate a life divided between Korea and London. They also have the advantage of being recognised in two or more countries/places as either a citizen or denizen of a developed country with social and cultural resources such as global literacy, skills, knowledge, and English proficiency (as explained below). These resources are necessary to obtaining the social power and cultural prestige necessary to achieve the social mobility that the young South Korean women in my study attempt to attain through their migration to London.

In her conceptualisations of "flexible citizenship" in the era of neoliberalism, Aihwa Ong similarly focuses on migrants in the Americas who engage in two or more societies at once and their resulting economic accumulation (Ong 1999). Migrants with dual or multiple citizenships (Faist and Kivisto 2007), or "flexible citizenship", have free movement, citizen rights and entitlements in two or more nation-states, and the opportunity to make connections, by which they accumulate capital. For instance, Chinese families living between Hong Kong and Canada increase their capital gains and guarantee their quality of life in both countries (Ley 2011). Chinese transnational families are encouraged to gain "flexible citizenship", by which men are counselled to become mobile businessmen and accumulate economic resources, while women (even professionals) are advised to marry and support the family and maintain transnational social networks. Even the children of these families have a role to play and are expected



to attend elite universities as a way of contributing to the family's cultural capital and social recognition in the host society.

While Ong mainly focuses on the legal and economic aspects of "flexible citizenship", Vanessa Fong, another American Chinese scholar in neoliberal transnationalism, explores transnational social power and cultural practices, as well as "differentiated legal citizenship" in contemporary transnational mobility. Fong expands on Ong's framework to introduce "legal flexible citizenship, social flexible citizenship, and cultural flexible citizenship" (Fong 2011) and broadens the scope of legal flexible citizenship by defining it as the right of abode, which only requires a residence permit or green card. By her definition, social flexible citizenship should include the assurance of a certain standard of living and access to education, work, and healthcare as a person's fundamental social rights and necessary for the fulfilment of subjective satisfaction in transnational life. According to her concept of flexible cultural citizenship, legal flexible citizenship and economic accumulation are just two basic elements of transnational mobility necessary to satisfy the barest conditions of social mobility. It should be noted that for an individual's transnational mobility to be considered a success, one must attain that unquantifiable "quality of life" (Favell 2003:420) in terms of social recognition and belongingness to communities. There are cross-national studies that reveal that even skilled migrants lack that elusive "quality of life" if they are excluded from social institutions and lack a sense of belongingness. Most interesting is her acceptance of the fact that university degrees earned in developed countries are recognised worldwide as a resource of flexible cultural citizenship. She writes:

Cultural citizenship processes can transcend national boundaries, as individuals are made and make themselves in the context not only of the societies in which they live and hold legal citizenship but also through the global neoliberal system, which assumes that all who acquire developed world discipline, skills, and affluence can become social and cultural citizens of the developed world, regardless of where they live or what is written on their passports. (2011: location 348 of 5584)

Fong's universal definition of flexible citizenship describes the explicit aims of South Korean women migrants through transnational mobility: economic, legal, social, and

cultural resources that South Korean women migrants aim to attain through transnational mobility. More important than accruing skills, knowledge, and English proficiency through global education, however, is the fact that these women with these skills have gained worldwide recognition and earned a level of respect. For this reason, young South Korean women in my study have the expectation that degrees from higher education institutes in London will qualify them for jobs not only in the UK and South Korea but also in other global cities and countries. For those who return home with an education certificate but without working in London or elsewhere it is not considered a failure. They have obtained the cultural capital for which they are recognised as “cultural citizens in the developed countries” and that alone is enough.

### **Cosmopolitanism**

As the globalisation process has created tighter connections all over the world, debates on cosmopolitanism, a term so popular in the 1990s, have been revived. Major social changes throughout the world inevitably necessitate new imaginations of how the world should be and how we should co-exist with others, looking at everything from improving social justice to solving environmental risks. Thus, some scholars have focused on defining the notion of cosmopolitanism in order to determine just how to go about handling these social changes. For instance, they defined the concept of cosmopolitanism as “overcoming the national identity as an ideological or naturalized constraint” (Beck 2006), “learning from each other’s differences through conversation” (Appiah 2010), or “identification of the self with the universal humanity” (Nussbaum 1998). Other researchers, though, are interested in cosmopolitanism as an ethico-political project, deciding that global institutions should configure international systems such as the implementation of an international justice system, criminal tribunal and human rights laws that would be applied to everyone in the world. However, these discussions on the notion of cosmopolitanism and political cosmopolitanism are cerebral and scarcely address how cosmopolitanism is experienced in everyday life. These prescriptive or moralistic ideals fail to take into account the lived experiences of cosmopolitanism that manifest in global social forms and hybridizing identities.

Unlike these other discussions, discourses on “everyday cosmopolitanism” emphasise cosmopolitan practices in real life and explore how ‘ordinary’ people from every level of

society practice cosmopolitanism and reshape their identity to adjust to a changing society. I will address the parts travel, emotional labour, and serial migration play in everyday cosmopolitanism in order to better understand the cosmopolitan social realities of young South Korean women in London.

To help underpin the travel experiences of these young women, I refer to James Clifford's "discrepant cosmopolitanisms" (1992), one of the most important theories addressing different lived realities concerning the cosmopolitan experiences of "travelling cultures". Finding the discourse of cosmopolitanism to be elitist and Eurocentric, Clifford includes marginal cosmopolitanisms by comparing privileged and unprivileged travellers, such as companion servants, guides, and migrant labourers, and giving them equal attention in his article titled *Traveling Culture*. He writes that "differential, often violent, displacement and transplantation impel locals to travel (22)", which causes many different cosmopolitan practices to co-exist in late modernity, with their own historicities and distinctive worldviews. His concept is not limited to the cosmopolitan reality of the working-class people that he primarily discusses, and he informatively includes deliberations on gender, ethnicity/race, age, sexual orientation, and so on. This helps give an accurate illustration of the diverse layers of contemporary cosmopolitan realities. I use the all-encompassing nature of Clifford's "discrepant cosmopolitanisms" (1992) to help frame the travelling experiences of not only the privileged women in my study but the underprivileged ones too.

To explain the emotional labour in engaging in everyday cosmopolitanism, I turn to Bingyu Wang and Francis L. Collins and their study of the 1.5 generation of Chinese migrants in New Zealand. They used the 1.5 demographic to explore how emotion is involved when 'ordinary' people from various backgrounds interact and live together in 'ordinary' sites such as schools and workplaces. According to them, becoming cosmopolitan or having cosmopolitan sociality requires sophisticated emotional flexibility and adaptability, and sensitivity. But most of all it requires an awareness of embodied differences to be able to read social cues in order to 'fit in' to diverse social settings and navigate cross-cultural encounters. Depending on the situation, these encounters can require the selective enactment of certain emotions and identities. In some cases when the setting is more formal, social encounters can even call for "emotional labour", which is the management of feelings in order to maintain smooth relations with others. Those individuals acculturated to the host society can usually engage in emotional labour well enough to adjust to contact spaces ("contact zone"), creating a sense of comfort ("comfort zone"). This enables them to build up meaningful

intercultural relations through emotional dynamics with others. However, those who lack these social skills and finesse frequently find their opportunities for cosmopolitan sociability to be quite limited. By examining the role of emotion and inner experience in cross-cultural encounters, Wang and Collins proved becoming cosmopolitan or having cosmopolitan sociality are not merely given but achieved through active negotiation and strategies (Wang and Collins 2016a, 2016b). The women in my study realised that to be successful they would have to actively employ these negotiations and strategies of cosmopolitan sociability to fit in while living in London. The emotional labour involved in fitting in to London society took a greater toll on some than others, something I will discuss in greater detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

The difficulty some young South Korean women encounter in adjusting to their host societies and the cosmopolitan reality of in London is compounded by their engagement in contemporary migration patterns known as “serial migration”. In Susan Ossman (2013) book *Moving Matters: Paths of Serial Migration*, Ossman defines the concept of “serial migration” as one that sees people migrate from their homeland to a host society, then return to their homeland only to migrate again later to another host country. This framework accurately describes the characteristics of the ‘new’ global mobility, which differs from cosmopolitanism, nomadic action, and immigration. Ossman notes that in serial migration adjusting to distinct cultural, political and social settings in the host societies inevitably involves inventing different versions of the self. She examines how the practice of crossing several borders and the necessary interaction with the host societies transform the identities of serial migrants. The conditions attached to crossing borders are circumscribed by social categories, such as class, gender, race/ethnicity, and nationality, which affect and constrain the migration experience and consequently the self-making process and identity. The harsh reality of serial migration is vastly different from the ideal of cosmopolitanism, which emphasises idyllic notions and political detachment. Though there are quite a few studies on gendered migration in a political-economic context, many omit the process of return and therefore fail to show the complete cycle of migration. Whether it be temporary migration or serial migration, one needs to trace the whole process of leaving-experiencing-returning in order to fully examine the meaning and practice of their migration, educational or otherwise.

In her book, Ossman examines “serial migrants” in London by documenting the experiences of two cases of (semi) skilled single migrant women. The first is a self-exiled

young woman from Cairo who has chosen the life of an expatriate in order to fulfil her ambition to be a “professional” and take advantage of “network opportunities” in America and London. She could either be viewed positively as a high-skilled and intelligent woman living in London for the experience, or she could be viewed negatively as a person living in London purely for economic accumulation. She admits that she endures the high cost of living in London in order to have access to high-paying jobs. Her plans include living in “a rural area surrounded by nature”, but until that time “work and a social life including people who appreciate her jokes in Arabic” in London satisfy her for now (113). The second woman in Ossman’s book is a domestic labourer from the Philippines. Even though she is a highly educated woman and is satisfied with life in her homeland, she voluntarily travels abroad as a labourer to experience the world. Even though she is vulnerable due to her limited legal status and her next destination is uncertain, serial migration still provides her a good life in Manila and covers her niece’s university tuition fees, which makes her feel like a “kind” person (96). Ossman makes a point of stressing the fact that serial migrants experience ‘ugly’ emotions as well, such as loneliness and feelings of stagnation. Her discussion reminds us that there are different and diverse cosmopolitan lived realities and the identities formed by these positive and negative experiences. So, while both these women are quite different, there are aspects of each of their experiences that in many ways are reflected in the women in my study. Strong intelligent women seeking higher education and skilled jobs but willing to take low-skilled jobs to get by and even commit to serial migration to fulfil their ambitions. All the women in this study at one time or another share at least some similarities with one or both of these women. Unfortunately, continually seeking cosmopolitanism experiences has also become a normalised practice so much so that young people feeling pressured to be globally competitive are starting to show symptoms of “global fatigue” (Abelmann 2009).

### **“New femininities”**

Feminists examine young women’s subjectivity in the era of post-feminism, which is a mixture of neoliberal capitalism, feminist politics (especially liberal feminist ethics), and traditional femininity in the late modernity of neoliberalism. Defining the “new gender regime”, or the reconstruction of gender norms, Angela McRobbie writes about the emerging “sexual contract” in which young women develop as workers in the global

knowledge economy, have a high level of education, gain the attention of family and government, achieve consumer power (in the “beauty complex”), and attain material rewards for their competence (McRobbie 2009). However, young women’s entry to this economic sphere does not necessarily lead to the emancipation of which feminist movements had dreamed. Individuals are required to make the most of their energy and resources to achieve a ‘new success’ without the benefit of fundamental changes to the patriarchal structure. McRobbie argues that while a few young women are successful most young women are left vulnerable and struggling in the clutches of a patriarchal cultural contract. As for the wide publicization of the few successful young women, she sees that as none other than a ploy and an apparatus for shaping and controlling the new female subject in the post-feminist era. Agreeing with McRobbie upon how the formation of the female subject is being manipulated, Australian feminist Anita Harris infers that the manoeuvring of a girl into the new female subject is an underhand attempt by governments to limit the risks to society posed by the new female workers (who ambitiously seek opportunities). In a bid to understand how the formation of the new female subject affects women, Harris conceptualises a “can do girl” and an “at risk girl” (2004a). Regrettably, she discovers that though on the surface “can do girls” appear to be in control, many young women experience the same mental health problems in dealing with risks as the “at risk girls” do. Furthermore, she finds that “can do girls” have to be seen as cured after suffering from a mental disorder before they can get back “on track”. Building on her subject theory frameworks, there is now empirical research on “new femininities” in Western literature. These studies show that highly educated women show lower job satisfaction than men because of poorer employment conditions (Mora and Carbonell 2009), which is causing new types of health issues (Love et al. 2011). At the same time, however, the celebration of traditional gender roles as child-centric mothers persist in the media (Kuperberg and Stone 2008).

McRobbie and Harris continue to map out how “new femininities” intersect with migration, conceptualising the “global girl” and “ambassador for the nation”. McRobbie describes “global girls” as transnationally mobile in the field of education and work, with the purpose of material rewards and self-actualisation. She notes that although they are in high demand in the global knowledge economy, they are forced to be compliant workers to retain the right to remain in the host country, or they face limited mobility under the conditions of consumer citizenship. McRobbie also expounds on the fact that many other young women are excluded from the prestige of education and limited to the hardship of unskilled labour. She states the opportunity for

a young woman's overall transformation is only possible through educational migration in the "global contact zone". Here they can interact and build relationships on reciprocity within power dynamics less coercive than the dichotomy of internationalisation between the West and the East. While their education can increase the possibility for social movements geared toward radical change, it can also create autonomous spaces for them, something Harris has dubbed the "jamming girl culture" (2004b). But while McRobbie focuses on the space of higher education, Harris examines the space of nation-states formed by the subjectivity of mobile young women. Successful stories of young female migrants are often presented and celebrated as a model of the ideal immigrant citizen by the media and the government, and from the neoliberal notions of self-invention and individual responsibility the construction of good citizens as immigrants is born. Those girls who overcome adversity as immigrants and embody this idealised version of themselves are endowed with what is in fact a DIY citizenship<sup>1</sup> or a reward for their desirable participation in the economy and appropriate behaviour in the communities.

The 'successful' stories of the few women to have high profile full-time jobs and obtain citizenships in London are like "illumination effects" for young women in South Korea and contribute to the shaping of the cosmopolitan subject in the South Korean context. The South Korean women in this research who are inspired by these stories and move away for higher education and better working conditions, often with full parental support, contribute to these changing femininities simply by postponing relationships and marriage. To give an overview, this research explores how "new femininities" intersect with South Korean women's migration experiences no matter how great or small their successes are ("New femininities" constructed in South Korea will be discussed in the section on Korean contexts in the last part of this chapter).

Young women's advancement in higher education and work has been closely linked to the rethinking of intimacy. Removed from the 'old' gender role of caregiver, young women voluntarily or involuntarily build up a new identity to survive economically. As they strike out on a new life path, it is quite different from men who only need to follow the traditional breadwinner model. Women are confronted with a

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<sup>1</sup> DIY citizenship is unlike the social rights automatically granted to natural citizens through regular channels. Instead, the young women in this study have to acquire social rights through self-invention and self-responsibility as self-made citizens: a DIY citizenship. See Harris (2004) for further information.

contradictory situation that arises from the transformation of labour markets and reinforced gender inequality and makes love, intimacy, and romantic relationships difficult even as they become more important than ever to surviving in an increasingly disconnected world. Both partners put a priority on “being themselves” and seek balance in “being together” with someone who is equally searching for one’s self. Moreover, within a “pure relationship”, which is maintained or changed according to immanent attributes (Giddens 1992), they need to endlessly make choices from a multitude of options, a variety of lifestyles, and all kinds of expectations and hopes for love. Any regional, national, and cultural differences only further complicate romantic relations and intimacy (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; 2014). In these situations, where an individual consents to participate in a romantic relationship as long as it is in no way detrimental to their prime objectives in their own lives, sensual relations tend to emerge as “cold” contractual relationships. While women have the right to agree to or reject any relationship, they are still at higher risk than men in the newly reconstructed intimacy regime due to persisting inequality (especially in a heterosexual romantic relationship).

Eva Illouz, a well-known sociologist of emotions, carries out a meaningful examination of the transformation of romantic relationships in the neoliberal age in her books on emotional capitalism, *Cold Intimacies* and *Why Love Hurts*, (2007; 2012). According to her, the development of telecommunication has created almost limitless opportunities to choose partners that ironically make it more difficult for men and women to commit to romantic relationships or marriages. Dating websites that are meant to ease finding a partner in fact offer so much selection that men and women struggle to devote themselves to one person. For those already in real relationships, they coast along half looking for a better partner instead of dedicating their full attention to the partner they have. This failure to commit epitomises the problems couples face in society today. In the process of finding an optimal partner, emotions are commodified, rationalised, and standardised. Romantic love with its associated feelings of spontaneity, “heat”, “magnetism” and “electricity”, is fundamentally neutralised by those who have “evaluated, inspected, discussed, bargained, quantified and commodified” it (109). As a result, emotions have become more closely harnessed to instrumental actions (23). Too much freedom and too many choices in relation to romantic relationships and marriage leave women more vulnerable in terms of intimacy and love. Their ticking biological clock, along with a tendency to pursue upper middle-class motherhood, results in a disproportionate number of women seeking partners in the expanded sex and marriage market. This imbalance has been further exacerbated



by the fact that cultural pressure on men to have children is incongruously easing. So, while men and women both struggle with the transformation of intimacy, the expectations placed on men seem to be decreasing, while hurdles young South Korean women face in negotiating intimacy, from postponing marriage to choosing partners during/for migration, are growing ever more complex.

## **Gender and migration**

This section will review how gender affects and constraints migration in relation to middling migration, low-skilled migration, and single women migration. Although gender is a strong social component of migration, it has been largely neglected in migration studies or treated as a marginal issue (Mahler and Pessar 2006; Pessar 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999). However, gender affects and limits migration, from an individual's decision-making on migration to the nation-state's migratory regulations and legislation (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999). Of late, female migrants make up more than half of the entire population of the contemporary global flow, forming "feminization of migration" (Castles and Miller 2013). This phenomenon urgently demands research, including qualitative and ethnographic studies, into gendered migration and on how migration affects women migrants' lives and vice versa.

In the field of gendered migration studies, Nicola Piper (and others) points out that research on the migration of skilled,<sup>2</sup> highly educated, middle-class single women is one of the most understudied areas (Kofman 2000; Piper and Roces 2004). Piper adds that marriage and work-related migrations have also been understudied even though they are closely intertwined and influence the (transnational) life-course of women migrants. Those studies on marriage migration for social mobility (i.e. mail-order bride) or migration as the trailing spouses of high-skilled men migrants or expatriates do not begin to address the complexity and multiplicity of women's migration, especially those who are unmarried or single. Neither do studies on the dichotomy between high-skilled migration, characterised by the 'the third world' brain drain, and low-skilled migration demonstrate the characteristics of the growing global flow of women migrants as students

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<sup>2</sup> I define "skilled" work as 'lower positioned work at the upper level' and "high-skilled" work as 'higher positioned work at the upper level'.

seeking higher education. My research will contribute to studies on middling migration by examining the educational migration and lives of unmarried/single women migrants and then creating a new category especially for them within the field of migration studies.

There are several political-economic migration systems that apply to the educational migration of young South Korean women. The three main ones I will address here focus on the brain drain, the “production of a colonial subject”, and the “survival circuit”. It has long been known that there is a brain drain of well-qualified women workers to developed countries, forming a circuit of high-skilled female migration from developing countries to developed countries (Findley and Li 1998; Piper and Roces 2004). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak warns that the educational migration of middle-class women from the Third World to the First World is no less than the “production of a colonial subject in order to administer a settled colony” (Spivak 1998:220). Sassen describes the flow of low-skilled women migrants streaming into global cities for economic reasons as a “survival circuit”, a circuit that provides a dependable source of cheap labour to the receiving countries and provides material resources to the sending societies (2002:254). Of the South Korean women who migrate for a chance at the employment opportunities in their host country, the majority will fall into these three categories.

The individual’s decision to migrate is best understood within the framework of Everett Lee’s theory of migration (1966), which focuses not only on the push-and-pull factors but also the intervening obstacles, the influence of personal traits, and the effect of transitions. Moreover, once the decision is made, it sets off a chain reaction that precipitates interactions with institutions or social locations that function as links between the macro and micro levels of analysis. One of the first links in that chain is the person holding the most authority in the family household. This person makes the decisions as to whether migration will take place, who in the family will migrate, what resources will be allocated to the migration, what remittances will be sent back, when household members will be expected to return, and whether the migration will be temporary or permanent (Massey et al. 1990; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991). Based on the political economy and the power relations within the household, individuals as social actors follow a migration strategy laid out by the head of the family.

Accumulated studies on women’s migration for low-skilled jobs provide an insight into women’s educational migration and (high) skilled migration. One of the most

outstanding works on domestic workers is by Rhacel Parrenas, who examines the sense of “dislocation” domestic Filipino women workers feel due to contradictory class mobility, non-belongingness to communities, and insecurity as non-citizens (2001). To overcome these feelings, Filipino domestic workers rally together, unified by their sense of non-belongingness as ethnic minorities in a host country and thus stand in solidarity to support and protect each other. However, even within the settled immigrant communities in the US, Filipino domestic migrants from low-income families (or lower-middle class) have feelings of isolation or even ashamed in the presence of their upper middle-class Filipino peers. Even educational migrants from low-income families frequently experience the same feelings of shame when with their upper middle-class educational migrant peers. Moreover, highly educated Filipino women workers experience insecurity and downward mobility in the receiving country because the Philippines is not a powerhouse within the global economy. Education certificates from developing countries such as the Philippines are devalued in the context of the transnational labour force, which relegates the high-skilled workers from the developing country to the status of low-skilled workers (390). Young South Korean women also suffer through similar experiences of diminished class mobility in London due to discrimination and prejudice in relation to their country and race, devalued education certificates, and jobs for which they are overqualified.

The most likely option for lower-circuit migration is marriage migration. Studies look at women from third world countries who seek to fulfil their “double desire” when opting to marry for migration purposes: romantic and economic. When choosing a partner, many women have a romanticised fantasy of the cultural “other” or glorified West, but what really leads them to marry Western men are their economic motivations and the desire to be emancipated from low-skilled work or sex work (Constable, 2010). Women who opt for marriage migration are often criticised for instrumentalising romance, love, and intimacy for material resources. But my research reveals that even upper middle-class educational migrants have a “double desire”, economic as well as romantic, that they keep in mind when choosing the best partner for their career. They also instrumentalise romance, love, and intimacy. Their selection of a partner is an act of agency to bring balance to their education, work, romance, and marriage. Yet this exertion of agency doesn’t always lead to the expected result and in some cases, produces unfortunate circumstances (idealised relationships going off course when real-life interactions don’t conform with their plans). This also parallels cases of Thai women who make a conscious decision to marry German men in order to escape the hardship of

low-skilled domestic work but end up trapped by husbands who expect them to be “domesticated” (Piper and Roces 2004). Since the topic of vulnerability within intimacy is integral to my research, studies on marriage migration provide important insights into young South Korean single women’s rationalisation of emotions and blurred agency in constructing intimacy (Constable 2010; Piper and Roces 2004).

I will close the section on gender and migration by discussing how global media promotes a cosmopolitan/metropolitan consumer lifestyle that plays an important role in forming a young single woman’s self-identity in South Korea. This discussion covers the fandom phenomenon of a night-time soap opera *Sex and the City*, which has helped shape contemporary global femininity in terms of a consumer lifestyle and attitude, as well as women’s sexual pleasure and agency. The consumer lifestyle in the soap opera is represented as not merely a series of commodities to be bought but as an integrated way of life to be emulated. Consumption is seen as a means of empowering women and their self-confidence comes from their ability to appreciate high fashion and afford an expensive lifestyle. They use commodities to actively express their individuality and individuation regarding romance and sex, visibility, self-fashioning, performance, and indirectly women’s agency. They thereby reject some of the social and sexual stereotypes of traditional femininity, as well as the social order or political agenda (Arthurs 2003; Akass and McCabe 2003).

The young women in this research group grew up watching *Sex and the City*, and as such this generation is susceptible to the notion that cosmopolitan consumer lifestyles are an important part of contemporary global femininity. Trusting this to be true, they mainly consume for appearances, being seen in the right restaurant or café, travelling abroad, staying fit, and participating in cultural activities all just to enhance their image. Young South Korean women use consumer power to assuage current hardships (at work), and to embody professional femininity and social status. However, their consumption has competitive characteristics based on class location, which is aggravated by a workaholic, hyper-consuming system (Mo, H.J. 2008). By examining middling migration, low-skilled migration, the cultural politics of consumption, and most importantly intimacy, this research demonstrates how gender intersects migration.

## **“New femininities” and familism in South Korea**

Korean literatures on “new femininities” mainly focus on young women’s higher education, work, and something called the “beauty complex”. These same young women aged between their twenties and thirties are the first generations to benefit from the widespread notion of gender equality, the advancement of the feminist movement, and the establishment of prohibitive laws in the ’90s against discrimination based on gender (Kang, E.S. 2013; Bae, E.K. 2009). All of which together have led to a dramatic increase in highly educated women becoming part of the workforce. They did not have to endure the gender discrimination of the past that would have ignored their daughters’ education and sacrificed their opportunities in favour of the oldest son according to Confucian culture. Rather, these women were granted the higher education that formerly would have been reserved for their brothers. And of those young women who go to university, more than 80% of them find jobs after graduating and enter these one-time rarefied social spheres as their right, something they take for granted but older generations never would. The ones whose achievements at work gain recognition are the ones the media present to the public as an “Alpha Girl” (Yoo, B.R. 2016; Ann, S.S. 2007). The term “Alpha Girl” was initially conceptualised by the American scholar Dan Kindlon and is the most used term in South Korea, signifying young, capable, self-determined, self-confident, and brilliant women who are high achievers in education and work (Yoo, B.R. 2016)

Despite progress allowing for the “Alpha Girl”, many high achieving young women confront a gendered discriminative structure at work. The labour market is precarious and instable for young women, and their earnings are less than those of men: the average wage of young women is 63.3 % of that of men (OECD 2016). More than half of all young women aged between their twenties and thirties are employed as part-time workers without job security (Cho, S.K. 2011). Young women were the first to be dismissed during the economic crisis in 1997 and again in 2008 (Eun, S.M. 2009). Although young women may find employment, they tend to be stuck in dead-end jobs. Even high-achieving and empowered women are often denied high-power, decision-making positions. Less than 10% of women held higher management positions in 2009 (Ministry of Employment and Labour 2009). What’s worse, young women and even married women are required to engage in “sexualized labour” since their sexual appearance still plays a significant role in work-related activities (Choo, J.H. 2012). South Korea continuously falls to the bottom in the Global Gender Gap report every year, and as recently as 2017 South Korea placed at a lowly 118 out of 144 countries

regardless of the country's high proportion of women with higher education (World Economic Forum 2017).

As participants of global "new femininities", young South Korean women have risen in education and work, but gender inequality still runs profoundly deep because of seriously gendered discriminative work structures and labour markets. The representation of successful (and rich) young women in the media is unspeakably misleading and functions as an "illumination effect" (McRobbie 2009), which conceals the struggles of the majority and the "feminization of the poverty" (Chun, H.I. 2014). Young women who can only find part-time jobs that do not offer job security or pay enough to defray heavy student debts often feel hopeless. Recent studies have shown that health problems such as sleep disorders stemming from stress are on the rise in young women (Bae, E.K. 2009), but more troubling is the rising suicide rates among young women in their twenties in OECD countries, a higher rate than that of men in the twenties.

Young women however continue to seek out their own personal solutions for structural inequality and the contradictions. They indulge in self-development such as obtaining new certificates or higher education degrees. They postpone intimacy, such as marriage and childbirth, in order to have stability in their careers first. They prefer their career to intimacy, especially since a career accords them economic self-reliance (Kang, E.Y. et al. 2010), and since they are dissatisfied with the male-dominated work culture, this makes them want to leave South Korea (Park, K.N. 2011).

It is at this economic-social juncture that the educational migration of young women from South Korea increases. They either go abroad to study so that they may improve their earning potential and find better work conditions, or they just move away for a while to escape the harsh reality of their employment options, all while postponing romantic relationships, marriage, or motherhood. Regardless of class, young women aspire to educational migration, but it is the young women with the financial and emotional support of their families who are more likely to be able to do so.

In order to understand parental support for a daughter's educational migration as well as its polarising effect, one first needs to understand Korean familism. In general, Korean familism puts the needs of the family over those of an individual family member, which is based on Confucian values centred on kinships over social relations (Kim, D.C. 2002). The family is the smallest political-economic and social-cultural unit within the state-nation of South Korea. In order to rebuild after the end of the Korean War, the

South Korean military regime mobilised the family unit to aid state-led economic development by shifting national responsibility for everything from welfare to education onto the family. Familism is either attacked for its anti-social familial egoism (Kim, D.N. 2001; Cho, H.J. 1985), or defended as a resource to overcome crisis (Park, Y.S. 1987). Although the family is influenced by the social changes, it is also a driving force powering social change forward (Lee, Y.J. 1999).

Sociologist Chang Kyung-Sup introduces the concepts of “social investment family” and “institutionalized familism” (Chang, K.S. et al., 2015; Chang, K.S. 2002, 2000) to help explain Korean familism. In contrast to “institutionalized individualism” by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), “institutionalized familism” explicitly or implicitly reinforces responsibility, duty, and the right of family in the formation and management of various social institutions, and thus forces citizens to maintain family-centred lives. Examining its embeddedness in the fields of income security, education, and care, Chang discusses the fact that, among educational institutions, the obligatory education system, the college entrance exam system, and parent support programs are heavily influenced by familism. This heaps the financial burden of both public and private education squarely on the parents. Moreover, as education plays a significant role in the knowledge-based economy, the intellectual basis for economic and social development in South Korea is supported by familial private investments in children’s education, in contrast to Western/British society where a state-nation invests in education (“social investment family” vs “social investment state”).

In Korean culture, the “social investment family” deems education as one of the most important paths individuals and their families can follow to increase social mobility, which is optimised by learning English. In more recent times, South Korean society identifies English proficiency as a key factor for success and a strategic resource of globalisation and cosmopolitanism (Cho, E. 2008). Many families relocate to English-speaking countries so their children will benefit from an education abroad. Families following this route become a transnational family, or *kyreoki kajok*, in that mothers usually accompany the children while fathers stay in South Korea to work and support the family. Instrumental motherhood based on gender role divisions is another characteristic of the “social investment family” in South Korea. As “managing moms”, mothers plan and manage the children’s education, including English education and studying abroad, but ultimately the goal is to assure the family’s social mobility (Na, Y.K. et al. 2007; Abelman 2004).

This research addresses how the educational migration of young women is not only encouraged but promoted within the South Korean familism context. Indeed, familial financial and emotional support as well as the mother's active management are important factors in their educational migration trajectory. Often young women receive remittances from their parents during migration. Mothers actively plan their daughters' educational migration and keep in continuous communication to manage and direct their studies and career paths. The young women who have familial financial support can strategically postpone entering the cutthroat competition for jobs by escaping through educational migration. Unfortunately, young women from low-income families are not so fortunate and must plunge right into the job market in order to earn money to support themselves while studying at the same time. Either way, receiving or lacking financial and emotional parental supports shape the educational migration experience of youth South Korean women.

### **Young South Korean women studying abroad**

Since the liberalisation of overseas travel on January 1, 1989 (Im, E.S. et al., 1992), the number of South Korean overseas travellers dramatically increased and many university students and young people started to backpack all over the world in the '90s. For women in the '90s, travelling meant emancipation, escaping from an oppressive society and having the opportunity to find a "new self" in the space between (Kim, S.W. 2007). In this atmosphere of liberation, going abroad was both a reprieve from the mass production mentality and a search for a new individualistic lifestyle, especially for highly educated elite people (ChoHan, H.J. and Um, G.H. 1999). Young women who studied abroad in the '90s evaded the gender-discriminative division of labour in the private and public sphere. In addition, they found opportunities for a new life in the West by studying and working abroad, learning English, and marrying Korean immigrants or white men, who symbolise freedom (Kang, Y.J. 2006; for further discussion see Kelsky 2001). It should be noted travelling abroad to escape from a country that maintains a gender-discriminative structure to an advanced country is a historically embedded practice for South Korean women. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, young women from the colonised Chosun society applied the knowledge and skills they had acquired while studying abroad in Japan to build successful careers for themselves. In addition to



their skills, the lifestyles and fashion sense they had developed by living in a metropolitan city like Tokyo also contributed considerably to elevating their social status (Park, S.M. 2007).

There are as many studies as varieties of migration, such as language training, travelling, and working holidays (Woo, S.H. 2015; Park, S.J. 2010; Cho, M.Y. 2013; Lee, K.H. 2006). Since the millennium, unlike previous eras when the academic expectation of going abroad was a seed of resistance from which a new lifestyle would sprout, studying abroad and living abroad has become a way of accumulating the cultural capital so highly valued in a neoliberal culture (Yoon, K. 2014). Of the total population of young South Korean people studying abroad, 60% are women (Kim, Y.N. 2013). However, despite this majority, there is a conspicuous lack of research on women studying abroad. The research that does exist shows that these young women as social actors and active subjects have complicated and multi-layered motivations for acquiring cultural capital. Anthropologist ChoHan Hae-Jeong documented the methods one of her upper-middle class female students employed to penetrate the unequal, exploitive, and dominating global power outside South Korea. This student used all the resources available to her (rich family, elite university background and so on) to earn a degree from a foreign, internationally recognised university and thereby construct a global experience, which addresses survival circulation (not to fall from middle class) and competition circulation (to succeed in the competitive system). Aware of white men's exploitative relations with women from 'the third world', she decided to exclusively engage in intimate relations with Korean men or Korean-Americans (ChoHan, H.J. 2008). Through education, this subject now had more equality in the global job market, and by interacting with men who were her cultural equals, she assured herself that she would not be exploited as a woman. While ChoHan's 2008 study does examine the educational migration of young women, her focus on upper middle-class elite women does not demonstrate the diversity of female educational migrants that exists. My research is more comprehensive and will examine the educational migration of women from different social backgrounds and how they adjust to their temporary homes.

In discussing the settlement experiences of young South Korean women, I first reviewed literature on international students in general. The struggles of international students has been widely documented as they confront language barriers, financial hardship, and adjustment to a new educational system. But in some cases, students also endure racial discrimination, especially those students from Asian countries, South American nations, and developing countries (Alavi and Mansor 2011; Lee and Rice 2007; Wilton and

Constantine 2003; Mori 2000; Li and Kaye 1998). Many of these studies recommend solutions for these problems, such as improving learning experiences by changing policies at the institutional level (Sherry et al. 2010; Lin and Yi 1997) or improving overall physical well-being by providing mental health care (Lee, J.S. et al. 2004). However, most of these recommendations presuppose that these problems are merely a result of culture shock, missing the bigger picture and greater stress international students face in regards to their social positioning and global power (i.e. Guclu 1993; Yang and Clum 1994; quoted in Lee, S.K. 2004). While my research does deal with culture shock, such as language barriers and discrimination, it also examines educational migrants' experiences and emotions, which are influenced by international students' political-economic and social-cultural positioning.

There are two studies of note on the effects of the political-economic and social-cultural positioning on young South Korean women's migration experiences in the UK. First, I refer to Kim Young-Jeong's thesis *Imagining 'Home': Korean Migrant Women's Identities in the UK* (2008) to explore the political-economic positioning of the young women in my study. In examining the settlement of young South Korean women in the UK within the framework of "making-home", Kim explains that young women migrate in order to escape from their marginalised position in the patriarchal society in Korea. According to Kim, they trade one politically and economically marginalised position for another as they become trapped again just in a different patriarchal system in the UK as ethnic immigrant women. This research thoroughly plots the process of their marginalisation in the receiving society, as well as their transformed identity in terms of nationalism. However, Kim's thesis is primarily built on the premise that these young women plan to permanently settle in the UK, while my research includes diverse migration trajectories, from short-term migration to permanent settlement to serial migration.

Second, I look to Kim You-Na's book titled *Transnational Migration, Media, and Identity of Asian Women: Diasporic Daughters* to explore East-Asian young women's social-cultural positioning (2011). A Europe-based Korean scholar in media studies, Kim discusses the marginalised position and the social exclusion educated East-Asian young women experience in London. According to her, contrary to their expectations before they arrive, young women experience overwhelming distress, doubts, inequality in the global system, unspeakable discrimination in racial relations, and exclusion and marginalisation, none of which is articulated in the dominant language of English or in the discourse on personal responsibility and personal freedom. Therefore, the diaspora

of East-Asian young women including Koreans creates feelings of vulnerability and precariousness rather than feelings of liberation and empowerment. In the end, these women feel neither an affinity for the home society they left to escape gender-discriminative labour division, nor an affinity for the host society where they encounter social marginality as ethnic minorities and foreigners. Challenging the concept of cosmopolitanism, Kim suggests the term “thin cosmopolitanism” to convey the exclusion of marginalised people in an uneven and contested transnational social field.

This pioneering work on Korean women in London, as well as Japanese and Chinese women, illustrates the lived reality of exclusion that confronts East-Asian women every day even in so-called cosmopolitan London. This just proves that migration is intersected with gender and race/ethnicity and ultimately challenges the idea of cosmopolitanism. However, to imagine these young women are victims of the global economy in general greatly detracts from their accomplishments. Kim’s study establishes that women strategize to take advantage of globalisation to improve their own lives, something I build on in my study. However, I intend to take it one step further and will show how they take advantage of intimacy, how they negotiate and reconstruct it so it co-exists with their ambitions for higher education and work.

## Chapter 3. Methodology

### Introduction

In this chapter, I will outline my research methodology using in-depth interviews conducted in various locations depending on where my interviewees were living, working or studying. I will explain how I selected my interviewees and traced their lives by interviewing them over a span of almost eight years in order to understand their migration trajectories. I will close this chapter by explaining my research position as an insider, and expound on the advantages as well as disadvantages that position holds. By studying from above and from below, this research will provide a clear map to the educational migration of young South Korean women, which is a small window to understanding the characteristics of contemporary global mobility on a whole.

### Research method

#### 1. The In-depth Interview

I used in-depth interviews to scrutinise the challenges young South Korean women face as educational migrants. The qualitative methodology used in this study is useful in drawing conclusions from the investigation into changing social realities and using them to present the interviewees' interpretation of their experiences. Face-to-face in-depth interviews especially facilitate reading interviewees' emotions, the examination of which are the focus of this thesis. Quantitative research, or statistics, cannot begin to chronicle the detailed psychological landscapes of the interviewees. Conversations about personal experiences unearth everything from migrants' desires to their vulnerabilities in the day-to-day process of migration. In this section, I will explain the in-depth interviews that I conducted starting in the autumn of 2008 and ending in June of 2016.

## 2. Recruiting Interview Participants in London

Before I came to London in 2008, I brainstormed a research preparation in Seoul in 2007 to use as a point of reference when drafting the semi-open interview questionnaires that I would use for my fieldwork. I started by interviewing my acquaintances who in turn introduced me to their acquaintances. Once I completed my test run, I had documented the experiences of six acquaintances in total, all of whom had studied everything from the fine arts to media studies either in the UK or the US. Based on their stories and feedback, I composed the research questions I would pose to my interviewees in London once I started my research.

From the outset, I set up recruitment conditions for the interview participants regarding education and work: 1) they had to have migrated to London after 2000; 2) they had to be studying for a diploma higher than a BA when I first interviewed them; 3) they had to be between 20 to 40 years old when they first started their higher education in London (I purposely limited the age range in order to interview a younger generation of women. See Chapter 1 for the definition of young women.); 4) for those who were working in London, they had to have studied at higher education institutions in London as well; and 5) for marital status, they had to be single. However, I included one divorcée since this thesis focuses on the migration experience of women without partners, and building up intimacy with a new partner was an important issue for her. In South Korea, the divorced state is called “returning single”, which further supports my rationale for her inclusion as a single woman.

To lay the groundwork for the research I started in 2008, I recruited interviewees using two different methods. First, I located suitable interviewees through formal and informal networks affiliated with universities. I contacted the South Korean student communities at two universities in London, LSE and Goldsmiths College, to request the contact details of female students studying for an MA and PhD, including those who had graduated with a BA. I specifically chose these schools since LSE and Goldsmiths College are the two universities with the highest concentrations of South Koreans in the UK. Since I was one of the students at Goldsmiths, it was easy for me to establish a rapport with the chairman, and as a student at a highly recognised university it paved the way with the other institutions. I emailed an explanation of my research and outlined the ethics of consent to the students I now had information for, directing them to verify the legitimacy of my research through my contacts in the student communities. I asked

interested candidates to contact me through the information details provided and arranged interviews with those who responded to the emails. At the same time, I emailed international offices and language centres charged with international students' English pre-sessions at the two universities, and I asked them to inform their classes about my research. In those cases when after listening to their stories I could discern an interviewee had acquaintances who could fulfil the interview conditions, I would ask them to extend an invitation to join, employing the snowball method. Drawing from university sources, I tried as much as possible to include interviewees from diverse disciplines outside social science studies. Informants' experiences in studying and working abroad differ according to their disciplines. Thus, I included people from diverse faculties, from science, management and economics, nursing/social work, music, the arts, and cultural industries.

Second, I recruited interviewees through every informal channel at my disposal. I used to my advantage the best characteristics of London, an urban multicultural city with diverse ethnic neighbourhoods (ex. Korean ethnic grocery shops) and advanced telecommunications (ex. Internet websites). I also posted adverts to recruit interviewees, was introduced to interviewees through informal ethnic networks, or went to meetings of South Koreans in London and Seoul to find suitable participants. See the appendix for the venues I frequented to meet people and where those venues are located.

I created two adverts, one for online and the other for offline. For the online advert, I briefly described my research project and the three necessary conditions for participants, adding my email address and contact number to which people could reply. I posted the advert several times and I selectively offered material compensation, 20 pounds per interview and a small pouch, for those who wouldn't otherwise be able to afford to spare time for an interview. The compensation was both an 'incentive' for people to participate in the interviews as well as token of appreciation for their time.

As for the offline advert, I printed hard-copy flyers of the online advert and posted them in South Korean grocery shops. Outside the university setting, I as a customer got to know Korean hairdressers and cooks and I explained my research to them. Based on regular interactions with their other clients, they knew enough about their lives to be able to connect me to the ones who were suitable for my research.

In total, I had in-depth interviews with 32 people, making sure there was a diversity of disciplines, experience, and class, and a balanced ratio of ages. I selected 19 of these 32 people to discuss in this thesis. Then, I selected 10 of these 19 people to interview more

than twice over the eight years. In addition, I used the answers of one interviewee to use as a basis for a control group. Thus, the total number of interviewees selected for this research is 19.

### 3. Mobile Ethnography – Following Up with People Moving to Different Places

I selectively tracked 10 people from among the 32 using “mobile ethnography” in a broader sense (O’Reilly 2009:145). Mobile ethnography is useful in the research of transnational social fields in the era of globalisation. Since my main source of information came from interviews rather than researching transnational communities, and since many of the individuals didn’t particularly belong to a community permanently, I used “mobile ethnography” as a “tracking” strategy to “follow people”. That is to say, the researcher will “follow and stay with the movements of a particular group of initial subjects” (Marcus 1995: 95–96; 106). Tracking people was a useful and necessary approach to documenting interviewees’ migration in the long term and ensuing life changes, such as finding employment after they completed their studies and developing different lifestyles after migration.

### 4. Conducting interviews

Each interview usually took one to three hours, and I judiciously selected those that had long-term plans for follow-up interviews (more details later in this section). The interviews were recorded with consent. Before each interview, I asked them to sign a form that would give me permission to record the interviews but also allowed them the right to refuse to answer questions and to withdraw their interview afterwards. I held unstructured sessions, selecting and modifying pre-made questions according to the specific concerns and interests of the interviewees. I conducted two follow-up interviews via Skype and one through email since these interviewees were living at quite a distance from me at the time. Since I had already met all three face-to-face and interviewed them previously, I had built enough rapport with them to avoid misunderstandings or distorting the interviews, which can sometimes be the result of electronic communication. I have charted the date, locations and frequency of the interviews I conducted at the end of this chapter.

## 5. Hanging out and being in the field

I tried to hang out with my interviewees and be “in the field” (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997:101). I purposely went to the places that were relevant to them to get a better sense of their experiences and be attuned to their voices rather than just relying on interview questionnaires. Hanging out in the field helped maintain “continuous reflexivity between perception and knowledge, and experience and memory, and sight and citation” (Jenks, 2000:4) not only in regards to the migration process but also the practices of everyday life. I hung out with my interviewees and visited the places they frequented: coffee shops and libraries on the LSE, Imperial College, Goldsmiths College, and Saint Martin campuses; their common rooms in the student residence halls in Holborn; Korean restaurants in New Malden (Little Korean town in London); sandwich shops in the City of London; coffee shops near their workplaces in the Kang-Nam area or ones in the Il-San area near their places of residence, and some of the exhibition places in the Hong-Ik area in Seoul where their own exhibitions took place.

In 2008 and 2009, I attended two Korean churches located in inner London and New Malden and made it my priority to join their social events, such as cell meetings and social dinners, in order to associate with South Korean young female students. Korean churches play a significant role in Korean ethnic communities in which people share information, make friends, receive help, and take on social roles connected to church activities. Regular attendance for sermons and related activities was one of the avenues student migrants might follow in the early stages of migration in order to have support for their migrant life and to make friends.

In addition to the casual settings and church events I have mentioned above, I also attended important events in the higher education industry. In the UK, I engaged in participatory observation of workshops and demonstrations against “rises in higher education” and “point-based immigration policy” in 2011. It was during this time that I researched media representation of international students and student visas. In South Korea, my fieldwork included a “studying abroad exhibition” by the British Council, and I also interviewed three related institutions—two studying abroad agencies and the British Council in Seoul. This exhibition and these interviews helped me to map out how neoliberal governmental reforms were stoking the higher education industry and how that affected students seeking a higher education.

The campus landscape in South Korea was as good a place as any to observe the thoughts and behaviours of Korean students, as well as foreign students on exchange in



South Korea. Whenever I went to work at Yonsei University, where I completed my bachelor's degree, I listened and talked to, whenever possible, female students, international female students, and student mentors, be it in a café, a library, or a study room. From listening and talking to local as well as international students from all over the world, I inferred the uneven geographical power dynamics by observing international students' behaviours. From just walking around the university, I observed the visual evidence of neoliberal reforms and the growing higher education industry in the new buildings constructed on campus and wondered how this would affect future students.

I also tried to maintain an attitude of being in the field whenever I thought it necessary in everyday life places. Whether I was in an airplane where I happened to sit next to a Korean female student to entering a flower shop run by a woman who had studied related work in Canada, I was always in the field. With consent and all due respect to their privacy, I followed my informants' internet usage, such as Facebook profiles, posts, and blogs. Talking with my friends who were studying abroad, in countries such as the US, Canada, Japan, and China helped me to sustain my sensitivity and to draw relevance from my research while having new insights and self-reflexivity. In every way I could find, I was "in the field".

### **Insider researcher**

As an educational migrant of the same generation, gender, nationality, and class (with a few exceptions) as my interviewees, I had the significant advantage of being both an insider and researcher. The position of an insider researcher made it easy for me to have access to interviewees and to have a rapport with them in a relatively short period of time within the transnational urban setting. Though people are normally cautious about "strangers", they tend to gravitate toward and trust people from their own culture, even strangers, when the alternative is a completely unfamiliar group of people. Interviewee 13 explained her reticence saying, "As I can't sense who they are from their appearance, I tend to hang out with people from my culture, rather than those from other countries". However, my position as an insider researcher gave us common ground and a shared sense of identity based on awareness of social position as young women in South Korea, cultural norms, language, and so on. This helped the interviewees overcome their natural reservations and inspire almost instant camaraderie, and consequently they

were more willing to spare time for interviews. If I ever lost contact, it was easy for me to reconnect with them through Korean ethnic networks, through Facebook, or adverts on a specific website for Koreans living in London.

Beyond the camaraderie, my position as an insider researcher provided me more in-depth insights into the delicate and nuanced affective aspects my interviewees had experienced in the process of educational migration and serial migration. As an educational migrant myself, I suffered distress and depression, anxiety and turmoil enough that I took a year off and consulted a therapist. Without my own experiences to draw from, I couldn't have imagined the intensity of uncertainty, anxiety, and confusion they experienced as educational migrants, which repeatedly emerged as one of the core forces defining several interviewees' experiences (which I only understood on a theoretical level during the pre-research in 2007 conducted before my migration to London). On the one hand, through my unique position as an insider researcher I gained a full understanding of their affective, emotional, and psychological vulnerability. I had the advantage of experience to help interpret the depth of meaning in their diverse strategies and actions in re-arranging and re-managing the affective and emotional states engaged in their migration and everyday life. As an insider, it was extremely advantageous in understanding "the cultural force of emotion" (Rosaldo 1993:56).

On the other hand, I tried to remain detached from my own experience and stay impartial, putting some distance between me and the interviewees so as not to influence their answers or miss things that could be relevant but that I might take for granted as part of our shared culture. To minimize the misunderstandings from mistaking or inferring what was said, I attempted to select interviewees who had the ability to express themselves well. I asked them to explain what they were feeling and why rather than rely on just using adjectives. This helped give me a more accurate picture of their feelings. And if there ever was any doubt, I asked for clarification and sometimes even followed up after the interviews if I felt ambivalent, trying not to assume anything just because we shared cultural experiences.

To help keep perspective and add balance, I spent time with young intellectual migrants from other countries and different cultural backgrounds in my everyday life. This allowed me to deepen my self-reflectivity and helped me to keep some distance from my interviewees as an insider researcher. I managed to bring balance to my self-reflectivity by switching between "alienated distancing and participatory belonging"

(Ricoeur 1981:131), which also allowed me to objectively adjust the theories I was using as I gathered information. For instance, as I exerted myself to engage and communicate with non-Korean migrants, I met an intelligent Estonian gay migrant. It was while I was contemplating the push factors of his marginalised social position as a sexual minority in his homeland that I realised the parallels with the young South Korean women in my study. Though not a minority per se, in the gender dynamics in their homeland, these young women are sexual minorities due to men's domination over sexuality. On the one hand, conversation with this young man opened my eyes to the commonalities of young migrants in London and to think of my interviewees as a part of the meritocratic flow of global youth. On the other hand, I found that he and I had different conceived "world maps" (how people imagined the world) (Fong 2011), which affected our imaginations of subsequent destinations for migration after life in London. (Russia for him and the US for me and many of my interviewees.)

I further added dimension to my study by observing young Taiwanese students in London, and young American and British students in Seoul. These control groups provided insights into how social positions such as gender, class, race/ethnicity and nationality are engaged in the migration process and its everyday life practices. Without the self-reflectivity that I contributed as one of the objects of the analysis, as well as the analysing subject (Rosaldo 1993:59)<sup>3</sup>, it would be difficult to obtain these insights as an outsider. However as both an insider and outsider, I could scrutinise how global inequality affects the social safety net for this young generation of South Koreans. In the era of 'development without employment', nationality or the degree of a country's modernity or the dichotomy between the 'West' and the 'East' plays quite an important role. The world is becoming so interconnected that big world issues are shaping local issues. It ultimately led me to draw multi-directional forms of globalisation that also helped me step outside of myself.

I worked to maintain objectivity so that I could see "the difference in the sameness" and to find "the sameness in the difference" and assess their characteristics/singularities as correctly as possible as an insider researcher. For instance, to establish difference in the sameness I interviewed Korean women in my control group who were educational migrants in the '80s and early '90s and compared them with my interviewees from the

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<sup>3</sup> To study, perceive and understand things (without objectifying them) is a philosophical approach to gaining knowledge.

late '90s. The biggest difference I found was that my interviewees could stay in touch with family and friends through technology and media and maintain intimacy and emotional security in a way that was formerly unavailable to earlier migrants. By being able to maintain contact with their families, these single educated women were able to negotiate for familial approval and support for their migration. The results of these negotiations are quite important in that they provided me an insight into the affective forces of their family dynamics that I could well understand as an insider researcher. Finding a balance between sameness and difference provided a space for self-reflectivity, challenging the notions based on my own experiences I had come to take for granted as universal.

<b>Interviewees</b>	<b>Interview Venue</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup></b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup></b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>5<sup>th</sup></b>
<b>1</b>	Senate House Library Café in Russell Square, Skype,	APR 7, 2011	JUL 23, 2011	JUL 25, 2011	JUL 26, 2011	Sep 26, 2016
<b>2</b>	Bar nearby her house in London	OCT 18, 2009				
<b>3</b>	A restaurant in Waterloo, the lobby of her place of work, Sandwich bar in the City	DEC 13, 2009	JUL 31, 2011	AUG 11, 2011	AUG 24, 2011	
<b>4</b>	Turki restaurant nearby her university in New Cross, Sushi restaurant nearby her house in Clapton Junction	OCT 13, 2009	OCT 31, 2011			
<b>5</b>	Café nearby her university on Oxford Street, her place in London, in Il-San in Seoul, and a restaurant in Hong-Dae area  Seoul	OCT 23, 2009	JAN 2011	APR 6, 2011	FEB 11, 2012	
<b>6</b>	Café in her university in Holborn,	NOV 25, 2009	JUN 10,			

	and café in Kang-Nam in Seoul		2010			
7	Café in her university in Holborn, and café in Kang-book in Seoul	AUTUMN, 2009	FEB 17, 2012			
8	Reception in her university library, cafés nearby her university and nearby her residence in Canada Water	AUTUMN, 2008  (missing)	NOV 2009	JUN 2011  (missing)		
9	Café nearby her residence in Bun-Dang in Seoul and email	JUN 11, 2010	FEB 27, 2012			
10	Café nearby her work place in Hong-Dae in Seoul	APR 14, 2010				
11	Café in her residence hall in Holborn	OCT 21, 2009				
12	Café nearby her university	OCT 2008				
13	Café nearby her university	NOV 1, 2008				
14	Empty classroom in her university and café nearby her university in Brockley	AUTUMN 2008 (missing)	AUTUMN 2009			

<b>15</b>	Restaurant in New Malden (Little Korea in London), Skype	DEC 9, 2009	DEC 29, 2009			
<b>16</b>	Café in New Malden (Little Korea in London) and Skype	DEC 10, 2009	FEB 3, 2013			
<b>17</b>	Café nearby her place of work in Kang-Nam in Seoul	JUL 22, 2010				
<b>18</b>	Café at Waterloo in London	DEC 2013				
<b>19</b> <b>(control group)</b>	Library where she had a monthly community meeting in Ilsan, South Korea	MAY 2010				

## **Chapter 4. Push-and-Pull Factors of the Movement**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will examine the push-and-pull factors of the political-economic and social-cultural context that influenced the expectations and motivations of young South Korean women in their educational migration to universities in London at specific spatial-temporal conjunctions. Elaborating on Eleonore Kofman's discussion on the relations between structure and the individual actor in migration, I will focus on three elements of migration: "individual migrants", "migration institution", and "migration regime" (Kofman et al. 2000:32). First, I will discuss "individual migrants" and the socially constructed characteristics of this new generation of young women in the Korean context. I will also look at the societal influences that have directly or indirectly interacted with their personal decisions for migration. Second, I will review "migration institutions" and the roles family play in the migration decision-making process, addressing the South Korean culture of familism that places family ahead of the individual. Promoting the good of the family by keeping pace with the changing global neoliberal system drives young South Korean women to pursue educational migration as a way to raise or maintain the family's class. Third, I will scrutinise the "migration regime", a migration structure constructed under the influence of the recently changed higher education/industry in the UK and the UK's governmental policies.

### **"The new women"**

In order to embrace globalisation, the South Korean government came to accept that economic and political liberalisation was inevitable and necessary. One outcome of this new acceptance was the lifting of travel restrictions in 1989. These restrictions were further eased by the launch of a financial liberalisation programme known as *segaewha* in the 1990s. This sparked a trend as highly educated young women in their twenties and thirties started to travel abroad as tourists, students, and workers (Kang, Y.J. 2006). They travelled the world as backpackers, exchange students, students in higher education, language trainees, and interns or workers. By the advent of the new



millennium, going abroad had become an exceedingly common practice for young women, not only for upper middle-class but also lower middle-class young women (ChoHan, H.J. 2008). Forms of migration hitherto uncommon in South Korea started to emerge, from short-term working holidays to volunteering.<sup>4</sup> Formerly, travel destinations used to be limited to Japan or English-speaking countries such as the US, but now countries that would not have been considered before started to become destinations of choice for South Koreans. These departures from customary locations can be attributed to a rising social conscious, for example travelling to volunteer in countries in need in South East Asia (Cho, M.Y. 2013); a journey to India to practise meditation for a spiritual awakening (Kim, D.H. 2014); a move to Australia to study nursing on an educational adventure (Kang, C.H. and Yoon, S.N. 2005). The “world map” (Fong 2012), a term describing how the world is perceived, has being re-drawn in South Korea to include “global Others” (Kim Y.N. 2012:66), and year after year this world map has re-sized to include so many more others. The advantage of living through these changes is that this generation of young women, more so than any other generations before them, were becoming quite familiar with cross-cultural encounters.

However, without ever crossing a border, young South Korean women are well informed about the world due in large part to a pervasive global media,<sup>5</sup> which has contributed to broadening their view of the world. Since the 1990s, global media has developed rapidly in South Korea, and through media, young women of this generation have easy access to “global Others” (Kim, Y.N. 2012:66). They learn English by chatting with foreign friends online, and they become acclimatised to cosmopolitan lifestyles and consumption by watching globally recognised soap operas such as *Sex and the City* (HBO 1998-2004) or *Friends* (NBC 1994-2004). Through the global media’s influence, they learn that ‘the Korean way’<sup>6</sup> is not the only way of living and envision alternative lifestyles for

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, from 2007 to 2010 Korean youths made up the second largest group to be granted working holiday visas by Australia, one of the biggest countries to run working holidays programs. The number reached 35,000 in 2010 (Annual Report from Department of Immigration and Citizenship in Australia 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Global media is media without borders such as MTV and HBO. These global image industries reach world markets, deterritorialising audiovisual production and the elaboration of transnational systems of delivery (Morley and Robins, 1995: 1-2). I include the Internet as a form of global media.

<sup>6</sup> For instance, despite their higher education, even high-achieving women were encouraged to

themselves. Europe-based media specialist You-Na Kim (2012:52-56) describes global media consumption as the constitutive process of transnational mobility as a mediating cultural experience. According to her, young South Korean women have become aware of the differences between their social-cultural position and that of women elsewhere in the wider world. This juxtaposition has led to a process of self-reflective imagination mediated by popular culture that has explicitly or implicitly evoked a movement to achieve the alternative lives and happiness they envision. Global media whether directly or indirectly has inspired many young women in my research to imagine a better life and “new self” (Kelsky 2001:122), motivating them to go abroad and seek betterment through education and global careers.

Women born in the 1970s and 1980s are the first generation to step out of the private sphere of family life and into the public sphere by pursuing education and work, and not just a few cases but in growing numbers. Unlike the women of their mothers’ generation and the generations before them who had to sacrifice their education for the sake of their brothers or had few options beyond becoming housewives in gender-discriminative South Korea, younger generations take higher education and employment outside the home for granted (No, M.S. 2008:42-43). They trade domestic chores for academic and professional achievement and replace the role of motherhood as the core of their identity with that of career woman. The government as well as the young women’s families invest in their higher education and employment, and the media reports on their accomplished performances, calling the phenomenon *yeopung* [the wind of women] or Alpha girls (Chai, H.W. 2014). The women in my research grew up in the late 1980s and the early 1990s during a time when the feminist movement had dramatically gained momentum in South Korea and pushed for women’s independence, equal opportunity, and empowerment. It is in part due to the influence of the feminist movement that so many young women are stepping into the public sphere of higher education and the labour market.

Even though work allows this generation of women to self-actualise, it is also a necessity for without their own income they cannot be independent. Independence was not an option for their mothers’ generation, and marriage was almost the only way to ensure their economic security since participation in the public sphere such as having a

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remain in the private sphere and marry, have children, and stay at home which according to Confucianism is where they should be.

career was strenuously discouraged. Thus, the institution of marriage was essentially inescapable, and women seeking to secure their economic and social status had to accept the rigid gender roles related to marriage, such as intrusive filial duties (especially in relation to overbearing in-laws) and the unilateral burdens of childcare and household management. However, unlike their mothers, young women born since the 1970s could be, if sometimes only partially, financially independent and responsible for their own living expenses thanks to political and cultural changes that now allow women to have jobs. Thus, they could eschew the discriminatory and unequal role of South Korean women in marriage. These young women have the option to rely on careers and remuneration more than on intimate relations and marriage as the basis for their life and future plans. They consider a career to be a necessity, while marriage is merely optional (Segye ilbo Mar 22, 2019). Statistics prove that this is a growing trend, indicating that the number of young people who believe they should marry has rapidly decreased from 64.7 % to 46.6% between 2010 and 2018 (Statistics Korea 2018). Many of the young women I interviewed admitted that they had chosen to follow a career path and were reluctant to marry at all, something Interviewee 2 expressed the most succinctly. “I wouldn’t like to live like my mom who had a hard time with her in-laws and demanding filial duties”, she told me. Despite being career-minded, knowing the emotional security a family can provide and recognising that marriage is a social norm in South Korea, many young women are just as reluctant not to marry. In fact, many young women of this generation did not entirely dismiss marrying, but they did postpone it, wanting to combine a career with a family and ‘have-it-all’, even knowing it would be difficult to do so.

Since the late ’80s, the feminist movement has been gaining momentum in South Korea and has given young women the independence and power to choose a career over family or to have both. But being neoliberal subjects and participating in an infinite competition also influenced their decisions. The women in my study internalised the logic of competition and strongly believed that rewards should be allotted according to an individual’s ability and achievement based on merit. They criticised individuals for their perceived failures without reflecting on the impact social inequality has had on other people’s lives. That is to say that they believe that choices are made freely, and therefore people must take responsibility for their decisions regardless of their circumstances (Brown 2005; Gill 2008). So though they might feel a pang of sympathy for minorities, they still believe minorities do not make enough of an effort and see this as a justification for the fact that they are victimised and impoverished (Oh, C.H. 2013).

Their formation as neoliberal subjects and lack of empathy may in part be attributed to their experiences during the Asian economic crisis that the country suffered through. Most of the young women I interviewed had witnessed mass unemployment and restructuring after the 1997 IMF (International Monetary Fund) economic crisis in South Korea during their formative and impressionable adolescence. Fearing a similar fate, many bought into ‘the winner takes all’ attitude, only interested in their own accomplishments and “settling down in society successfully and safely by whatever means”, as Interviewee 6 told me. As such, they focused almost exclusively on their own success, security, and (social) survival. They became “the generation of survival” (Kim, H.J. 2016). Thus, for them, migration for education and a global career was ‘the best’ and possibly only strategy to survive, and their main goal was economic entrepreneurial freedom. But within this grander purpose, they also sought subjective qualities such as independence, self-reliance, choice (to be realised through markets), and security (financial). They saw material success, social recognition, and cultural differentiation as symbols of their achievement.

What this generation of young women sought to realise from educational migration sharply contrasts with the reasons South Korean women travelled to the UK for educational migration in the 1980s. At that time, the military regime in South Korea strictly limited travel abroad for any reason and only a few elites could afford this educational luxury. The limited number of elite women who were permitted to study abroad at that time understood that it was with the support of their family and community, for which they were grateful. As such, one of the main goals of their educational migration was to return to their home society and apply their knowledge and skills to contribute to the greater good. Interviewee 19, one of my interviewees who had studied for a PhD in the UK in the 1980s, told me that she was fortunate that her family and her in-laws allowed her to go abroad to study. It was natural for her to want to contribute to the modernisation of the country, and she considered the contribution she made to her community upon her return to be her pleasure and responsibility. In contrast to this, the generation of young women who left in the late 1990s and the early 2000s viewed their individual success, such as economic gain, social recognition, and cultural differentiation, to be the main goal of their educational migration. These young women might have a sense of community spirit as well, if not as altruistic as previous generations, but they are too individualised to commit to political activities for the country’s overall benefit. The few political voices that have been heard lacked a sense of community (Kim, H.J. 2016). Instead, they operated on the premise that surviving

infinite competition justified the self-centeredness of their educational migration.

### **Caught between global desire and global anxiety**

I planned to move to London for a higher education in order to have a global career. Frankly, studying for an MA here is just a steppingstone. If I get employed by a transnational company, I can start my career here, and then it would be easier to go to other countries afterwards. A high salary is another factor I consider. I am thinking about staying in London for about 5 years and then I want to go to other places as an expatriate, transferring to different branches of the company in other countries (Interviewee 3).

Young South Korean single women choose educational migration to a Western country specifically to have a degree from a university recognised in the West. This affords them greater employment opportunities in multinational companies in London and other locations, as well as in foreign companies with branches in Seoul. They believe higher education in Western countries or global careers and positions within multinational companies will elevate them to the “global class” or, as Interviewee 15 called it, the “global elite”. For the women interviewed for this research, the terms “global class” or “global elite” represent the economic affluence, vast social networks, and consumer buying power that offer transnational mobility, world-wide acceptance, and cosmopolitan lifestyles. For instance, in South Korea Interviewee 3 is an acclaimed “global success”. When she published the story of her life London, a well-paid job in a transnational company, interactions with people from many different countries and cultures, travel to more than 100 countries, and more, the mainstream media in Korea took her story and made her famous overnight. Many people, especially young people in South Korea, deemed her to be globally successful and a ‘winner’ in the transnational mobility stratification (Kim, S.Y. 2015).

According to South Koreans’ ideas on global hierarchy and educational migration, Interviewee 3 has what they call “global talent”. This discourse on “global talent” describes those persons who are proficient in one or more foreign languages, are highly educated and skilled, and capitalise on their skills. This all while presenting a ‘good’

attitude and demonstrating values such as an appreciation for diverse cultures and a social consciousness about the globalised society. The market-oriented discourse of “global talent” in the development of human resources in terms of labour and education rapidly expanded on the national level as South Korea started to actively implement the neoliberal globalisation system in the late 1990s. Workers from all backgrounds see “global talent” combined with a strong work ethic as necessary to succeed as an entrepreneur, and they voluntarily and involuntarily internalise the logic of global talent in order to adapt and survive in a globally competitive environment. This concept of competitiveness in the global market, driven by the government and expanded upon by enterprises and the media, functions to mobilise people to participate in South Korea’s globalisation policy. This policy is meant not only to ensure Korea’s success on the world stage at a national level but to solve unemployment on a local and domestic level (Hong, S.H. and Ryu, W.J. 2013). In this discourse, “global talent” is widely accepted to be the pinnacle of the transnational world. My interviewees’ desire to attain “global talent” for themselves and thus to be “the best” (ChoHan, H.J. 2011) led them to study abroad, where they exploited every last resource at their disposal to make their ambition a reality. Rather than criticising neoliberal practices and rejecting the relentless drive to succeed, they actually embraced these practices. These women adopted the logic of meritocracy, internalised the ethics of self-responsibility and self-reliance, and engaged in the “winner takes all” competition.

In South Korea, it is impossible for me as a TV program writer to be a producer. Men monopolise producer positions even though they are not talented, or the owner of a broadcasting company. Most TV program writers are women and most of the jobs available are only short-term contracts. Program writers are responsible for a variety of tasks so male producers depend on them. However, TV program writers are always secondary...But working at the global level has, I hope, plenty of merit since there may be many opportunities to play a role in diverse positions, and even work in a position equivalent to a producer in South Korea. With these experiences, I hope I can start my own broadcasting company in South Korea one day. I want to go back home in about 10 years after working here and there, like London and Hong Kong. (Interviewee 5)

Though their educational migration seemed to largely centre on becoming a member

of the “global elite”, joining the “global class”, or becoming a “global talent”, they aimed at the same time to improve the marginalised position of women in South Korea. Unlike their mothers’ generation, this generation of young women have been empowered by higher education. Unfortunately, the actual work environment in Korea is currently still quite poor for women, which they find deeply disappointing and frustrating. So while many young women are entering the work force, most of them work at lower- to mid-level jobs. Many others have to settle for part-time jobs or contract work without the guarantee of social insurance/social safety net, and being paid 36.7% less than their male counterparts (OECD 2016). Trapped in entry-level positions in an unstable work environment, any attempts to move up are thwarted by an unbreakable “glass ceiling”. In 2009, less than 10% of the high-level decision-making positions in political, economic and social fields were held by women. This indicates that although women now have the education equal to or even greater than their male counterparts, they have still been locked out of upper-level positions (Ministry of Employment and Labour Korea 2009). Even though the traditional male breadwinner model is being steadily eroded and women now assume that they will continue to work after marrying, once children are involved and household responsibilities become especially burdensome it is the woman who must quit her job (Kim, H.Y. and Sun, B.Y. 2011). Though the obligation to give up a career to care for family should in theory no longer be solely a woman’s responsibility, this unspoken expectation is still deep-seated. Thus, even this highly educated generation of young women are bound by the same patriarchal system that constrained mothers’ generation, but now they struggle for equality in the workplace and in the home.

Sensing that even with an education their options in South Korea would be restricted, the young women in this study strategically planned their educational migration, attempting to avoid being marginalised on the basis of their gender. Some women selected destinations that they believed would have greater gender equality where individuals would be evaluated according to ability and achievement in a more equal work culture where they would have an opportunity for self-actualisation. However, migration to cities like London for higher education had an additional purpose. By studying in the city to gain “global talent”, these young women would benefit from the knowledge, skills, and experiences that higher education in London offers. Having the type of qualifications favoured by transnational companies in London, as well as being there in person to access international labour markets, would make it conceivably easier for them to find employment in foreign companies. It would even help to rise

to higher positions in Korean companies back in Seoul. It is generally accepted that the desire to have a global career and have “global talent” is driven by South Korean women’s marginalised political-economical position at home, which is a significant push-factor for educational migration in London. Seeing no other way, these young women, driven not only by a desire to be “the best” but also the fear of being “the worst”, risked everything for the hoped-for rewards that educational migration might deliver.

It used to be that a degree from a recognised university abroad gave a person an advantage when seeking employment in South Korea, but that is no longer the case. Nowadays South Koreans need to accumulate even more *spec*,<sup>7</sup> such as work experience abroad, in addition to a degree from a foreign university in order to survive – I myself have been worried because of this. Before, it used to be only people who enjoy studying would get a PhD, but now many people are getting doctorates just to be competitive in the labour market. I am also thinking of doing a PhD later. (Interviewee 8)

I came here to build up *spec* in order to find employment in South Korea. It is becoming extremely difficult to get a job, and an MA in South Korea is no longer enough. You need to speak English well and to have work experience... All my friends also went abroad for further education so that they would be prepared to find employment. I have to go too since everybody else does, or I will be at a disadvantage in finding a job and for future promotions. (Interviewee 11)

As some young women in my research told me, studying abroad had become quite common and was even becoming compulsory for upper middle-class young women in the era of youth unemployment in South Korea. Naturally, anxiety increases as youth unemployment soars, affecting every level of society. Since 2015, the era of ‘growth without employment’ and youth unemployment have become serious social problems with 9.2% of young adults unemployed and only 1.5 out of 10 young people with regular employment (Ministry of Economy and Finance in Korea 2015). This has made young

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<sup>7</sup> *Spec* is a term used to précis the qualifications young people need to have in order to find employment in Korea, such as a university degree and career experience.



women especially anxious since traditionally women are the first to be let go (BAE, E.K. 2007). Thus, young South Korean women, who are at greater risk of unemployment than young men, have become obsessed with building up qualifications to find employment and then stay employed. These qualifications or *spec* could include anything from high academic grades to credentials from a top-tier university (in the stratification of education in Korea) to English proficiency to work experience abroad to a PhD to a cosmopolitan consciousness. Migration to higher education institutions in London is viewed as a means to acquiring all the necessary qualifications in one fell swoop. Many young women in this research expected to obtain not only degrees from elite foreign universities, which are internationally recognised, but also to improve their English skills, work abroad, and even build a life abroad. All of which was deemed to be cultural capital and an advantage when looking for employment.

While their anxiety is obviously rooted in youth unemployment, it is also rooted in the South Korea's economic crisis. The young women in this study grew up directly or indirectly experiencing the impact of the Korean economic crisis in 1997. Sudden job losses, bankrupt Korean conglomerates, forced restructuring, and loss of trust in their government left their nation no choice but to accept help from foreign private consulting companies. They grew up during a time of fundamental social changes, the disappearance of the social safety net, and the fierce competition to survive. Interviewee 5 wouldn't have been able to attend university if she hadn't been offered a scholarship since her father had gone bankrupt during the economic crisis. After the economic crisis in 1997, Interviewee 2 and her family had to abruptly leave Liverpool where they were situated for her father's job training and return to South Korea. All because the value of the South Korean won had dipped so low that they could no longer afford to live in the UK even though they liked it there. These unforgettable and painful experiences during their adolescence, regardless of whether it was a direct or indirect result of the economic crisis, planted in many young women a fundamental fear of falling, which made them work even harder to keep 'on the track'. Their desire to become one of the "global class" could well stem from the anxiety that they would never be entirely free of the spectre of financial and social collapse. They lived in fear that nothing they could do would be enough and they would never be entirely safe.

As the interviewees above explicitly stated, studying abroad had become a normalised and even a compulsory practice across Korean society, especially among upper middle-class young people. However, the advantages once offered were becoming opaque. That

said, they couldn't stop engaging in the various forms of educational migration since so many young people were still studying abroad. Although it didn't give them the edge it once might have, they decided they had to follow this now well-worn path anyway since others continued to do so, and they were feared that they might otherwise fall further behind. They saw educational migration as an increasingly risky and even painful practice, which came at the expense of their money, time, and energy without a guaranteed return on investment. According to an American anthropologist Nancy Abelmann (2009:230), what these young people are experiencing is "global fatigue".

### **Educational migration and Korean familism**

Familism is a powerful ideology in South Korean culture (Kim, D.N. 2001:9). Familism sacrifices the heterogeneity of individuals for the homogeneity or unity of the family, prioritising the interests of family over those of individuals (ChoHan H.J. 2000). The nation's political-economic system tends to consider the family as economic and social units. As such, the nation tends to neglect its responsibility to individuals, leaving families to supply that what the state is meant to provide for its people, a social safety net for individuals (family members), as well as fiscal responsibility for an individual's education (Chang, K.S. 2000; 2002; 2015). Since the 1997 economic crisis, instrumentalization of the family has intensified to the point that the only safety net available to ensure people's economic position is provided almost exclusively by their families. Thus, members of affluent families united to reinforce their economic resources, while those with few resources struggled to keep their families together (Kim, D.N. 2001:19).

For families in South Korea, education plays a very significant role in the political-economic landscape. Korean society holds to the premise that education is the great equaliser and that educational stratification is the new measure for upward social mobility. Success of the individual means success for the family. Thus, through the intergenerational transfer of various familial resources and economic capital, parents financially and emotionally support their children's education in order to attain material resources, social prestige, and differentiated cultural capital. In doing so, they look not only to their children's future but to their own too, expecting to have a safety net in their old age by having financial affordance and emotional care from their

(successful) educated children. Financial and emotional intergenerational reciprocity is a universal phenomenon. However, the familial practice of supporting and investing in their children's education has been taken up too enthusiastically and become normalised across South Korean society to the extent that the excessive financial burdens for children's private education have become a persistent social problem. The private education industry in South Korea grossed more than 13 trillion pounds in 2008 (Munwha ilbo Jan 16, 2008), and in 2010 almost 70% of junior high school students were enrolled in some form of private education (Korean economic magazine Apr 27, 2011). Put in this context, the "education fever" afflicting young South Korean women in this research is quite simply a symptom of the distinctive culture of familism in Korea.

Not only the individuals but also their families play a central role in migration decision-making. The family participates in the critical decision-making process that determines which family member will migrate, for how long, and with what purpose, deciding how familial resources will be distributed to migrating family members and when family members will return home (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991). Formerly, important decisions affecting the family would have been made solely by the patriarch. As gender roles and gender norms in South Korean families change, though, how the family handles children's educational migration is also changing.

First, instrumental motherhood is taking precedence over authoritarian fatherhood. Mothers remain actively involved in children's educational migration even after children complete their university education and advance to join the globalised infinite competition, as seen in cases of Interviewee 3, 5, 8, 9, 11, 12, and 13. Many mothers have become "backstage managers" (ChoHan, H.J. 2002:172), directing their children's education (not a role fathers usually take), as well as increasing the familial private property. These are just two ways that mothers further the family's social mobility. As studying abroad becomes normalised across South Korean society, so does the continued maternal involvement in children's education over a protracted period of time, especially in families with the resources to support children's educational migration and global careers. This new trend also increases a mother's power in the family and over her children (more details in Chapter 6).

Second, it is becoming quite common for daughters to be the recipients of familial supports and resources in studying abroad, not just sons. In traditional South Korean Confucian culture, the sons (or brothers) used to be the only ones to benefit from

familial material and emotional support (as well as the familial inheritance) because theirs was the only success to impact and advance the family's success. Education for daughters was not a priority and resources for education costs were often earmarked for the sons, requiring the women of their mothers' generation to sacrifice their education for the sake of their brothers'. It was not at all uncommon to discover narratives in the writings of women factory workers in the 1970s describing the sacrifices daughters or sisters made in order to support sons' or brothers' tuition fees by going to urban areas to earn money as factory workers or clerks (Barracough 2017:242). For the most part, the education women did receive was predominantly meant to help them secure a "good marriage", and their marriage rather than their career was viewed as a vehicle for familial social mobility (Chang, K.S. 2002).

Now, however, young women receive attention, support, and even an "investment" of family funds for their higher education, including educational migration under "the new gender regime" (McRobbie 2009). The increasing investment of familial resources in daughters' educational pursuits can partially be attributed to the one- or two-child policy enforced by the government to control the birth rate in the 1960s and 1970s. This policy has contributed to the events that have led these young women to being the first generation whose higher education was taken for granted and future employment was seen as a means of familial social mobility and securing parents' later years regardless of their sex/gender. Parents have started to realise that their daughters will support them in their old age (Kim, Y.H. 2012) and that their daughters are also capable of being successful enough to improve the family's social mobility. In light of these revelations, familial financial and emotional support for the educational migration of these women is on the rise, and through higher education and global careers, these women have become participants in the intergenerational exchange and contributors to the family's social mobility. However, even while gender norms and gender roles are changing, a woman's advantageous marriage is viewed as a viable path to improving the family's social standing (more details in Chapter 6).

## **Globalised higher education/industry<sup>8</sup>, and high skilled migration scheme**

Using student and work visas as a lure, the UK actively campaigns to entice young South Korean women to make the UK their educational destination of choice in this globalised phenomenon of higher education/industry. As a consequence of neoliberal competition, the UK's higher education/industry has expanded beyond its borders, recruiting an unprecedented number of "global students", as well as establishing campuses abroad. The education industry has become the UK's 7<sup>th</sup> largest export industry (Collini 2013) with 19% of the entire student population from outside the UK. Of post-graduate programs, however, non-EU students made up an astounding 42% of enrolment in MA and PhD courses (UKCISA 2016-2017). The purported purpose behind the globalisation of UK universities was to facilitate global academic collaboration and accumulation of economic capitals. However, scholars point out that little global collaboration has taken place, and in fact economic accumulation has been the actual aim of the globalisation of higher education (Miller 2012). Moreover, when governmental funds for higher education were cut and universities could set the tuition fees at will, "global students" or international students came to be viewed as the economic revenue that UK universities depended on for financial security. Tuition fees for international students are skyrocketing and the gap between international post-graduate students and UK and EU graduate students is widening. In 2018, it was noted that international student fees were set between 9,470 and 28,700 pounds whereas EU student fees ranged from 4,950 to 13,070 pounds (The Complete University Guide 2019) (more details in Chapter 5).

Despite exorbitant tuition fees, the young women in my research felt that studying for an MA degree abroad was still the most expeditious strategy for gaining legal residency in developed countries and an opportunity to pursue a global career. Studying and earning education certificates in the UK had its advantages; it helped young women improve their English, gave them social recognition in South Korea, and qualified them for better employment opportunities. English proficiency and studying abroad are two things South Korean companies specifically started to look for when hiring after the millennium (Hankook ilbo Aug 9 2015). As Interviewee 6 told me, people in South Korea are normally hospitable and "would defer" to those

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<sup>8</sup> I refer to this as the "higher education/industry" in order to emphasize 1) higher education is becoming an industry, whose purpose is to make profits over improvements, and 2) the contemporary higher education scene mixes education and industry.

who had studied abroad in Western countries. In some fields such as fine arts academies, it was even deemed necessary to study abroad in order to become a professor. Thus, these young women strategically chose to study at higher-education institutions in the UK in order to have a competitive advantage back in South Korea.

Although Korean university degrees are equivalent to the educational certificates issued by universities in the UK and elsewhere, they are not currently as widely recognised. Thus, they do not have a significant advantage when applying for jobs outside the country. Either because the universities are not ranked at or even near the top in the world, or because they are located in a ‘the third world’ country, the reasons for South Koreans universities not being widely recognised are mixed. However, even if South Korean universities had a higher profile, that would not change the fact that educational migration enables these young women to legally live in the UK, but more specifically London. A city that due to its high concentration of global finance and multinational companies, as well as the high-skilled international and global labour markets (Sassen 2001), they believe will provide them with job opportunities in other global cities and countries. Since occupations in these markets are standardised and thus transferrable to other places outside London and the UK, the women might work anywhere in the world once they have gained enough experience in London. As Interviewee 1 said, “London is the final destination for higher education”, and Interviewee 4 added that “London is a good starting point to begin a career”.

Since the late 1990s, the UK has specifically targeted high-skilled workers in the sectors of IT, management, and science, as well as giving investors and entrepreneurs incentives to invest in and develop technological industries in the UK. In order to remain competitive in the knowledge economy and to supplement a deficiency in the domestic high-skilled labour market, many countries in Western Europe and North America, along with Australia, have created selective migration schemes designed to attract highly skilled migrants (Shachar 2006). Seeing the potential for high-skilled workers in the sectors mentioned above, the UK government started to issue specific work visas (Tier 1 Post-Study Work Visa, PSW visa) to non-EU higher education students as of 1999. Hiring from a non-EU group would have the advantage of employing workers that have the same education and capacity as domestic workers but are satisfied with lower wages (Sennett 2006:107,119). Even though political anxieties about immigration put a stop to the PSW visa application in 2012, the right of abode and working permits are still issued to non-EU PhD graduates and selected entrepreneurial graduates (Home Office 2016).

Young South Korean women aware of the visa allowance strategized to make the most use of this opportunity. For instance, Interviewee 1 told me that even just the possibility of winning one of the lottery-system visas to have the right to work in London, even with strict limitations and time constraints, would be worth the risk and expense of educational migration. Aihwa Ong, a Chinese scholar on citizenship in the age of neoliberalism, warned that the governments would still control and limit the flow of (high-skilled) migration regardless of the “social contract” between the nation-states and migrants and mutual agreement to accumulate economic resources (1999). However, the young South Korean women I interviewed had made up their minds that they would not be discouraged by possible changes to migration policies and would make the best of the situation as it stood.

## **Conclusion**

In sum, this chapter scrutinised the three main factors that compelled young South Korean women to choose educational migration. As “individual migrants”, these young women’s collective generational experiences have been coloured by globalisation policies and the economic crisis in South Korea. These circumstances have taught them that they need to be competitive and that a global education and career will help them to ascend the class ladder. Seeking a solution for economic precarity, as well as escaping from a patriarchal society, they chose educational migration to escape gendered discriminative labour markets and work conditions. I went on to discuss the “migration institutes” of family that have also played a significant role in the women’s decision-making in migration. Their higher education and global careers are believed to enable the family’s upward mobility, or at the very least secure the status quo. Thus, parents, especially mothers, are actively engaged in the financial and emotional support of their daughters’ educational migration. I finished by looking at the “migration regime” that is the UK government and globalised higher education/industry. These regimes covet the educational migration of young South Korean women, knowing that once these educational migrants graduate that there will have a pool of (high) skilled workers to recruit from. The UK government offers lottery-system visas, and the implication is that the global students are being granted a boon, it is the corporations that really profit economically. Despite all this, these young women took full advantage of the allowances made for their

educational migration in order to find better employment not only in South Korea and the UK but also in other countries around the world.



## **Chapter 5. Migration Experience in Newly Reconstructed Globalised and Cosmopolitan Spaces**

### **Introduction**

From their academic and working performance to consumption to their psychological state of mind, this chapter will examine how social factors such as class, cultural background, ethnicity or race, and nationality affect the migration experience of young South Korean women. I will argue that competence, autonomy, and participation, elements that the global meritocratic system considers to be necessary for equal opportunities in the workplace, are constructed from unequal social factors such as class, cultural background, ethnicity, and race. To break down the migration experiences of the young women in my study, I have classified them as either “global students” or “global workers”. This distinction helped to better examine the values and regulations formed under the specific spaces of global/internationalised universities and transnational companies. In order to examine the effect of class, I recruited young women who had to work while studying in order to support themselves, as well as those who didn't. To understand their state of mind in migration, I have studied how the “global success myth” leads to depression and feelings of failure and how consumption both alleviates depression for some while exacerbating the malaise of others.

### **Global students**

The school doesn't help international students find internships or jobs at all. I heard the learning system encourages students to be autonomous, but I think it is more that the school regards international students solely as a source of income. The environment is not hospitable to international students and sometimes it is very exclusive. At the beginning of the term, a professor mispronounced my name. I understand Korean names can sometimes be hard for them, but he asked me to go by a Western name, and continuously mispronounced my name until the end of term. (Interviewee 10)

The description of the curriculum on the school's website that I read while researching

schools when I was still in Seoul did not match the actual course. I wanted to study fashion design but the course was about management in the fashion industry. It was for middle-level managers in the industry, not for someone who was just starting out. The academic office didn't tell me about this when I called to ask for more information before I enrolled in the course. Moreover, the course was not well organised and the facilities were inferior. I suspect the faculty was established solely to make money. Many students quit during the course. I wanted to quit it as well. (Interviewee 18)

The young South Korean women in my study enrolled in universities in London with the expectation that they would be entering global or cosmopolitan learning environments that embraced diversity. It was natural for them to have this expectation, especially since the adverts on the university websites and flyers that global students peruse when applying from their home countries, present a collage of images that include global students. By portraying global students as a significant part of the student body, it appears as if these universities at the very least understand different cultures and are equipped to accommodate the needs of multinational students.

Universities in the UK have been campaigning to recruit global students since the late '90s by promoting newly reconstructed spaces based on globalisation, cosmopolitanism, and diversity. However, despite establishing international student programs, they did very little to modernise the content in preparation for the changed learning environments. Something many young South Korean women experienced first-hand to their detriment. Interviewee 10 noticed that her university didn't reprimand her professor for cultural insensitivity after he tried to force her to answer to an English name when he couldn't pronounce her South Korean name. That a professor with little to no understanding of different cultures continued to teach a class that included global students without being reprimanded is negligence on the part of the administration. It also demonstrates the lack of adequate retraining to equip academic staff with the skills to cope with the changed learning environment. While Interviewee 10 was disillusioned by her professor, Interviewee 18 felt taken advantage of by the entire institution. Since her school first misrepresented the course and then failed to create a proper curriculum for the course that was offered instead, she wasted her time in London completing a course she didn't want. She wasted her time and her money paying expensive tuition fees on a useless degree. Many of the young women in my research felt that universities invested effort and resources to recruit global students simply for the wealth they would bring,

but then failed to invest the same effort to modify courses and facilities to accommodate global students.

This lack of adaptation is astonishing considering the number of global students attending UK universities has steadily increased year upon year. Non-EU student enrolment increased from 114,910 in the 2006–2007 school year to 136,090 in 2008–2009, and Asian students increased from 73,630 in 2006–2007 to 112,300 in 2010–2011 to 126,670 in 2017–2018 (HESA 2017). As of the 2016–2017 school year, global students have come to constitute 13% of the student population in institutions of higher education (UKCISA 2016-2017). However, even though the number of students from non-EU countries has increased, the universities in London still retain a staunchly Eurocentric culture. Catchwords such as global environment, cosmopolitanism, and diversity are just lip service that higher education institutions use in their campaigns to attract global students but don't put into practice (Archer 2007; Ahmed 2006, 2007; Kimura 2014).

The increasing number of global students is most certainly a direct result of the Browne Report of 2010 that essentially authorised lifting the cap on tuition fees, allowing universities to set their fees. This initiated the financialization of higher education institutions in the UK and created a higher education industry where students came to be regarded as consumers. Global students became an especially significant source of economic revenue for higher education institutions to the extent that tuition fees for international students could be as much as triple those of domestic students. In 2017, for instance, English universities could charge up to a maximum of £9,250 per year for domestic undergraduate students, while international undergraduate students paid between £10,000 pounds and £35,000 (Times Higher Education 2017). In theory, universities have re-invented themselves as global and cosmopolitan learning environments, encouraging global academic collaborations and world citizen consciousness. In reality, they have concentrated more attention on strategies to increase economic profits than on improving their existing learning environments (Miller 2012). As a result, global students have been selectively included only to be effectively excluded. The universities welcome global students and their willingness to pay high tuition fees, but without providing proper education and facilities that welcome falls flat, leaving students feeling marginalised, regardless of their increasing presence on campus.

I was a spokesmodel for my university. My face came up on the school website. You know,

there are many photos of Asian students on school websites as school ambassadors... But 3 months into my studies, I realised that I might not be able to learn much here... It was hard to participate in classes. In our education system, students tend to listen to teachers without voicing our opinions. But in the seminars here, you need to speak up. I couldn't adjust.... It was hard for me to sit quietly without joining in all the time in the seminars. I used to come home and cry after these seminars, and I would get so sad that I couldn't leave my room for a couple of days. (Interviewee 1)

I had a classmate who'd studied at an English school. He worked tirelessly to make his own way. He went to meet a famous designer and managed to get a job working for him or found jobs with the professors who liked he got. But it was not so easy for me to do the same thing. I thought so long as I was proactive, I would succeed... and I thought I was passive and...wrong. I know I had to be proactive in order to get what I wanted, but I was not as good at being proactive as I needed to be. (Interviewee 10)

It is difficult for global students to actively participate in the academic activities on campus when the learning environment is not pluralistic enough to support and accommodate their diversities. This is especially problematic in regards to differences in pedagogies, programs, and facilities. Some young South Korean women in my research suffered from crippling depression and became apathetic, slowly withdrawing from the structured academic activities that caused so much distress. Interviewee 1 especially, but also some other young women in my research, had difficulty in adjusting to the seminars that didn't show any consideration for how the learning culture in the West (centred around student participation) differs from the East (centred around the teacher's lecture). After every seminar, Interviewee 1 became so discouraged that she was unable to participate in the discussions that she sank into a depression and stayed in her room for days. Interviewee 10 often blamed herself, believing that she was not proactive enough in building academic relationships to help in her job search. Unfortunately, universities pathologized global students for their lack of participation and consequent poor school performance. This pervasive attitude led some young women in my research to criticise themselves for their maladjustment and view their lack of participation and poor performance as their fault.

## **Global workers**

Of my interviewees, a few succeeded in achieving their initial goals of obtaining “legal and social flexible citizenship”, or the right of abode and the right to work as full-time employees in transnational companies. (I excluded those working at Korean or British companies in the UK since these companies did not facilitate freedom to move around in the Europe.) Those women who did succeed found high-paying jobs in the fields of IT, media, management, and science in London after graduation. Specialising in these subjects almost guaranteed that they would find full-time jobs, especially since the UK labour market had to hire (high) skilled global workers to compensate for the shortage of domestic workers in these fields. After obtaining legal citizenship in the UK, which opened the door to living and working in Europe, one of the women in my study moved to Paris and another to Berlin. After working in London for a while, yet another of my interviewees became a journalist specialising in world travel. She also published a book about her migration experiences in London, which gave her recognition as a successful and cosmopolitan woman and a higher profile in South Korea and in Korean communities around the world. Providing proof of a global career was necessary to ensure that they would be lauded as being successful mobile “global workers”.

These young highly educated middle-class women had a strong desire to rise in the business world as competent and successful career women. To do that, they would have to seek out women-friendly workplaces, which meant leaving South Korea. Every last one of my interviewees told me that young women in South Korean working environments faced unfavourable conditions. In addition to gender and age discrimination, many women also face class-based discrimination. For example, all the women I interviewed had been admitted to elite universities in South Korea on their own merit. However, the women from the upper middle-classes whose families had substantial economic and social capital faced fewer challenges than those without family backing. In a South Korean society where elite social networks centred on rich and powerful families, kindships, and regionalism, dominate Korean social life, women from middle-class families realised that their intelligence and competence carried little clout<sup>9</sup> once their ‘ordinary’ background was factored in. But by becoming professional

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<sup>9</sup> For instance, the nepotism that comes from exclusive informal networks built on family connections, friends from the same elite schools, and people from the same hometowns have created corruption so serious that a law (Kim Young-Ran Law) was established in

career women, these merely middle-class elite women used their relative deprivation to motivate themselves to go abroad and utilise their intelligence, capacity for hard work, and self-discipline to overcome their relative lack of economic, social, and cultural capital.

Those young Korean women who obtained flexible citizenships and well-paid jobs in the UK appeared to be thriving and living a glamorous life in the eyes of family and friends in South Korea. Often, they had the recognition of not only their home communities but South Korean society at large. Interviewee 2's friends envied her for her unimpeded mobility and lucrative job and Interviewee 3, who had many young fans that wanted to become like her, even appeared on a national television talk show as a celebrity guest (Kim, S.Y., 2015).

However, those of my interviewees who had conquered the first hurdle, which was obtaining the limited right to work, were then faced with a second hurdle, the obstacles to obtaining legal flexible citizenship. First, just in order to make sure they could stay and eventually obtain legal flexible citizenship and the unrestricted right to work (social flexible citizenship), my interviewees had to accept entry-level jobs for which they were generally overqualified in order to gain work experience in the host country and build up to better opportunities. Though they were (high) skilled workers in IT, science, and finance, the nature of the work available to them was limited to relatively low-skilled jobs until they finally had the right of abode/work or found satisfying jobs. The women in my research endured monotonous tasks, worked harder and longer than others, and waited anxiously for their initial 3-year work visa to be extended for another 2 years. In a sense, the promise of the right to work and the right of abode ensures compliant workers. Anxious because visa laws could be randomly changed, they were apt to keep their heads down and become voluntarily workaholics for fear of doing anything that would see them deported. It was no wonder that Interviewee 2 was rigid with anxiety while waiting to receive her extended visa, worrying something would go wrong. Only after working and living in the UK for 5 years could global workers apply for a residency permit and legal citizenship, both of which open doors to greater job opportunities.

Until they do attain legal and social flexible citizenship, they must navigate the obstacles engineered by the migration policies for non-EU citizens that limit high-skilled job

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2017 to prevent the corruption perpetrated by elite dominating groups (Kyung-Hyang Newspaper, 1 Jul 2017).

opportunities. These policies almost seem intentionally confusing, and some companies are put off by the contradictory regulations. Though the UK welcomes high-skilled migrants to fill the lack in the domestic market, political anxiety regarding migrants translates into capricious and awkward visa laws meant to control migration. For instance, one such restriction demands that skilled migrants prove their salary exceeds a base figure set by the UK government in order to prolong their abode. For these young women, the limited right to work, which also enabled them to finally get the right of abode, was their primary concern, and they worked extra hard to grasp the few chances available to them. These complicated policies not only regulated the migrants but the companies wishing to hire them. Any company that sought to hire non-EU foreign workers could only do so after proving that there were no domestic or EU workers available or qualified for a particular job. Companies tended to want to avoid this extra trouble and would only hire foreigners under exceptional circumstances, unless of course they were global companies.

It is a global company and people are from all over the world. My colleagues are from India, Malaysia, Japan, the US, the UK, Canada, Switzerland, Bangladesh, Italy, Spain and Argentina. They came here because they are ambitious and smart. We work hard but it is not like how it is in Korea. We all have our own work to do, our own projects to plan, consulting with upper management on a deadline when a project is assigned. Plotting the timeline and stages of progress is not something upper management concerns itself with. It is absolutely fine if you want to work from home or if you take time off during the week, like many working moms do, but you have to finish the project by the agree-upon deadline, even if you have to work at it all night to do so. Promotion depends upon your abilities. There are quite a few young people in senior positions. One 60-year-old employee has a 35-year-old supervisor. The system is not based on seniority but merit. I think work performance evaluations are quite fair and objective, especially seeing as a person from the Singapore branch became a global manager while a British man here became redundant in the recent reconstructing. (Interviewee 3)

In working for transnational corporations, young highly educated women found in these global and multicultural workplaces the level playing field they had been seeking. Here they hoped they would be evaluated fairly and receive rewards and promotions according to their ability and successfully completed projects. Global and

cosmopolitan transnational companies have introduced an evaluation system diametrically opposed to the one the 'old' corporate work culture used. To this day, local corporations in South Korea and even some in the UK that adhere to the 'old' corporate culture consider social factors such as gender, ethnicity or race, nationality, and age when evaluating employees for promotion. Transnational companies that have newly reconstructed their work culture environment rate employees according to their competence, independence, participation, flexibility, and resilience. These corporations though fair are exacting and hold their employees to a high standard. They expect not only knowledge and skills but also English proficiency and an understanding of different cultures in order to work and communicate in the global and cosmopolitan meritocratic corporate culture. However, though their capacity to participate in a global and cosmopolitan environment is unquestioned since they have the job, their personal experiences are somewhat complicated by reservations about their English language skills.

Koreans shouldn't feel intimidated by English. I will never speak as well as a native, so I should learn as much as possible and not feel bad when I don't understand a word or two. It doesn't mean that I am stupid. I try not to feel distressed when I need to ask people what something means or if I need to look it up on the Internet. It is very important to be self-confident. The more you feel intimidated, the less chance you will have to practice English. (Interviewee 3)

To my way of thinking you [English native people] should be very grateful that I am able to speak enough English to communicate with you, as English is not my mother tongue. Or you should speak Korean to me so that I won't feel intimidated. (Interviewee 2)

English is the global language of business and communication for transnational companies. As such, English proficiency in business is an absolute must. However, for non-native speakers to be considered proficient in English, they not only need to learn grammar and vocabulary but improve their fluency. And in order to improve their verbal skills, my interviewees needed to continuously practise speaking, which required emotional management on their part. For instance, Interviewee 3 worked ceaselessly to maintain a certain level of positivity and at least feigned self-confidence



while speaking English so as not to be discouraged from practising and thus improving her language skills. She tried not to feel distressed when she made a mistake and was willing to ask when she didn't understand, something many other interviewees found it difficult to do. Interviewee 2 also tried to remain confident as she spoke English by reminding herself that as a non-native speaker it was natural for her to get something wrong. She further buoyed her spirits by thinking to herself that English speakers should be grateful that she was willingly to speak English at all. These two young women found ways to guard against the feelings of shame, a trap so many South Koreans fall into when they fear their English skills are subpar. This positive self-talk and the effort to reassure themselves was something they were compelled to do to overcome feelings of intimidation. Without this effort they would not be able to continue practising to improve their English proficiency (through repeated practices). Essentially, they needed to manage their emotions to increase their capacity to communicate in English. They needed to put in "an effort in dealing with feelings" (James 1989, quoted in Wang and Collins 2016) in relation to the self, which can be conceptualised as "emotional labour" (Hoschild 1983, quoted Wang and Collins 2016) in a broader sense.

The ceaseless management of emotion some young women in my research practised was not simply to control feelings of nervousness when speaking an unfamiliar foreign language but a careful negotiation and strategy to survive and thrive as competent workers. In the English-dominant global meritocracy, English proficiency is not merely the capacity to speak a foreign language fluently but proof of aptitude and a competitive edge. Therefore, it follows that the extra emotional effort or "labour" required while speaking English is a subtle reminder of how language is inseparable from capacities in the global meritocracy and is inextricably entangled with cultural background and ethnicity or race. This "emotional labour" in relation to self is a symptom of the complicated ethnic realities in the global meritocratic system. Moreover, the subtle divisions in the unofficial networks that could affect work opportunities and promotions show that competence is not the pure concept it is purported to be but complicatedly constructed according to cultural background, ethnicity, or race.

It is more comfortable to spend time with people of a similar cultural background and shared experiences at work. People from similar cultural backgrounds tend to get along better. In addition, as South Korea is not a common place to travel. So people normally

don't know about it and as a result people at work are not familiar with my cultural background... It is not so much discrimination, but I think the unfamiliarity can sometimes affect work opportunities. When upper management selects people for projects, they pick people not only because they are hard workers but also because they can comfortably spend time with them. It is alright at my level, but I am worried that should I advance to a managerial level my ethnicity could adversely affect further promotion... So, I think it is also necessary to meet South Korean people in higher positions in South Korea for networking for the future. (Interviewee 4)

Interviewee 4 perceptively observed how her colleagues would gravitate towards others they identified with based on cultural background, ethnicity or race, thereby creating informal divisions. She herself noticed that it came naturally to interact with people that share cultural, ethnic, or racial similarities. While she acknowledged and even understood these divisions, she worried that networking relationships based on cultural and ethnic familiarity in the unofficial sphere might influence decisions when job opportunities or promotions would arise. The notion that similarities in cultural background, ethnicity, or race that create feelings of familiarity could be deciding factors if higher managers had to choose between equally qualified candidates is not out of the realm of possibility. To argue that there was racial discrimination in awarding promotions would be a dangerous generalisation, but it would be just as dangerous to discount Interviewee 4's awareness of the tendency to gravitate to what is familiar. Worried and anxious, she instrumentalised her South Korean-ness to network with South Koreans outside her company to give herself options and ensure her career remained on an upward trajectory. Quick to realise that her initial expectation that transnational corporations valued only capacity was not entirely true, she walked a tightrope that is ethnic difference, having learned how it could subtly but meaningfully affect the public sphere of work. Interviewee 4's observations demonstrated how cultural background, ethnicity, and race constructed the complicated realities of global workers even in cosmopolitan London. The existence of her anxiety about whether cultural, ethnic, or racial differences are factors in developing or not developing work relationships that can be instrumental to future promotions itself gives a tiny peek into the complicated ethnic or racial realities in the global and cosmopolitan workplaces.

## **Young women in economic predicaments**

As has become the norm under neoliberalism, the family functions as a financial safety net. So while many children from rich families can expect support, the safety net that is family for children from low-income families is quite tenuous. Thus, rather than expect rewards, such as familial resources or husband's salaries, for abiding by the "familial gender norm" (Min, K.Y. 2009), young women from low-income families make their own way in the world. Though it is to their advantage and an empowering step to take, many just have no other choice. One way that they have sought to ensure their financial security is to pursue further education. Educational migration was one of the individualised practices and strategies these confident and ambitious young women from poorer backgrounds employ to realise their dreams on their own terms, regardless of the cost.

As such, some international students had to work while studying in London because their parents couldn't fully or even partially support their educational costs. Of my interviewees, Interviewee 17 was from a low-income family whose father was a concierge; Interviewee 16's parents had passed away and she had only her own income to support her; Interviewee 15, though her family was not poor (her father ran a small business in her home province), was one of many children in the family that needed help paying university tuition fees. Some received a portion of what they needed from their parents, either from a mother who wanted her daughter to have a better life (in the case of Interviewee 17), or a father, though "traditional", who reluctantly consented to help his daughter pursue a higher education in the UK (Interviewee 15). Whether receiving the occasional remittances from family or working to cover all the costs including tuition fees, these three had to work.

Despite financial challenges, these young women came to London seeking success through higher education, striving to become part of the "global class" and doing everything they could to avoid failing or falling behind. In going to London, they hoped to gain the qualifications they need to have global careers as a world-famous designer, a specialist in environmental NGO, and a CEO in a private nursing home. They were intelligent and ambitious, as proved by their exemplary final grades and extracurricular work in South Korean universities. Rather than being limited by the lack of financial support from their families, they were self-sufficient and secured their own cultural capital by continuing their education in various different institutions. They were willing to work themselves to exhaustion just for the opportunity to join the "global class".

However, their aspirations and ambitions ironically left them vulnerable to anxiety and depression.

Tuition fees and the basic cost of living are high in London. Tuition fees for international students in 2013 were as high £11,000 with the lowest fees around £8,000 per year. The UK Border Agency required a budget of at least £1,000 per month to qualify for a student visa to study in London. Average student rents were approximately £150 per week and the cost of living was approximately £104 per week according to the government's estimation (Study London 2013). When totalled up, the amount of money required for a one-year MA course was a minimum of £22,000 per person in 2013, which was a considerable amount of money for young women from economically deprived backgrounds. Since their parents' financial aid could not begin to cover tuition fees and living expenses, they had to work to support themselves during their educational migration.

As overseas students, they were not legal citizens of the UK and as such denied access to many of the social welfare benefits, such as council housing, subsidised education, and student loans. Since they had newly arrived and hadn't had time to improve their language skills, they had no choice but to accept low-skilled jobs, such as nannies, waitresses or sushi makers in East Asian restaurants. Or they would rent a whole house and make a bit of money by renting rooms and even the living room to other students. They occasionally found under-the-table work in New Malden's Korean community that paid cash at the end of each shift. Even though overseas students could only work a maximum of 20 hours a week, they frequently worked up to 40 hours or even more, turning to informal networks to find off-the-books low-skilled jobs.

I felt ashamed when the assignments I submitted were barely complete because I didn't have enough time after working at my part-time jobs, while people with money did better because they had enough time. Often those rich students had lower grades than I did, but they still showed off because they were improving. (Interviewee 17)

Working three or four times a week, I felt too tired to concentrate during class and I missed classes too. But I chose work instead of going to class—it was hard. I can't describe it. I got a merit for some subjects, and a fail in others, but I did pass the thesis.

But I felt so ashamed when I failed the exam. Actually, I felt ashamed in front of my classmates—they didn't understand the fact that I worked and lacked the time to study and was stressed about it. I felt ashamed that I failed an exam that others passed. (Interviewee 15)

Adjusting to a foreign metropolis like London is challenging enough, but these young women who had to work to afford to even be in London had the added difficulty of finding a balance between work and education/internships. Their attempts to divide their time invariably led to mediocre results across the board. They knew if they wanted to succeed, they had to work at all three simultaneously even though their true purpose for being in London did not include holding down several low-paying jobs. On the one hand, if they spent too much time working to make a living, it could lead to assignments going unfinished or handed in late. If class schedules overlapped with work schedules, they chose poor attendance over risking losing their job. On the other hand, if they concentrated on their education instead of work, it could lead to a lack of funds and an early departure from London when they didn't have enough money to survive. In addition to taking care of their present circumstances, they needed to prepare for their future employment by applying for competitions and exhibition opportunities or doing several internships. This took even more time and energy away from work and study and put extra stress on their already precarious economic situation since the internships were mostly unpaid. That they had to work at low-skilled jobs just to survive not only affected their studies but reduced the amount of time they had to establish their career, which would then delay their successful return to their families and South Korea.

These financially impoverished young women had a poor academic standing due to conflicting and demanding schedules and the consequent lack of time they could dedicate to their studies. They didn't have enough time to look over the feedback supervisors gave on their essays, which meant that they had to postpone handing in their final thesis. As a result, all the young women I interviewed who had to work while studying failed at least one exam that they had to rewrite. Juggling three things at the same time, study, internship/competition, and working for a living, deprived them of an opportunity to concentrate on studying and denied them the recognition that would come with a successful academic year. Instead of enjoying recognition for a job well done, they felt ashamed of their poor academic performance. They had come all the way to London for a chance to study at an elite university, refusing to be stopped by their family's

disapproval and indifference, or worry about their siblings' jealousy because they as the academically outstanding daughters had their parents' support, if only partially, only to become 'deficient' students with a poor academic standing. It was true that upper middle-class students also had difficulties in studying and maintaining self-confidence in the face of a challenging new environments, pedagogical methods, and language. However, young women coping with financial insecurity were plagued with feelings of shame and low self-esteem more than those who didn't have to work for a living.

My ultimate dream is to be the CEO of a private nursing enterprise, opening branches in the UK, South Korea, and North Korea. I also want to do a PhD. It is the vision God gave me when I went to a conference, although I know I have little money to do it... But I wanted to go back to Korea without renewing my visa because I had had such a hard time. Working in a nursing home was difficult, but I kept working and I had other jobs too. I didn't study full-time, nor did I speak English very well. I wanted to go home since I was physically ill. But I didn't because I wanted to succeed here. (Interviewee 16)

I felt anxious and nervous. I was worried that I might be trapped in this stage of in-between forever, that I didn't belong here but was never able to return home. I felt anxious, thinking I couldn't return home to Korea because I hadn't succeeded here yet. I don't have other options there in Korea. (What does success mean to you?) **You know there are global success myths.** [My emphasis] People study abroad and achieve something big at the end of it, having overcome every adversity. Only one or two out of thousands might succeed, but I want to be a part of that story. I wanted to succeed. But it was uncertain...sometimes I almost felt I had achieved success but other times, when I felt anxious and was thinking negatively, I felt as if I were drifting without roots forever stuck in a part-time low-paid job. (Interviewee 17)

Despite adversity, these young women faced down economic predicaments and used their desire for success and achievement to sustain themselves through the hard times. The "global success myth" or global fantasy that Interviewee 17 mentioned was one they believed in even though they knew this fantasy came true only in extremely exceptional circumstances. Based on the success stories of Korean immigrants who have permanently settled in the host countries (mainly in the U.S.), the "global success

myth” meant not only material success and legal citizenship but also social recognition. Those who lived the global fantasy could return home triumphant and waving their “flexible citizenships”, which almost all young South Korean educational migrants aimed to obtain. As Interviewee 17 said, these young women used the global fantasy to overcome adversity and endure the hardships of their educational migration, putting their imagination to work to conjure up a preferred reality. However, the imaginative practice of “global fantasy” doesn’t always have positive results. Their almost normalised indulgence in the “global fantasy” prevented them from voluntarily stopping the brutal reality of their migrant life and compelled them to continue until they were exhausted and burned out. Only once they didn’t have enough money to continue living in London would they finally concede and admit they could no longer endure their educational migration.

They fluctuated between an intense “global desire” and need to succeed and a crushing “global anxiety” and fear of failure. On the one hand, their “global desire” was strong and they pushed themselves to work harder and harder, believing this was the key to success. Every time they achieved anything related to their academic or working performance, however small, they were elated. These occasional successes reconfirmed their identity as high-achieving ambitious young women and reinforced their belief that they could succeed. On the other hand, their “global anxiety” intensified as they faced financial challenges, or when they found themselves stuck in dead-end low-paid jobs. They were prone to negative feelings, and the intense ups of their small successes were cancelled out by the severe downs of their failures. This left them feeling depressed, helpless, and ashamed when they did finally face the reality of their predicament, and their exhaustion from so working hard compounded their emotional vulnerability. Without a doubt, women without familial financial support frequently experienced the emotional ups-and-downs more intensely than their upper middle-class peers. “Global fantasy” is a double-edged sword. With one swipe it gives them the hope they need to bravely struggle through the adversity their economic predicament causes. But, at the same time, this false hope induces them to struggle onward in vain as they work harder and harder, repeating a cycle of ups and downs that leaves them physically and emotionally vulnerable.

## **Lifestyle and consumption**

According to post-feminist scholar Anita Harris (2003), along with capacity, economic activity and participation, consumption constitutes a significant part of how young women build up their identity. Although Harris examines young women in Australia, her arguments apply to young Western and South Korean women alike, especially since South Korea became a part of the global neoliberal system. Moreover, today's South Korean young women grew up watching internationally recognised soap operas such as *Friends* and *Sex and the City*, both of which contributed to the formation of a global 'new femininity'. Studies on these soap operas, especially *Sex and the City*, illustrate how the cosmopolitan lifestyle and consumption play important roles in forming the identities of young women as global youth. This new identity as 'modern girls' (Akass et al. 2003) and these feelings of empowerment are a product of participation in the sphere of consumption (the public sphere). South Korean studies independent of Harris' findings have also shown that consumption plays a significant role in forming the new identities of young South Korean women as 'modern girls'. According to these studies, young South Korean women consider consumption as way to "escape" from the gruelling competition at work, as well as means to reinforce the social status they obtained through cultural capital (Mo, H.J. 2008). Many of the young South Korean women in my research followed a similar pattern. Abroad, they utilised consumption as an escape from the difficulties of migration as in the case of Interviewee 6 who bought expensive organic foods to alleviate her sadness. Back home, they flaunted and enjoyed the cultural capital they earned living in London and used it to elevate their social status in South Korea. Interviewee 10 for instance enjoyed the fact that her friends back home had started to drink their coffee black in imitation of her, thinking since she had lived in London that it must be a cosmopolitan practice. It was due to this imitation that interviewee 10 felt her educational migration in London made superior to her friends. Many upper middle-class young South Korean women in my research actually could afford cosmopolitan lifestyles. They lived in upscale neighbourhoods such as Notting Hill, Canada Water, White Chapel, Camden, or Surrey Quays, bought organic foods in The Whole Foods or Waitrose, and enjoyed cultural activities like going galleries and museums, gigs and music festivals, plays and musicals. Consumption, however, had more complicated implications for some young women in my research in the setting of migration in a foreign city.

One time I didn't receive money from family, so I couldn't buy anything. At the time, I



felt like a poor student from a third world country. I couldn't even use the bus. The bottom of society. I felt as if I had fallen to the very bottom of London. (Interviewee 9)

I try to dress well here so as not to be treated badly. If I dress badly and look poor, people are stiff and unfriendly as if I were a poor Chinese person. (Interviewee 10)

Consumption of fashion and buying in to the “beauty complex” (McRobbie 2009) was not as simple as just clothing themselves or as vain as caring about their appearance. It was a tool that they could use not only to shape their identity but to differentiate themselves from previous economic immigrants. However, it was also a form of armour that they could use to protect themselves from disrespect, inevitable tension (as a foreigner), and even deflect possible racial discrimination in the host society. Although Interviewee 9 was aware of her racial/ethnic difference, she distinguished herself from other ethnic minorities and improved her status in her host country through consumption. She donned clothes that would help her to feel empowered and ensure that she would not be dismissed as a racial/ethnic minority or as a “second citizen”. Interviewee 10 believed that when her clothing appeared shabby that people were standoffish. Supposing that people guessed her economic status from her appearance (clothing), she started to dress more expensively in order to be treated equally and have respect from others. These intentional actions indicate that these young women used consumption strategically, especially fashion. They hoped not only to be accepted as regular, unthreatening, and even desirable global citizens in the host society but to convince themselves that they are the ‘new migrants’: young, intelligent, and self-disciplined from newly rich countries. They attempted to use consumer citizenship to gain admission to the host society. Consumption for the young women in my study has parallels to studies on women who utilise their womanliness in male-dominate societies. According to feminist psychoanalyst Joan Rivere, women conceal their masculine traits behind a mask of womanliness. They use their femininity and subtler tactics to get what they want rather than openly asserting themselves, all to avert the reprisals for being too forward in a male-dominated world (1929). Although Rivere’s study was set in 1929, her findings are just as relevant to my study today. But instead of employing their womanliness to get what they want, the women in my research wear the “right clothes” to downplay their visibility as racial/ethnic minorities and to fit in.

I couldn't afford the expensive residence hall located in central London where my Korean classmates lived. Instead I moved more than 10 times in order to save on rent. One room I used to live in was an attic with a low slanting ceiling and another one had poor ventilation. (Interviewee 15)

Sometimes people at church gave me used clothes and foodstuffs. It is a way of saving money. (Interviewee 16)

Not all young South Korean women studying and working in London found empowerment through consumption. The less fortunate young women were excluded from this new freedom and public participation as consumer citizens. Worse still, they struggled with economic adversity in something so simple as satisfying the basic "life needs" as they tried to cut costs and hunted for the cheapest food, clothes, and accommodation. However, I had one Interviewee who was very much aware of her limited political position and attempted to create alternative spaces.

There were some people who told me to go home if I didn't have money and work. I understood why they told me this, but I was also upset they spoke to me in such a flippant way. They were part of the system in which rich parents made rich kids [said in an angry voice]. Anyway, I think I am better than them since I have learned how to handle difficult situations. Since I didn't have money I had to work here and there in the UK, and I had more chances to meet British people and learn how to interact with different people. But other people just went shopping, which you can only do if you have money but it still doesn't buy belonging to any one community. (Interviewee 17)

Interviewee 17 was clearly aware of the position her class put her in and was angered by the fact that higher education reinforced class stratification. She was critical of consumer citizenship, stating that it had limitations in attaining recognition in and belongingness to a community. She was angry and resentful when people who didn't understand her situation were quick to judge her predicament, feeling degraded and devalued by them. At the same time, however, she attempted to console herself with the fact that her experiences in overcoming financial problems were practical life lessons even though she

was ambivalent about her economic predicament and hardship.

I did a workshop named “healing tea” at an exhibition once. I was to invite about 50 people, friends, acquaintances, and even strangers, and listen to their stories carefully, and make a tea for them. Since I experienced hard times here myself, thankfully that helped me understand and empathise with their various stories from lost love to worries about work. Some people talked about things I don’t think they would even tell their friends, and others just sat drinking tea for 4 hours. I listened to them and gave advice if I could, but many people seemed healed just by having a person listen to their stories. Even though you don’t know them, it all works out well if you listen to them carefully and give advice with sincerity. The workshop healed me as well. (Interviewee 17)

Interviewee 17 worked to alleviate her economic predicament by attempting to make her life liveable in various other ways. By inviting people to her “healing tea” workshops, listening to their stories and giving advice if she could, she regained her self-respect and feelings of self-worth when she realised that she could contribute to the well-being of others just by listening and caring. The time she spent helping others had a curative effect on her too, healing the wounds of shame she carried because of her disappointing academic performance and financial predicament. Through this incredibly creative act, she was reenergised and found the strength to continue taking care of herself. Her resilience is a very important character trait that has been vital to her survival, especially living as she did in an individualised competitive society. According to Han Byung-Chul, a philosopher who is highly critical of neoliberalism, the ability to maintain physical and emotional resilience was and is an important skill to have living in a neoliberal meritocratic society. In a society where there is no end to competition and one must continuously produce results, people are plagued with fatigue and feelings of depression because all their energy is consumed by the unceasing their effort (Han, B.C. 2012), leaving them feeling hollow and exhausted. Therefore, individuals should prioritise their health over social success and concentrate on revitalising and healing themselves in order to live their lives to the fullest. In the case of Interviewee 17, she ‘exploited’ and overworked herself, but the struggle of working and studying at the same time, as well as managing life in a foreign city wore her down and she sank into depression. However, she managed to do something so many others hadn’t, she restored her energy. She did this using a creative approach based

on the feminist ethics of care to cleanse away gnawing anxieties while making friends by helping people to find even a few hours of peace at the same time.

Interviewee 17's life was quite different from Interviewee 10's life in almost every way. Interviewee 10 had full financial backing from her family, and thus had quite an affluent lifestyle, one that provided an apartment in a decent and safe middle-class area, Canada Water, and travel to Korea on a regular basis. However, she was disappointed when she found the university was indifferent to international students and faced frequent (subtle) exclusion. She started to withdraw from campus life and the host society, narrowing the relationships she had with other people to only one or two friends. She told me she had been miserable and felt powerless for the entire year and returned home as soon as she finished the course, which was not her original plan. Although both faced similar obstacles during migration, Interviewee 10 didn't try to improve her conditions, while Interviewee 17 showed an impressive determination to revitalise her life without all the financial advantages Interviewee 10 enjoyed.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter examined the migration experiences of young South Korean women on campus, in the workplace, and everyday life spaces. As newly reconstructed globalised and cosmopolitan places, universities and transnational companies seemed to promise young women a shiny new future with equal participation, rewards, and self-actualisation. Unfortunately, instead of an environment free of considerations based on cultural background, ethnicity, race, nationality, and class, the reality they encountered was far from free of these entanglements. Universities failed to provide cosmopolitan learning environments and treated global students merely as sources of economic revenue regardless of their increased presence on campus. Finding themselves in an inhospitable learning environment, young South Korean women often withdrew from the academic activities they felt excluded from anyway. And instead of admitting this was a structural issue and making changes to include the global students they had lured to their campuses, the universities blamed the individuals for not adjusting. Even transnational companies misrepresented themselves to young South Korean women, leading them to believe that only capacity mattered and social factors such as gender, cultural background, ethnicity, race, and nationality would in no way impact building their global careers. However, what they discovered as they negotiated school and work

alike contradicted these bright images. They learned that however subtle cultural background, ethnicity, race, and nationality are inextricably tangled up in communication and social networking and the process of constructing capacity itself.

The “global success myth” was another deceptively promising concept. Dangling the hope of flexible citizenship, young South Korean women from low-income families endured hardship and adversity until eventually the intensely emotional up-and-down of tiny successes and crushing failures left them vulnerable and exposed to physical and mental exhaustion. Those young South Korean from economically straitened circumstances struggled with negative feelings more than their upper middle-class peers. This was partially due to the fact that wealthy young South Korean women could make the best of their experience abroad by employing the strategy of consumption. These women could afford to buy the right clothes that would appeal to their host society and brand themselves as desirable global migrants. Although the women without the advantage of wealthy parents were excluded from consumer citizenship, not all of them succumbed to frustration. Over the years and through many interviews I learned that a few had attempted to make their lives liveable in the creative ways, deriving strength and resilience from their efforts instead of consumption.

## **Chapter 6. Reconstruction of Intimacy**

### **Introduction**

This chapter examines the issue of intimacy during migration. I will argue that young South Korean single women who migrated alone rationalized and instrumentalized intimate emotions in maintaining relations centered on romantic relationships, friendship and social relationships, and familial relationships. But their strategical alliances in the field of intimacy lacked trust, reciprocity, and bonding, which are vital to feeling supported and secure. Without being able to trust, they were prone to be wary and guarded, but in safeguarding themselves, this isolated them further and ironically resulted in making them more vulnerable to negative emotions. This chapter will argue that “their disorganization of the private sphere” (Furedi, 2013:218), the emptiness of intimate relationships, is the toll global meritocracy takes on their private lives. By examining their strategies in the field of intimacy, this chapter will use the information gathered to critic other studies’ discourses on women’s migration that argue that female migrants’ agency brings about life opportunities.

### **Romantic relationship**

As young South Korean single women migrate for the purposes of higher education and work, the matter of “marriageability” (Willis and Yeoh 2003: Location 2266 of 4592) and “marriageable age” does frequently affect decision-making in migration and the timing of migration in the life course. Though the young South Korean single women in this study chose migration for education and work over marriage and being a housewife at this stage in their lives, they explained that they were not discounting marriage altogether. In fact, many did admit to still hoping to ‘have it all’, just a little later. In order to assuage the concern that their educational migration might impede their search for a husband, many young women in my research, like Interviewee 3 and

Interviewee 5, set a Maginot Line of between 30 and 35 as their target age for marriage. Since educational migration could delay marriage and having children, the issue of “marriageability” impacted the migration decision-making of young single women in their late twenties and early thirties more than those in their early twenties. Parents of interviewees in their late twenties and early thirties tended to be more conservative and favoured the ‘traditional’ role of women in the home. They worried that the educational migration of their daughters could prevent them from marrying ‘on time’ and therefore strongly discouraged it. While parental disapproval did not stop the young women from acting on their plans, the support of parents who valued the importance of higher education and global careers made the decision to pursue educational migration considerably less difficult. With or without parental support, “marriageability” remained a factor in educational migration decision-making before going abroad. But it continued to be a factor even after migration when it came time to decide to prolong the stay or return home.

It would be great to be able to work here but I decided to go back to Korea in order to get married. Mom started talking about marriage more and more, but most of all, my friends got married one by one while I was studying here. You know, a woman should marry while still a marriageable age otherwise she could be treated like trash if she does not. People also think she might have a problem if she does not marry. It is scary. I would feel depressed if I didn’t give in to the Korean value [of marrying] as soon as possible. (Interviewee 6)

Interviewee 6 wasn’t concerned about marriage when she first moved to London to concentrate on her education and work experience. Her concentration on herself resulted in graduating with two MA degrees and gaining work experience through a network of contacts she had successfully established in London. However, when she turned 28 years old and when her friends started to get married, she decided it was time that she did too and went home. Fear of falling behind her peers who were getting married partially contributed to her decision to contemplate marriage. However, it was her fear of being marginalised, which could lead to becoming a social pariah, that far

outstripped her fear of not keeping up. The expectation that a woman will marry is a social norm in South Korea that still holds strong to this day, and women who remain unmarried are stigmatised for being single. Unmarried people over a certain “marriageable” age are often discriminated against by mainstream society. They are judged to be somewhat abnormal and problematic since the perception is that they *can’t* find a husband. Or they are treated as if they are immature and incapable of fully understanding the lives of married people (Kim, E.S. 1995:54) and thus are often excluded or even ignored. The social stigma attached to single women over a certain age is summarised by the Korean descriptor *nocheonyeo histeri*, “hysterical old lady”. Even the Korean word *mi-horn* that roughly translates to the word *single* in English actually means “not married yet”. From the word *yet*, one can glean that the expectation in Korean culture is that people should and will get married one day. According to media specialist and feminist Kim You-Na, the idea of marriage as a “normative ideal” (Butler 1994:1) has a powerful command over Korean women. “Marriage not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice. To be socially proper and normal, Korean women conform to the ‘unspoken normative requirements’ (Butler 1991:6) of society (Kim, Y.N. 2005:47). South Korean feminist Cho Hae-Jeong also discusses the fact that though there has been a feminist movement in South Korea marriage continues to be a normative institution. Even with the country’s modernisation, marriage remains at the core of Korean values for women since society only values them as housewives and mothers with their capacity for sexuality, motherhood, and service (2002:167). As seen in the comments made by Interviewee 6, even for those young women who leave the private sphere for the public sphere and form new identities through their work, marriage isn’t optional but obligatory. For all their individual success, they still see marriage as “a proper and safe place” (Kim, E.S. 1995:54) that will save them from being isolated or excluded. As such, concerns over their “marriageable age”, especially among young single women in their late twenties and early thirties, are factored in when deciding on a migration trajectory as well as deciding on when to return home. Since social norms in South Korea expect a child to be born within wedlock, this puts added stress on a woman to marry before her biological clock ticks down. Although men come under the same pressure to marry as women, the educational migration of young single men is in no way hindered by marriage since their female partners normally followed them as trailing spouses. Moreover, marriage in terms of migration decision-making and



the migration experience affects the genders differently because “the obligation and/or desire to care” (Holmes 2004:182) rests squarely on the shoulders of women.

However, the educational migration of young married women either comes to nothing or requires serious negotiation since male partners will not follow their wives’ migration as trailing spouses. An alarming number of South Korean young men still expect their girlfriends to make caring for them a priority over education and work. Some of them even demand that their girlfriends give up their aspirations for a higher education and a career to stay in Korea to be a wife and a mother. Interviewee 8 was in her twenties when I first interviewed her, and at that time she was facing this exact dilemma. Her boyfriend in Korea, who refused to live anywhere but Seoul and was unwilling to follow her to London, wanted her to return to Seoul as soon as she had completed her course. She, however, wanted to spend another 5 years concentrating on her education and work, which caused further tension since he opposed her working at all. This struggle to find a balance between what they wanted and the expectations of their romantic partners continued even after the young women in my research returned home if they planned to go abroad again as serial migrants. Interviewee 7 for instance was planning to continue studying and training in Europe even after her marriage. By the time I met with her in Seoul for a second interview, she was discussing the possibility of going abroad again and trying to convince her boyfriend, whom she wanted to marry, to agree to her plans. She was coaxing him into taking a sabbatical so that they could go together for a while. However, he was neither pleased with her proposed plan nor easily swayed to her way of thinking. She was oscillating between a future as a career woman and the promise of a romantic relationship, wanting both but finding the concessions she would have to make for one or the other unagreeable. Whether it was persistent inequality or the “habit of gender” (Adkins 2003:21), “the obligation and/or desire to care” constrained women’s lives and reinforced inequality in intimate relationships.

In theorising on late modernity, sociologist Anthony Giddens and German sociologists Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim have noted that two factors have influenced the reconstruction of intimacy and democratised relationships: reflectivity and disembedding allowing for greater agency. Giddens stated that a “pure relationship” based on mutual satisfaction would bring about empowerment for women in relationships (1993) in which individuals have more freedom and autonomy. Beck and

Beck-Gernsheim theorised that women in late modernity are on a more equal footing and are now able to find balance between work and family, though the fact remains that it is a “perilous balance” (1995). However, sociologist Lisa Adkins takes an opposing view and notes that the reconstruction of intimacy does not bring about women’s emancipation but rather entrenches the traditionalization of gender (2002). Her arguments are supported by empirical data that shows that reconstructed intimacy in fact simply adds extra responsibilities while reinforcing the traditional gender roles imposed upon women. For instance, a study on Filipino women migrants revealed that though these women travelled abroad for work and stepped into the role of breadwinner, they were also still caring for children (at distance) because their husbands wouldn’t take on the role of caregiver (Parrenas 2005). What Giddens, Beck, and Beck-Gernsheim failed to recognise is that in terms of gender equality these relationships are still unequal. In fact, the imbalance is even greater now because while women embrace traditionally male roles, men are not adjusting to traditionally female roles. Even the highly educated and high-achieving young women in my research struggled to gain equal footing in inequitable relationships. They grappled to find a solution that would allow them to be wives and mothers as well as career women.

The intimate relationships of young South Korean single women migrants are full of contradictions and uncertainties. In their research on Asian international mobility, Katie Willis and Brenda Yeoh argued that migration (particularly international migration) provided individuals with opportunities to meet a broader range of potential marriage partners, opportunities that were constructed on intersecting ethnic, racial, and gender terms (2003, Location 2135 of 4592). Although travelling abroad increases the number of prospective romantic partners in theory, interviewees in my research told me that these greater opportunities didn’t guarantee having more choice in relationships or maintaining relationships. On the contrary, they told me it became more difficult to have and keep a partner because of the implicit uncertainty and risk associated with migration and international encounters. If they had a boyfriend at home, they had to endure a long-distance relationship. If they had a boyfriend in the host country, they felt there was time limit since they would inevitably break up when it was time for the migrant to leave. Uncertainty and risk exist in all romantic relationships, but the added

fact that young South Korean women studying abroad might decide to return home or move elsewhere after graduation made it more difficult for them to promise their British boyfriends a future. Since they “had no idea about” how their futures would evolve, their relationships “were always unstable”. Unfortunately, relationships with other international students or skilled migrant workers were unstable as well. Uncertainty, risks, instability, and consequent anxiety characterised their romantic relationships and shaped decision-making in migration and the migration trajectory regarding marriage.

Those young South Korean single women in my study who did manage to maintain a long-term relationship had other issues to contend with. Since they were not the ‘traditional’ trailing spouses and their migration trajectory depended on their professional work rather than their husband’s, the husband did not unilaterally make decisions. They as a couple would have to settle on a place to live that they could both agree on and where they both could find jobs, which would require extensive negotiation. Among my interviewees, there were two women who had German boyfriends also living in London as students (Interviewee 2 and 4). Though both couples had plans to leave London, agreeing that the cost of living was too high and education quality for children was poor, the possibility of breaking up “still existed” if they couldn’t agree on where to live. Apart from their personal preferences, they needed to find a city where they could both find proper jobs, afford the cost of living, and agree that the area had a good education system for children. In order to ensure self-actualisation in terms of professional work, both partners had decided to “write their own biography” to outline what they needed from their job. In documenting it, this would help prevent either one from making sacrifices for the other. Thus, they had to keep negotiating on the migration destination until both could be satisfied that their own needs for work and self-actualisation were being fulfilled. In order to negotiate the uncertainty, inequality, ambivalence, and constraints within romantic relationships, they had to come up with a strategy unlike anything their predecessors ever had to consider.

I want to establish BBC Korea in South Korea one day... So, I want to get married to a CEO in the BBC. It makes it easier for me to work and maintain a marriage. (Interviewee 5)

I may have to break up with my boyfriend in Korea since he neither likes my studying abroad nor staying abroad with me... I wish I could meet someone like me...to study together, work together after returning to Korea. I wish to meet a man with whom I can have a home and raise children together while both of us study. I would like to meet a Korean since I don't want to struggle to communicate. (6 months after this interview, she broke up with her boyfriend and started dating a person studying abroad in London.) (Interviewee 8)

In order to find balance between education/work and a romantic relationship during migration, young South Korean women make an effort to strategically optimise their choices. Or to put it bluntly, so they can 'have-it-all' they look for a partner that will ideally support their careers. Interviewee 5 who dreamed of establishing BBC Korea after studying in London told me that she wanted to marry a rich, powerful man who could help her make her dream come true. She said it half joking but clearly meaning it. Interviewee 8, who wanted to continue studying for her PhD in London, was purposely searching for a romantic partner who would understand and support her and would take on an equal share of domestic chores in order to allow her to pursue her education and career. By employing an 'economic rationality', they were carefully selecting their romantic partners, looking for someone who would support their ongoing quest for higher education and a career. Their "rationalization of emotion" (Illouz 2007: 90-92) is diametrically opposed to the concept of romance. Romantic relations normally represent love and commitment without calculating in the practical benefits. But, some of the women in my research in fact "classified emotions, making a new hierarchy" (Illouz 2007:108-110) that placed desire for a career above desire for a romantic relationship. Indeed, romantic emotions rated so low in the new hierarchy that women wouldn't give up their time for loyalty, commitment, and sacrifice. Instead they instrumentalised their emotions and used a rationalised approach to methodically engage in romantic relationships and marriage.

I came back to Korea because I felt the need to get married. But success at work is actually more important for me now. I am not really looking for someone. But since I feel very lonely, I want to get married soon. I want to find a soul mate. I go back and forth. (Interviewee 6)

Women who didn't marry used to be thought of as liberalists or progressives since by refusing to capitulate to pressure to marry and have children they were resisting state-sanctioned ideologies (Tokuhiko 2010). However, nowadays those who trade in emotion and intimacy as if they are commodities and consider marriage as the outcome of interest relations are decidedly conservative when they conclude that marriage is not a sound investment for them. Of the young women in my research who did determine it was time to find a husband, some found it was not so easy even though they had changed their migration plans to return home just for that reason. With clear-eyed shrewdness, they sought out partners in positions that would be beneficial to their careers. Others selected from the ones their mothers, at least those mothers who micromanaged their daughters' lives to ensure their success (more details in the next section), had approved. For some South Korean young women, marriage is just another achievement. They calculate and evaluate the assets of potential partners, and manipulate and discount their emotions to accommodate more practical interests.

As a result, the women in my study were less and less able to commit fully to intimate relations. While their expectations of relationships and marriage were somewhat ambiguous (Was it to be a marriage based on practicalities or love?), they had incongruously high hopes for intimacy and romance. They hoped to find their soul mate, quite a romantic notion, and wanted to be loved and avoid loneliness. But they only had vague ideas of what a relationship should be and did not know how to maintain a relationship so that it would last (with commitment and true affection). Moreover, if they needed to sacrifice their interests to maintain a relationship, they would sooner give up the relationship than risk ruining their education and global careers. If their decisions were ever to be challenged, they would simply cite their survival strategy to justify their choices. Although they had high expectations of intimacy, their love was ironically plagued with narcissism, and they came to find themselves in the paradoxical position

of “cold intimacies” (Illouz 2007), which left them lonely and without emotional support.

### **Friendship and social relationship**

I have been in London for 3 years, but my Korean friends left and none of them are in London any longer. I got along with people and made new friends quickly, but they went back home after 1 or 2 years. They all wished to remain here and so I gave genuine advice to help them stay. But they all went back to Korea, and they didn't keep in touch with me. When I went back home, they were doing well. This made me feel sort of betrayed. Since then, I have boundaries in making friends, judging them as “this is a one-year friend, and that is a two-year friend”. I tend to get along with other international people who stayed longer, but in the end, they were all same since they also moved on. (Interviewee 2)

Young South Korean single women who migrated alone to London for a 1- or 2-year course had difficulty making long-term friends since they stayed for only a brief time before returning home or moving elsewhere. Except for the rare occasions that young South Korean women arrived in London with friends or siblings, most didn't have anyone who was familiar and could understand them “even without explaining themselves, just like old friends”. Young South Korean single women who stayed in London longer than 1 or 2 years for their MA course were more likely to have friendships with people from all over the world based on similar lifestyle choices. However, they still had difficulty maintaining friendships in the long term since even those people who extended their stay in London would eventually return to their own countries or the next destination in their migration plan. Well-known sociologist Richard Sennett studying the flexibility of labour explains that frequent mobility in late modernity makes it difficult for people to commit to long-term social relationships. Thus, there is little opportunity to develop trust or long-term reciprocal relations through which people could reflect on and develop themselves (2012). His critique on this new approach to social relationships in the labour market could easily be extrapolated to explain the

growing emotional detachment of young South Korean single women in educational migration or serial migration. Even after attaining their degrees from a London university, the trails these women face are not over. Just as with educational migration, the serial migration of young South Korean single women seeking work in the new global economy is fraught with loneliness. Frequent moves left young South Korean single women with few close friends, and this absence of close and intimate relationships in London/the UK signified a lack of support. Any effort to form a bond was a losing battle, according to Interviewee 2. Therefore, they had intense but transient relationships instead or attempted to put a time limit on friendships based on careful calculation. Since they presupposed the end of the relationships from the very beginning, they avoided investing themselves in any meaningful way, which resulted in their relationships often being superficial or fragmented.

I wanted to attend a party to improve my English. In order to get invited, I had to dance crazy so that the people doing the inviting would say, “Oh, you are the girl who danced at the other party?” In the beginning, I avoided Koreans because I was afraid my English wouldn’t improve if I continued to speak in Korean... When I was dancing crazy to get invited, I sometimes felt pessimistic and wondered what I was doing here, feeling empty. Many times, I felt lonely. (Interviewee 6)

If you look at your classmates carefully, you can find the studious ones. I attempted to get along with them, being nice in order to get necessary information and ask them how to write essays. It helped me get good grades. But it is tricky calling them friends. They are just people I know. (Interviewee 5)

Instead of trying to form relationships built on trust and reciprocity, these young South Korean single women almost purposely depersonalised social relations. They calculated carefully who would most benefit them and provide the support they needed to get ahead in their studies and employment. In order to maintain these relationships, they attempted to show only their bright side to people, hiding negative emotions. This was

a choice Interviewee 6 made when she danced as if she were enjoying herself, but she was just masking her sadness. The social relationships young South Korean women maintained were not so much friendships as networking, which could translate into social capital (for global networking), cultural capital (for education performance or English proficiency), or economic capital (employment). Young South Korean women “commodified, accumulated, and consumed social relationships” (Wittel 2001). They instrumentalised social relationships, which Interviewee 5 acknowledged when she explained that these were just people that she knew who could help her, but she could not call them her true friends.

The young women in my research explicitly told me that one of the goals of their educational migration was to establish a global network of contacts that could at some future time be beneficial to their careers. However, by assessing almost every social relationship based only on its potential as a source of social capital, the downside of global meritocracy is that many personal relations are stunted and the potential to inspire solidarity is non-existent. By carefully calculating strategic alliances based on prospective benefits and self-interest, this diminishes the opportunity to initiate personal relationships characterised by passion, commitment, unconditional hospitality, and mutual interdependency. As a result, the private self becomes vulnerable as the emotional security and support that intimate relations provide remain underdeveloped. For this reason, some of the young women in my research felt friendless even when they had many acquaintances. According to Frank Furedi, who criticised the therapy culture in late modern society, the assignment of contractual characteristics to social relationships consequently led to the “disorganization of the private sphere” and made “the self vulnerable” (2013:218). A preconditioned relationship based on advancement impedes the ability to reveal emotions and feelings in the private sphere, communicate with others, and build rapport. In addition, by pathologizing negative feelings and discouraging people from revealing them, it compels people to ignore the true cause of their negative feelings, such as unfairness or oppression (405-406), and leaves them with unresolved issues. Furedi’s discussion on the “disorganization of the private sphere” and the therapy culture that blurs the lines between the private and public self has parallels in the psychological landscape of young South Korean women who internalise the logic of global meritocracy as their personal philosophy. Young South Korean women repress



their private selves in pursuit of what they call a “global networking of people” through educational migration in order to obtain “social flexible citizenship” and compete in the globalised world. It might make them materially affluent, but by sacrificing friendships built on trust and reciprocity, their private selves become vulnerable. A few young women in my research indirectly admitted to being plagued by negative feelings such as emptiness, a deep loneliness, and isolation. But fewer still went so far as to explicitly express that they felt empty and truly lonely as openly as Interviewee 6. They sacrificed so much in their pursuit of happiness, but the results were unlike anything they could have anticipated and so very far from what they had envisioned.

I was suddenly alone here unlike in Korea where I was surrounded by people. In the beginning, I liked it very much, but eventually I realised that I was my real self when I was with my people. There were no friends, no parents. Everything disappeared. In the UK I was nothing more than just me. At a certain point, I became confused and felt really lonely. I felt this was not where I was meant to be. I thought I wanted to go back to my people. (Interviewee 5)

Some of the young South Korean women I interviewed purposely chose educational migration to escape from complicated and obligatory social relationships in Korea. And escape they did. But the sudden absence of bonds and friendships during their educational migration ironically revealed the positive side of obligatory social relationships that they ended up missing: trust, mutual interdependence, and approval. Thus, some South Korean women changed their migration trajectory, abandoning their initial plan to stay long enough to obtain various flexible citizenships, from legal right of abode to professional working experiences. Interviewee 5 gave up her initial 10-year migration plan and left London for South Korea as soon as she had completed her MA even though she had a job offer in London. Interviewee 6 and Interviewee 10 also returned to South Korea as soon as they finished their studies, telling me that they could not continue living in London feeling as deeply alone as they did. Interviewee 17 left London feeling her trust had been abused by the many people who had befriended her out of self-interest. She was surprised but genuinely grateful to find she still had old

friends on whom she could depend in Korea on her return home.

### **Family and intimacy**

I talk to my mom using internet calling a lot. I talk to her 3 or even 4 times a day. (What do you talk about with her?) Everything... yesterday she asked me to apply to the PhD program so I can get a job in a university later if I want to. I am not sure if I want to continue studying since the MA is already hard for me. But you know, I am influenced by my mom a lot... I may have to complete a PhD here as well. My mom also told me not to worry about boyfriends or marriage when I talked to her about my worries. She told me that it would be absolutely fine to delay marriage for another 3 or 4 years and get married after I finish my PhD. (Interviewee 8)

Thanks to advances in telecommunications, it is easier and cheaper for young South Korean women to stay in contact with their families, especially their mothers. This phenomenon was true of my interviewees in their twenties more so than those in their thirties. Since expensive long-distance phone charges are no longer a concern, young South Korean women have the luxury of time as they discuss everyday activities centred around studying/working abroad in detail. No less than “several times a day”, according to some, they would call home to chat about anything from their studies to work to social relationships and even romantic relationships. Today’s prolific communication and regularity of contact with family and friends are drastically different from the experiences of those of women who had studied abroad in the ’80s. Since telecommunication and the internet were in their infancy in the ’80s, maintaining communication with family in Korea was possible “only through letters or brief calls”, which did not keep their family in Korea well informed about their everyday experiences studying abroad. However, since the millennium, mothers of young South Korean women studying abroad can follow the lives of their daughters in real time or spend time interacting face-to-face thanks to relatively cheap flights to London or affordable telecommunications. Through these technological advances, families are able to better

support their daughters not only financially but also emotionally.

While in most cases it is the young women who initially investigate the requirements related to educational migration, it is their mothers who facilitate their educational migration by making the decision to financially support it. Once their daughters are abroad, those mothers who staunchly support studying abroad actively manage their daughters' study and work at a distance through daily contact. They direct their daughters' private lives, advising when to have romantic relationships and with whom, giving advice on how to sustain those social relationships. These mothers take over the research into educational migration, directing their daughters on how to study and what internships are necessary to improve employment opportunities. Those mothers who can speak English and afford to travel to London take the opportunity to be present as hands-on managers of their daughters' lives. They do everything from help their daughters move, prepare meals, organise extra activities beneficial to their daughters' study, financially support their education as well as bankroll a tour of Europe to introduce them to a global lifestyle. For instance, Interviewee 8's mother, who is a professor in the fine arts, took her to the Venice Biennale so she could gain an appreciation for the arts, which would be helpful in her future career as a professor in curating. The terms "helicopter mom" or "managing mom", which describe mothers too overprotective of their children (Yoon and Chung 2014), can obviously be applied to the mothers who accompanied their daughters to London. These terms however can be applied even to the mothers of my interviewees who could not travel to London to be with their daughters. It would not be an exaggeration to say that these mothers are "managers at a distance". By strategically organising the success of their daughters' educational migration and career abroad, these mothers attempted to raise the family as a whole through their social mobility.

(In the first interview in London) Over the phone, I whined to my family, complaining that life was so hard here. I also boasted about what I have achieved here in order to satisfy my mom and dad. Then they are proud of me... (In the second interview in Seoul) I live with my parents since coming back home, unlike my sister. It is difficult to live with them because we have different lifestyles. But it is good to be close to them since they know me and emotionally support me. They will be honest with me and tell me the truth

about myself, something nobody else does so truthfully, and I can whine to them even though it doesn't make sense anymore. (Interviewee 6)

The young South Korean women in my study are what many consider to be “good daughters”. They valued their mothers’ (and families’) support and as such attempted to recompense that support by elevating the family’s status through their achievements. While young people and adolescents are usually expected to rebel against parental authority in South Korea, this generation of women did not. They depended too much on their parents financially and emotionally and looked to them to solve their problems, big or small. But there was a challenge to their dependence. Due to their higher education and the influence of feminism, young South Korean women are raised to be individualistic, self-determined, and independent. Taking into account that they have been conditioned to be both dependent and independent, it is hardly surprising that their self-identity devolves into almost a split personality. Maintaining the image of the “good daughter” and “proudly achieving daughter” of a “happy family” that continuously praises their success results in behaviour that is like elementary schoolgirls rather than young women. They expect constant compliments and that every family resource should be mobilised for their needs. And when they could not find intimacy out in the world, these young women returned to the unconditional love of their parents, turning especially to their mothers for attention and a sympathetic ear so they “could whine” like children. They were so inept at maintaining other social relationships (such as romantic relationships or friendships as seen in the previous sections) that it was simpler for them to return to their mothers (and family). In an odd way it is almost a practical move since it saved time and energy by fulfilling their needs for intimacy. Although the educational migrants in this study were deemed to be to be brave and independent women forging their own paths, they still readily obeyed their mothers on whom they financially and emotionally depended. This dichotomy between being a dutiful daughter and being an independent woman illustrates just how complicated and contradictory young South Korean women’s individualism is.

Despite burgeoning higher education for women in South Korea, not all families support their daughters’ educational migration or see it as a commendable goal.

My father opposed my studying abroad, but he didn't give me money because he didn't have enough money to pay for my education abroad... I couldn't phone my family to ask for more money when I found the cost of living to be more than I expected, since everyone in my family, mom and siblings, opposed my studying abroad. I could neither phone them for comfort while I struggled to study for exams nor to celebrate my academic achievements including graduation. It was bitter. I was lonely. There was no one I could lean on. (Interviewee 15)

Interviewee 15's suffers from the paradox of embracing individualism while still seeking familial support if only emotionally. She was so committed to her educational and career path that she defied her family's wishes, and yet she yearned for her family's approbation and recognition of a job well done at the same time. She attributed her economic difficulties and suffering to her family's lack of understanding and grieved when her parents didn't support her or when siblings didn't praise her achievements. She lamented not having rich, powerful parents and indulged in self-pity because she didn't have the unlimited financial support that others had. She idealised the families that could afford to mobilise resources for their children's achievements and saw the children, the recipients, as a symbol of familial pride. In return for this investment of care and resources, the children would become accomplished and successful, creating a picture-perfect tableau of a happy family complete with powerful parents and good children. Rather than seek independence and make a life for herself, she wasted energy envisioning and craving this class-based "family romance".

I feel anxious and depressed since I can't seem to manage by myself... I have had to accept money from my mom to finance everything from studying abroad in London to starting my own business in Seoul. I can't maintain my office without her financial help now. [In Seoul] Actually I need more money to run the business, but I am too embarrassed to ask my mom for more money. It is difficult to say "I am an adult" if I am not financially independent. I truly am an independent person, so this situation is very distressing for

me. (Interviewee 6)

I want to continue working after giving birth and I also want to have many babies. But seeing my friends try, it seems difficult to work and raise a child at the same time. It also costs a lot to raise a child from hiring a nanny to education. So, I am considering asking my mom for money. I am actually planning to move closer to my mom since she could take care of my baby. Many of my friends have done this and some of them even live with their parents for this reason. My mom objects to my idea to move closer to her, but I think she will eventually allow me to do so. (Interviewee 5, in the third interview in Seoul when she was pregnant)

Upper middle-class young women's financial and emotional dependency on their parents, especially their mothers, continued even after they returned home and even after they found a job or got married. Interviewee 6 would have had to give up her dream of running her own business and take a low-paying job had it not been for the money her mother gave her to keep the business afloat. If Interviewee 5 wanted to continue to work after she gave birth, she had to convince her mother to look after the baby, but the first step in this was convincing her mother to let her move closer to her. Their dependency is a result of precarity due to the high rate of youth unemployment caused by tough global competition and the fragile welfare system in South Korea. Witnessing a welfare system teetering on collapse and policies failing to combat youth unemployment, young people try to establish financial security through their parents. This dependency lasts well into adulthood, from living with their parents to save money even after marriage to continuing to receive financial support even after they completed their education like Interviewee 6. This is especially true of young women in the gendered discriminative labour market of South Korea. Furthermore, those young women who do manage to start their careers and wish to continue working after giving birth face another obstacle in the insufficient childcare welfare system in South Korea. Since raising children is 'traditionally' thought of as a woman's job, there is a lack of institutional support and young women find it extremely difficult to both work and raise a child. Thus, young South Korean women have no choice but to lean on their family to support their need for both.

Ironically, they depend on their family to be their personal safety net and a reserve of resources they can draw on in order to meet the new standards for adult women in South Korea.

As a result, some young women in my research became mired in circumstances they felt helpless to change, psychologically trapped between being an adult and a child and unable to break free of a “limbo life” (Newman 2013). The economic independence that is a symbol of adulthood is still out of many young women’s reach. Interviewee 6 may have appeared independent by owning her own business, but she couldn’t make a living at it, which left her depending on handouts from her mother. She felt as if she couldn’t handle responsibility, which distressed her and led to an emotional vulnerability and depression. Interviewee 5, to all outward appearances, was an adult, a married woman and mother-to-be. Inside however she was still a child clinging to her mother’s unconditional support, help, and affection. She continuously turned to her mother for everything from financial support to emotional support to even asking that she raise her grandchild. If marriage, giving birth, and taking on responsibility for others are all signs of being an adult, then Interviewee 5 was only playing at being an adult.

In her book *Accordion Family*, sociologist Katherine S. Newman explains why young people are less able to be independent both economically and emotionally. According to her research on intergenerational relations that she conducted in 6 countries (Denmark, Italy, Japan, Spain, Sweden, and United States), there just aren’t any jobs available for young people. Without steady employment, there is no way for them to earn a living so that they can afford to pay rent and move away from their parents. In the context of the global economy due to high unemployment and fragile or absent welfare politics (2013), even young people with higher education and professional degrees have had to move back in with their parents or never even left in the first place. She also noted that economic downturns or crises also affect young people’s formation of self-identity. In these cases, parents try to compensate for financial difficulties and ended up treating them as dependent and partly helpless, hindering their assumption of adult roles and attitudes (120). Stories in Newman’s research run parallel to the young women’s stories in my research in relation to their psychological state of mind in leading a life in limbo between adulthood and childhood. Young women in my research depended on their families and mothers to assist them or even complete their unfinished tasks in the *rite*

*de passage* to becoming an adult. Thus these women became what is known now as an “adult child”. What should be focused on here is that the external environments that have created this limbo life are in part a product of the conflict between feminist ideals and a staunch patriarchy in the post-feminism era in South Korea. Young South Korean women are encouraged to be economically independent and have a career, but the labour market for women is discriminative, and the responsibility of childcare is still entirely a woman’s.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I examined how the quality of young South Korean single women’s private lives suffered during migration as they rationalised and instrumentalised intimacy in romantic relationships, friendships and social relationships, and familial relationships. They might appear to be highly successful, accomplished and capable individuals, but their private sphere was disorganised and in disarray. Their efforts to optimise partners in order to ‘have-it-all’ both in education/work and personal relations made it difficult for them to have healthy interactions based on trust and commitment. Viewing friends and social relationships as commodities in their quest for social capital, they lost the innate ability to offer reciprocal support. Rather than move outside the family unit to build new significant relationships, young women formed strategic familial alliances with their mothers in their bid to not only survive but excel in the global meritocratic system. Now financially as well as emotionally dependent on their families, especially their mothers, young South Korean women try to learn to be independent adult women from the people who treat them like children. The psychological impact of this oxymoron rendered them infantile and produced a generation of adult children living a limbo life. As a result, their private sphere became empty and their sense of self became more fragile. On the surface, they appeared to be adventurous and self-confident young women ready and able to claim success and material rewards through hard work and self-discipline. However, they paid a high price for their success, and they projected a positive public image at the expense of their emotional health and psychological well-being. Ironically the freedom of choice agency



offered worked against them, granting superficial success while causing deep inner turmoil.

The new femininity of young South Korean single women migrants is complicated and contradictory. Their strategy of instrumentalising emotion in order to attain freedom, happiness and flexible citizenship instead made them psychologically unstable, vulnerable, and feel empty inside. Recent migration studies on women emphasised female migrants' agency and interpreted their strategy of migration as an opportunity to maximise their life opportunities. These studies also interpreted their agency as resistance to their oppressive social position within their society. However, the evidences of this chapter show that their strategy, agency, and the action they took to overcome oppression ironically forced them into impoverished and vulnerable situations. Emotional exhaustion and psychological vulnerability are the price they paid for the opportunity to enter into the global meritocratic system that values accomplishment and competency.

As such, agency and strategy did not always bring about the emancipation and happiness the social actors anticipated. As sociologist Umut Erel noted in researching skilled Turkish women in the UK and Germany, "agency and victimization should be seen as opposites, but rather as dynamically related so that victimization sometimes propelled women to action and at other times, their agency led to their victimization" (2009:185). Her argument is germane to the lives of young South Korean educational migrant women in my research in relation to their reconstruction of intimacy. The women in this research made transnational moves with the expectation that they could have greater mobility, social privilege, and new and alternative lifestyles based on their capabilities, resources, and self-discipline. However, their reality was full of uncertainty, confusion, dissatisfaction, instability, and risks. Many were in fact in quite a precarious position because even with all their planning, few could anticipate the effects of impoverished intimacy and the consequent psychological vulnerability. Feeling related, connected to others, emotional closeness, and emotional flexibility are necessary, frequently more so for women than men, in the formation of self-identity and maintaining positive emotional security (Surrey 1985). Unfortunately for many young South Korean women in the UK, these were the very elements missing from their lives.

## Chapter 7. Conclusion

### Young women keeping mobile

Since the 1990s, young South Korean women have been migrating in growing numbers to developed countries and metropolitan cities like London, one of the “global cities” (Sassen), for the purpose of higher education and global careers. Unlike women of their mothers’ generation who migrated as trailing spouses to support their husbands’ higher education and work, these young women are the first generation of women migrating purely for themselves. Women constitute more than 60% of South Korea’s migration population, and there is an urgent need to study and understand young women’s purpose in migrating for higher education and global careers. Since migration for higher education has become a normalised and common practice for young women, neither categorised as high-skilled nor low-skilled migrants, they are shaping a new migration pattern: middling migrants. Middling migrants travel a great deal, leaving home, returning home, and leaving again for other countries, earning migration status as short-term migrants or migrants with resident permits or the right of work. The majority of these woman are single when they move away and thus face the added stress of reconstructing intimacy in order to combine education and work with romance and marriage. Their migration has become a significant part of the contemporary ‘new migration’ in South Korea and absolutely needs to be examined.

I looked at why these young women migrate and the immediately obvious reason is to attain legal, social, and cultural “flexible citizenships” (Ong 1999; Fong 2011). Leveraging their higher education certificate and English language skills to enhance their cultural capital, they hoped to gain residence permits or citizenship, the right to access social institutions including education and work, as well as better employment in South Korea after their time in London. With the expectation that they could secure these rewards by dint of their abilities and achievement, knowledge and skills, youth and self-discipline, they came in droves to seemingly cosmopolitan London. They envisioned participating in the global meritocracy in a city where individuals could freely

accumulate economic capitals, cross borders unhindered, achieve social prestige, and pursue new lifestyles and consumption based on their own capacities. Repulsed by the gendered discriminative work structure in South Korea, ambitious high-achieving and highly educated young women have no other choice but to leave. Fluctuating between “global desire” and “global anxiety” these young women voluntarily or involuntarily participate in the infinite global competition in order to live the dream of being “global class”, but more importantly to not fall behind their peers in the era of youth unemployment. Their high-risk and high-return educational migration is their strategy for surviving the global neoliberal society as women.

### **Global women at risk**

However, their migration realities were more complicated than they could have imagined. The newly reconstructed cosmopolitan education of globalised universities did not meet their expectations. Instead of the images of multicultural learning environments and happy global students from all over the world, many young South Korean women realised they were merely a source of economic revenue for universities. Encountering underprepared professors and curricula, they became discouraged and withdrew from on-campus academic activities, including everything from seminars to academic networking.

Conditions were even worse for those young South Korean women who found themselves in dire economic straits. In order to pay their way they had to work, which in addition to their academic responsibilities was physically exhausting. Understandably working even part-time restricted the time they had for studying and their academic performance suffered. The vicious cycle of exhaustion from overworking and depression because of their poor grades left them emotionally vulnerable. They could not even indulge in the consumer citizenship their upper middle-class peers utilised to ease adversity and find a form of belongingness to the host society.

Even after graduating from university, the pressure did not ease. In fact, for those young women who managed to be hired on as full-time employees in transnational companies

and stay in London, the pressure increased. Fear of deportation and the need to hold on to their right of abode as non-EU temporary residents, they tended to work harder than everyone else while still being overqualified for the job. Before arriving in London, young South Korean women envisioned working in environments such as transnational companies that promised flexible citizenships based solely on their capacities. They were disappointed to discover that cultural background, ethnicity, and race, were underlying factors in the evaluation of their capabilities. But they were also psychologically exhausted by the need to speak only English in the workplace and the emotional labour required to negotiate the nuances of social interactions unfamiliar to them. No matter how much effort they put in to adjusting themselves to their host society and making their educational and work migration a success, young South Korean women were marginalised according to social factors from cultural background, ethnicity, and race to nationality and class.

Even more distressing than marginalisation in the host society was the vulnerability young South Korean women felt in reconstructing intimacy in relationships from romance to friendships to family. During interviews many of the young single women in this research admitted to instrumentalising intimate emotions, however unknowingly. They confessed to combining education, work, romance and marriage by selecting romantic partners that would support their ambitions in an attempt to optimise their education and career rather than looking for devotion, loyalty, and commitment in relationships. They even tended to consider friends and acquaintances merely as social capital and useful tools for building up their global networking rather than people with whom they could develop friendships and trust in the unofficial sphere. They also made strategic alliances with their parents, especially their mothers, in order to continue benefitting from the familial material resources that supported their successes and achievements. But in having this continued support, they became compliant good daughters and eventually this unhealthy dependence resulted in adult-children. Their strategy to instrumentalise emotion and intimacy ironically impoverished their relationships, stunted the natural development of intimacy and thus made them vulnerable and unable to connect to other people in healthy ways. Relatedness, connection to others, emotional closeness, and emotional flexibility often affect women more than men in forming self-identity and maintaining positive emotional security

(Surrey 1985) Thus, there is a greater possibility that the migration lives of women will be more unsatisfying, impoverished, and unstable than those of men due to the psychological vulnerability caused by the “disorganization of the private sphere” (Furedi 2004:104) during migration.

I assume young women around the world who similarly instrumentalise intimacy, which is now an identifying trait of global femininity, have been influenced by the global neoliberal economy as well. “New women”, whether they are called an A1 girl or a global girl (McRobbie 2009), a future girl or a can-do girl (Harris 2004a), are appearing worldwide in developed countries and newly rich countries (or developing countries) within the global neoliberal system. These women with their higher education, high-flying jobs, and familiarity with travel and (short-term) migration (Fahey 2013) are emerging in the US, the UK, and Australia, but also China (Chen 2016), Singapore (Lazar 2006), India (Radhakrishnan 2009), and Israel (Frenkel 2008). Since women who used to be limited to the private sphere are now entering the public sphere, one of their main concerns is finding a balance between the private, intimacy and family, and the public, school and work. Of the strategies and negotiations these young “new women” could use in their attempt to ‘have-it-all’, the one that seems to be used with the most frequency is the instrumentalization of intimacy. Inspired by the heroines in global soap opera sensation *Sex and the City* that gave a global prelude to the instrumentalization of intimacy, single women have started to deal with romance and love not from the heart but from the brain (1998-2004). These ideas have spread from the fictional dialogue of four women to real life. Nowadays, everyday women evaluate, examine, and discuss their emotions, romantic partners, and their heterosexual relationships just like Carrie, Samantha, Charlotte and Miranda. This phenomenon has even had a worldwide impact on real-life news. For example, in an article in *The Atlantic*, one of the most left-wing publications in the US, a professional woman gave a relatively young career women advice on how to carefully calculate intimacy (The Atlantic July/August 2012). In an example of “cold intimacy” (Illouz 2007;2012), she suggested to either marry early and have children while still young or delay both for as long as possible, as if she thought intimacy and love was at their service and could be managed and controlled.

Another symptom of “cold intimacy” is the increasing number of young people who are ‘living apart together’ (LAT) in Western countries. At first glance it may seem as if

preference for LAT and one-person households is an outcome of liberalism and a rejection of traditional gender norms, but it is in fact a result of conservatism. The phenomenon of these one-person households in OECD countries<sup>10</sup> reflect how the logic of capitalism permeates young women's sphere of intimacy. Despite cultural influences that still have people half-convinced that marriage is the right choice, women (and men) are on the side of caution in regards to their economic interests and choose one-person households or LAT over marriage or cohabitation. Loyalty, commitment, and sacrifice for another are weighed against economic rationality as they calculate the pros and cons of marriage or cohabitation (Duncan 2015). Instrumentalization of intimacy is a growing worldwide practice that shapes the identities of young women within the global system and is coming to characterise global femininity.

Despite all the physical, emotional and mental risks to them, young South Korean women continue to participate in the biased global meritocratic system as serial migrants. Many young South Korean women attempt to go abroad or have a plan to go abroad again even after returning home after educational migration in London. For some of the interviewees in this research, London was already the second or third place they had migrated to for the purpose of education and work, having tried living in countries such as Germany, the US, and Australia first. Some of my other interviewees have since left England and migrated to other countries such as France, Germany, the US, and Singapore after completing their studies or work in London. Some other interviewees returned home after London, but they plan to go abroad again for further study, training, or work as students, workers, and even mothers or wives. One of the main reasons they keep migrating, in spite of the vulnerability they experience as migrants, is that young women still tend to be easily marginalised in the job market and workplaces in South Korea even after educational migration. For many young South Korean women, work and economic activity are at the core of their identities, and thus

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<sup>10</sup> Among about one-third of OECD member countries that have submitted related data, the number of one-person households is expected to grow in all these countries. The largest increase is expected in South Korea (43%), Australia (48%), England (60%), New Zealand (71%), and France (75%) (OECD 2011).

they have no choice but to keep going global. However, as serial migrants they risk repeating negative experiences, especially since their strategy to instrumentalise intimacy in order to make their migration lives for education and work succeed robs them of true intimacy.

This research followed young South Korean women's educational migration in the newly reconstructed globalised and seemingly cosmopolitan space over many years. It also examined their lives from the time of their educational migration to London to their return home and in some cases migration to other destination. By focusing on young South Korean single women's sphere of intimacy, I witnessed how this first generation to migrate just for themselves attempted to balance education and work, and intimate relations and marriage. This approach is quite distinct from other studies on women and migration that either primarily focus on the framework of work or that of intimacy, only examining the labour migration of married women or marriage migration. Further studies that expand on the research here is necessary, particularly since Brexit in the UK will affect and vastly alter the migration environment. A juxtaposition with studies on male educational migrants would complement this research and allow for a closer examination of the changed landscape of intimacy constructed through the interactions between women and men in heterosexual relationships.

## Appendix 1.

List of interviewees and their information

1				
Age when first interviewed	Occupation before migration	Education course taken in London	Residence before migration	Father's occupation
28	Worked for a marketing company	MA	Seoul, South Korea	Farmer and real estate investor
Summary of Interviews				
<p>Interviewee 1 chose educational migration in order to find employment with a London-based media-related multinational company. She was formerly employed by a marketing company in Seoul but had to quit that job due to gruelling working hours and sexual harassment. She believed that she could have a better quality of life if she worked in Europe, being under the impression that human rights were given priority in the workplace there. Her parents had every expectation that she would be highly successful. She had easily achieved more than her brother and displayed “bravery” by travelling all over the world and volunteering, which made her parents very proud of her.</p> <p>At school in London, she felt intimidated and isolated during her MA program. Different pedagogical approaches (especially the use of discussion groups) made learning challenging for her. She told me that when the school offered to upload her photo to the university’s official website that she felt happy and saw it as a sign of acceptance, but later she felt let down and disappointed because the feeling of belongingness quickly faded. She</p>				



and her Korean friends often discussed the fact that they felt they had bought an expensive MA certificate. They criticised the school's policy for international students, feeling that it didn't accommodate students and help them to learn in a meaningful way. She explained that though she enjoyed writing essays and excelled at them, her lack of language proficiency prevented her from participating in seminars. She admitted to frequently crying when she was alone in her room because she felt as if she was stupid for not being able to express herself. She also had trouble mingling with British students in her residence hall since she thought they subtly excluded her and didn't treat her as a member of the unit. She admitted that she didn't feel as if she belonged, which made her angry and depressed.

In the third interview, after she had found employment with a London-based Korean multinational company, she mentioned that her parents disliked the fact that she had prolonged her stay in London, but they did enjoy the fact that she had a job with a well-known company, about which they could boast to their acquaintances. Years later, I heard that she worked for a branch of a British multinational charity company in Seoul, having moved back in 2016.

2				
Age when first interviewed	Occupation before migration	Education course taken in London	Residence before migration	Father's occupation
28	Worked for a	MA and PhD	Seoul, South Korea	Civil servant

	governmental institution			
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**Summary of Interviews**

When Interviewee 2 was a child, she lived in Liverpool for 2 years because the company her father worked for had transferred him to England. She had quite liked living in the UK, which was why she decided to return to London. Her initial plan was to study for her MA and PhD in the UK and then go to the US to do her post-doctorate and later find a job. However, since it was rare for non-EU students to qualify for a PhD scholarship, it was a difficult process at the beginning, and she had to apply countless times not only in the UK but also in Canada and the US. She also changed her field of study to a less popular subject in order to get a scholarship and be able to work as a researcher. But since she could work as a researcher while completing her PhD in the UK, she decided to remain in London, making her eligible for citizenship after having worked there for 5 years. Once she had a British passport and could freely move and work within the EU, she transferred to Germany to work at the Berlin branch of the same company she had worked for in London. She didn't like working as a researcher in the lab as much as she thought she would. Her dislike of the job was compounded by the fact that she felt her hard work was taken for granted by supervisors/directors. After working so diligently, she felt especially betrayed when her supervisor applied for another job without saying a word to her. After, she decided to change her career path from a scientist to a consultant in a transnational company. She had a very close relationship with her mother. They called each other several times a day, and her mother kept her supplied with Korean food care packages as well. Her mother worried that she wouldn't get married, but when she pointed out that few Korean men had better a job than she did, her mother stopped mentioning it. Though her mother worried, she was enormously proud of her.

As for friendships, she kept the people she met in London at a distance. Since most Korean students stayed for a year and returned home without getting working permits or citizenship, it was difficult to maintain long-term relationships with them, knowing that this friend would be 1-year friend

and at best a 2-year friend. Thus, she kept a distance from her English and Korean friends. She also had a long-time German boyfriend, but when I asked her why and how much she liked him, she confessed that she liked him just because he was cute and that she was not serious about him.

3				
Age when first interviewed	Occupation before migration	Education course taken in London	Residence before migration	Father's occupation
28	Worked for a multinational consulting company	MA	Kyeonggido, South Korea	Small business owner

#### Summary of Interviews

Interviewee 3 came to London to study anthropology, but she changed her major to international management when she realised that studying anthropology wouldn't get her a job. She was exceedingly realistic and highly intelligent, worked extremely hard, and hungered for social mobility and recognition, much like interviewee 2. After sending out hundreds of applications, she was finally hired by a London-based multinational oil company. She recalled that it was an extremely difficult time. The lack of positive responses when seeking employment took an emotional toll on her.

Though she missed her friends and family in Korea, she didn't miss the Korean culture. She cited an abhorrence of a male dominated and totalitarian culture as well as limited time for individual actualisation as her main reasons for leaving. She planned to live the life of an expatriate and work in London for several years before moving on to other places. She preferred London to other smaller global cities, feeling there were fewer disadvantages as a woman and a foreigner and enjoying the anonymity and diversity that London offers. She thought the UK workplace was female friendly, but she knew she might face challenges in higher positions within the organisation because of motherhood. She also realised that competence was the most important thing at work. She explained that a flex time schedule was available to everyone, but that once the deadline of a project was fixed, even if you had to work through the night it had to be finished on time, which seemed to be their measure of one's competence. She was quite famous in South Korea for her blog and a book about her life in London. It seemed that the blog and book gave her emotional security and helped her feel connected to people at home.

4				
Age when first interviewed	Occupation before migration	Education course taken in London	Residence before migration	Father's occupation
31	BA student in Korea and Germany	MA	Seoul, South Korea	Salaryman

### Summary of Interviews

Interviewee 4 studied for her BA in Germany and moved to London to do her MA in economics. She wanted to find a job in London since it had a better working environment and she could put her major to use. She also thought it would feel like a “win” to find a job in London, but if she didn’t it would feel like a “lose”. It was a long process for her to find employment in the City since she didn’t have a work permit. Thus, she had to take jobs she was overqualified for in order to build up experience and finally be able to apply for the job she wanted. Although there were many foreigners in London compared to where she had studied in Germany and she didn’t feel as if she was a foreigner at work, she noticed there was a fine division according to race/ethnicity at work, something interviewee 3 had also noticed. Clients became awkward when they realised that she was an ethnic minority, and senior partners tended to give more opportunities to work on a new project to people from similar cultural backgrounds since it was how they were used to conducting business. She outlined how she planned to work on building social networks with influential people in Korea so that she would have an edge in global business once she was promoted to a higher position.

Even though she had thought London would be a good place for young people to work and socialise, she found relations with people tended to be shallow or short-lived in the case of friendships with other Koreans. Although she had planned on moving to another country after working in London for a while any way, she had decided leaving London would be necessary to raise a child because she found the school system to be poor and the health care system to be inadequate. She and her German boyfriend talked about moving to anywhere from Switzerland to Bermuda, but she told me after our final interview that when she got pregnant, they decided in the end to move to France where both found jobs.

Age when first interviewed	Occupation before migration	Education course taken in London	Residence before migration	Father's occupation
32	Worked as a TV program writer	MA	Seoul, South Korea	Businessman

#### Summary of Interviews

Interviewee 5 had worked as a TV program writer for a long time but decided she should travel to London for re-skilling in media. Her plan was to set up BBC Korea on her return home after working in other places including London and Hong Kong for 10 years. Since she didn't have the power to direct a program in Korea where sex/gender segregation at work was very strict and limited women's involvement, she wanted to own a TV broadcasting company. However, she found living in London was quite different from what she expected and struggled to adjust to these unexpected challenges. The language barrier, downward mobility, and feelings of loneliness were the main reasons she returned to Seoul just after graduating with her MA. The job market was disappointing after graduation, and though she applied for several jobs in London and Hong Kong, the salaries offered were meagre. In the end, she could only find a part-time job in a media-related company in Seoul. Thus, after a year or so, she returned to her previous job, TV program writer, which depressed her for a while. She disclosed to me in the first interview that she wanted to marry a powerful media mogul, believing that would help her pursue her dream. After returning home, she quickly married the man who had loved her for a very long time. She said, "a woman should marry a person who loves her. A man will do anything for her. I feel as if I were a king. It is very good to be comfortable and to be loved".

Her relationship with her mother was conflicted. One of the reasons she left Korea was that taking care of her mother had exhausted her. But not long after moving to London, she missed her mother so much that she quickly decided to only finish out the year and then return home. She also planned

to live with her mother once her baby was born, as many of her friends did, since she would depend on her mother to help with the baby. She appeared very independent, individualistic, self-confident, and high- achieving. In reality, it seemed as if she could not live without her mother's approval and care. She planned to go abroad again for work and education for her child in the future.

6				
Age when first interviewed	Occupation before migration	Education course taken in London	Residence before migration	Father's occupation
28	Cultural animator (florist and teacher in a related field)	2 MAs	Seoul, South Korea (Korea)	Civil servant

#### Summary of Interviews

Interviewee 6 completed 2 MAs in London. She chose London because she thought the higher education system in the UK was well recognised and that degrees from a university in London combined with solid experience gave her an advantage in the South Korean job market. She built up a network of contacts as a florist working in London hotels when she came for her first MA in 2006, which made it easier to find a job when she returned to London for her second MA in 2008. She told me that Asian women could be easily stereotyped or sexualized as passive, quiet, and obedient

women on campus and at work. For instance, some classmates during discussions refuted what she said without even listening; she was often allocated the tedious work in making flower arrangements in hotels; and one male classmate even put a pen in her hair as if she were a geisha. She remarked that Asian women had to be twice as strong as others in order to survive. At first, she just cried alone in her room when these things happened, but she soon stood up for herself and resisted the dismissive and sometimes discriminatory treatment by speaking up and fighting to be heard.

She moved back to Seoul just after graduation since she was afraid she wouldn't otherwise get married if she didn't. She worried about her marital status because she knew that in South Korea women who didn't get married could be viewed as "trash" and people would think there was something wrong with her. However, by the time I saw her for our second interview in Seoul a year later, she still wasn't married, saying that work was more important at that moment. But her work was not going well either. She had tried to set up a business with financial support from her parents, but it was hard to attract clients because her network base was not substantial enough. She found informal networks were more powerful than her educational certificate in getting jobs/clients in South Korea and this deeply disappointed her. It also upset her to learn that the number of people taking short courses abroad was increasing, since it devalued her education capital. She was so anxious about making her business a success that she became ill and was hospitalised. It was especially difficult for her because she had lost the money her parents had given her. She was distressed and felt guilty, apologising to her parents for not being economically independent. However, when she told me she chose to live with her parents again because she wanted "to listen to their advice so she could act like a baby winning over her parents", it seemed contradictory to me. Even more so since it was an extremely uneasy situation and she had a chance to live alone like her sister. When I contacted her after the second interview, she explained that she had given up her own business in the end and found a low-paying florist job in a hotel as an irregular worker.



<b>7</b>				
<b>Age when first interviewed</b>	<b>Occupation before migration</b>	<b>Education course taken in London</b>	<b>Residence before migration</b>	<b>Father's occupation</b>
26	BA student	MA	Seoul, South Korea	Small business owner

**Summary of Interviews**

Interviewee 7 came to London with a plan to get an MA and a PhD degree. She wanted to study laws relating to women and children, explaining that it was difficult to find a professor well versed enough to teach these laws. In the first interview, she expressed her expectation that she would learn things in a modern and contemporary environment. Although she had planned to continue to study in order to earn a doctorate, she didn't wish to go to the US as many of her friends had, preferring specific characteristics and traditions at the UK academies. However, in the end she didn't do her PhD in the UK, returning home instead and preparing to apply to do her PhD in Korea. She told me that though she didn't like the authoritarian academic atmosphere in Korea, she found that it was the same even in the UK, nullifying the main reason she had gone to study in London. She declared that her fantasy about the UK had been destroyed. She also volunteered in Uganda where people from developed countries dominated the volunteering sector/industry and realised that there was a limit to the work an Asian woman from a peripheral country could find. She found after the Post Study Work visa had expired, it became especially hard to find a job, which contributed to her decision to leave London.

In Korea, while preparing for a PhD, she found a part-time job in a governmental research centre in a related field. That she had studied in the UK was an advantage and helped her get the job, but she acknowledged that having a higher education degree from the UK did not guarantee finding a

job easily. She emphasised that one should have a social network, make connections with people from the same university who might later facilitate finding a job.

Her parents and sister were proud of her exemplary academic achievements. She professed that it was her filial duty to have a high academic standing, but there was also pressure to succeed since her family had financially and emotionally supported her study.

She planned to go abroad again to Northern Europe to study and train in the future, and she was discussing it with her current boyfriend at the time. She asked him to wait for 3 years, but she confessed that he did not seem to like her plan.

8				
Age when first interviewed	Occupation before migration	Education course taken in London	Residence before migration	Father's occupation
24	BA student	MA, PhD, and a related short course in a private institution	Seoul, South Korea (Korea)	Professor
<b>Summary of Interviews</b>				

Interviewee 8 came to do her MA and PhD in London in order to become a professor like her parents. Even though a PhD is the highest level in higher education, she realised that not even a PhD would be enough to get a job in a Korean university since there was so much competition nowadays. She understood that she therefore needed to build up her work experience in London and do a short stint in a famous art auction house to have an edge in her preferred field.

Building her career was the main reason she remained in London even though her boyfriend in South Korea wanted her to come home. She told me that she wanted to grasp every opportunity for her career while in London even though they were opaque opportunities. She hoped to make connections with other artists so that in the future she could easily contact them to put on an exhibition, and so she could work globally, coming and going between Seoul, London, and New York. She complained of how difficult it was for women to find balance between study/work and family, saying that it was still the women's responsibility to take care of her male partner whose study/work always took priority even though women have more equality nowadays. Sometime after the second interview, she broke up with her boyfriend and found a new boyfriend with whom she thought she could study and work without sacrificing her own interests.

Interviewee 8's mother was proactive in her education and marriage plans. She actively planned her daughter's study abroad in London, financially and emotionally supported her by talking to her every day and advised her to postpone marriage until she had completed her PhD. Interviewee 8 sensed that her life was planned by her mother, expressing, "It was as if I were a cow raised in a pasture. I thought I had decided my life but in fact my life was thoroughly planned by my mom". Even knowing this, she still followed her mother's advice and plan. She felt guilty for accepting financial support from her father, but she also took it for granted. When it came to her family, she seemed to oscillate between being self-determined and being dependent.

9				
Age when first interviewed	Occupation before migration	Education course taken in London	Residence before migration	Father's occupation
33	Technical analyst	MA	Seoul, Korea	Business owner

**Summary of Interviews**

Interviewee 9 took a language course and studied for her MA in the UK before moving to the US to work on her PhD. Her mother supported her through her studies and was proud of and trusted her high-achieving daughter. However, her father opposed further study without her first getting married. Once her mother stopped sending remittances during her studies, she had no money and no savings since she had spent most of her money on clothes. At the time, she felt as if she were a poor immigrant from a Third World country and was miserable.

She confessed to being obsessed with work and wanting to be the best. She didn't think she could live in Korea forever. She thought it would be alright to live in Africa or the US and maybe end up living in Spain. At the time I had a second interview with her, she was interested in working in Indonesia. When she was working in an English company, she realised even if she were promoted to a managerial or middle-management position she would never have a top-level job in the UK as an Asian woman from a peripheral country. She described how segregation according to race/ethnicity and class was very clear in the UK. And this was one of the reasons she decided to pursue a PhD course in the US.

10				
Age when first interviewed	Occupation before migration	Education course taken in London	Residence before migration	Father's occupation
29	Teacher	MA	Seoul, Korea	Business owner

**Summary of Interviews**

Interviewee 10 came to London with the purpose of doing an MA and PhD, but she returned home just after completing her MA because she was disappointed with the schools in London. She told me that the universities regarded international students as cash cows and lacked cultural openness, adding that her university didn't care about international students at all. She felt that she needed to wear expensive clothes while living in London in order to gain respect from others and feel confident the way she did in Korea. She believed that without designer clothing she would be overlooked or judged to be a poor Asian woman. Another reason she returned was that she wanted to get married. She thought she could get married while studying abroad, but she didn't find anyone who suited her. She was quite clear about her fear of ending up old and single like many other Korean women studying and working in London if she continued to study through her 'marriageable' years. After returning home, she got a teaching job at a university in Korea through her network of contacts that included fellow and senior students. She explained that she needed to study abroad in order to be hired by the university but it was not enough alone – that she needed to know people too. Even though any illusions she once had about the West were destroyed after her stay in London, she wanted to go abroad again as the wife of one studying/working abroad since it seemed nice, and because she thought it would be a good way to avoid her filial duty to her parents-in-law.

11				
Age when first interviewed	Occupation before migration	Education course taken in London	Residence before migration	Father's occupation
24	BA student	MA	Seoul, South Korea (Korea)	Small business owner

**Summary of Interviews**

Interviewee 11 was of the post IMF (International Monetary Fund) generation and shared the typical concerns and reasons members of this generation have for travelling to London to study. She worried that she may not be able to get a job if she didn't have *spec*, defined as everything from education certificates to English proficiency to work experience abroad as the qualifications for employment in Korea. She confessed, though, that she went abroad because all her friends had gone abroad to study as well. She explained that she had planned to stay in London for a couple of years, working to be "the best" in her field, earning a high salary and eventually setting up her own IT business. However, she found the other students at the university to be highly competitive and had difficulty adjusting to the different educational techniques as a linguistic minority. Having only one friend to hang out with, she felt isolated. She admitted to feelings of depression and helplessness, and even blamed herself for what she felt was a poor performance and felt guilty since her parents had "invested" money in her studies. Although her parents were not rich, they could support her study abroad since she was their only child. She already felt disappointed in herself but felt worse for letting her parents down. She explained that one reason she left Korea was the pressure to be competitive. But the irony was that the competition at

school in London was just as aggressive with the added complication of a language barrier.

12				
Age when first interviewed	Occupation before migration	Education course taken in London	Residence before migration	Father's occupation
32	Analyst	MA with a plan to complete a PhD	Seoul, Korea	Retired

#### Summary of Interviews

Interviewee 12 completed her BA in the US and worked in Korea thereafter. She came to London to do her MA and PhD at an elite university with a stellar reputation that would be beneficial in finding work later. She wished to work abroad for a global company and later raise and educate any children she might have in a developed country. However, she was fully aware it wouldn't be easy to get a job in London as a foreigner, something she had already experienced in the US. Despite knowing this, she took a gamble on educational migration with the goal of working in London in the future.

The relatively shorter period of a 1-year MA course as well as the fact that she could enjoy cultural activities as a single woman in a metropolitan city were two factors that attracted her to study in London.

Her parents opposed her plan, worrying she wouldn't find a husband while still of 'marriageable age' and would lose her stable job in Korea, but

she decided this move was necessary to regroup after working at a demanding job in Korea for several years.

13				
Age when first interviewed	Occupation before migration	Education course taken in London	Residence before migration	Father's occupation
28	Program manager in HR and a part-time MA student	MA	Seoul, Korea	Salaryman
Summary of Interviews				
<p>Interviewee 13 wanted to work for a foreign company in Seoul, Sydney, Hong Kong, or Singapore. She thought it would be exciting to get a job in a foreign city, but she also realised she had a “competitive edge” in Seoul that increased her chances of getting a job there. She said she wouldn’t mind working in Seoul, but she emphasised that it should be a foreign (Western) company because she didn’t like the totalitarian Korean culture in domestic companies. In Korean-owned companies, it was compulsory for employees to have dinner and a drink together after work, which deprived them of their own time, time she felt would be better used to have a work-life balance after she had a baby.</p> <p>She believed that education in the UK would be helpful in finding employment with a foreign company in Korea. She chose London because of the shorter period of the course (1 year) and the university’s reputation. She had decided she should have an MA anyway, but she felt it would be</p>				



more beneficial to study abroad in order to build up a network of contacts. She told me that she herself hadn't experienced gendered discrimination at work in lower- or middle-level positions but that the higher positions were dominated by men and less open to women.

14				
Age when first interviewed	Occupation before migration	Education course taken in London	Residence before migration	Father's occupation
38	Housewife  (divorced)	MA and PhD	Seoul, Korea	Retired

**Summary of Interviews**

Interviewee 14 started her MA after her divorce. She wanted to re-train in a new area so that she could start her own business. Because she couldn't/didn't get an internship while working on her MA, her English didn't improve, and she couldn't/didn't have enough information/knowledge to start her own business. As a result, she stayed in London after finishing her MA and started a PhD. She told me that she had to speak English perfectly in order to get an internship. If she couldn't speak English well, she worried that no one would hire her. But at the same time, she felt that her English couldn't be perfect even if she worked extremely hard at it, which ironically discouraged her from trying to improve her English and only made her feel more depressed. She explained because of downward mobility and a low quality of life her time in

London was “miserable”. She endured it and comforted herself with the thought that students are poor everywhere. She often felt truly lonely and homesick, missing her old friends in Seoul since they understood her without her having to explain herself. Even though she was divorced, intimacy in romantic relationship was particularly important to her. She confided that it was very difficult for her when she lived by herself. She felt anxious and isolated. When I interviewed her, she had a boyfriend with whom she cohabited.

15				
Age when first interviewed	Occupation before migration	Education course taken in London	Residence before migration	Father's occupation
27	MA student	MA	Kyeongsangdo, Korea	Small business owner in construction

#### Summary of Interviews

Interviewee 15 was a very ambitious, hardworking woman. Because her family was not at all rich and what little money they could spare had to be divided between her and 4 other children, she had to find alternative resources. She proactively accumulated cultural capital by commuting to Seoul in order to attend economics classes at a top university, and after completing her BA, she attempted to enlist in the navy in order to qualify for a

scholarship and further her studies. She couldn't explain to me why she decided to go abroad to study English and get her MA, but she told me she was extremely happy when she was admitted to one of the elite universities in London, feeling she could be an elite now. However, her life in London was full of complications since she had to work for a living while studying. Responsibility for making a living prevented her from spending time with her friends, left little time for studying so she failed exams, and left her with no choice but to quit the internship with the NGO that she loved. She shared that not having emotional support from her family was one of the hardest things about her time in London, but she also acknowledged that even before her migration she hadn't had any emotional support from her family. At the time we had our first interview, she was applying to international organisations such as the UN. She didn't want to return to Korea since she thought the job market in her field (environment) in Korea was too small for her to pursue the kind of work that interested her. However, since her visa was about to expire, she had to continue working as a guardian for young Korean students studying in the UK, a job she didn't like, in order to prolong her visa and apply to the UN in London.

16				
Age when first interviewed	Occupation before migration	Education course taken in London	Residence before migration	Father's occupation
35	MA student	2 diplomas and 1 MA	Kyeongsangdo, Korea	Passed away
<b>Summary of Interviews</b>				

Interviewee 16's dream was to set up a private care home for the elderly not only in London and Seoul but also in North Korea. She came to London to learn English since not being able to speak English fluently had caused her problems at a university in Korea, but once in London, she decided to stay longer and continue her studies in health care. Like interviewee 15, she too had to work to pay her tuition fees and rent. Her sister financially supported her through her first year, but after that she had to take any job she could get from a cashier in a Korean supermarket to a nanny. This prolonged the time it took to finish her programme. All the financial and emotional strain took a toll on her health so much so that she wanted to go back Korea. She had no time to study and no money for private English lessons, which she very much needed as she continued to have poor academic results. Despite her difficulties, she was planning to do her PhD, which she thought was a divine message (she was a devout Christian and she claimed that she heard God's voice telling her to do PhD when she prayed for guidance). She admitted that she didn't want to go back to Korea because she disliked the Korean homogenous culture and social pressure on young women to get married. The Korean community located in New Malden supported her so she could continue to stay in London. She also received support from people in her Korean church, everything from legal counselling for visas to getting free clothes to cheap rent. She told me that the Korean people in her church were like her second family who wanted to help her reach her goals.

17				
Age when first interviewed	Occupation before migration	Education course taken in London	Residence before migration	Father's occupation

27	BA student	BA	Kyeonggido, Korea	Concierge
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**Summary of Interviews**

Interviewee 17 also faced financial difficulties. Her family was poor, and though her father strongly opposed her studying abroad, her mother went against his wishes and gave her daughter all the financial support she could afford. Though she wished her daughter wouldn't repeat her miserable poverty, her mother couldn't cover all the costs and thus she had to take jobs as a low-skilled worker. She told me her abilities were highly recognised at schools in Korea since she was proactive and independent, going above and beyond required academic criteria and doing extracurricular activities such as creating art projects in a well-known alternative school. She was such an outstanding student that even her professors in London recognised her potential at the beginning of the school year. But she nearly didn't graduate and had to get an extension to complete the course since she lacked the time to study while working. She succumbed to various negative feelings, such as depression, helplessness, loneliness, shame, and self-blame. For a while, she couldn't even look another person in the face properly because she felt so ashamed. However, she didn't want to go back home until she had succeeded in London. The myth of "global success", the idea that one could obtain flexible citizenship after migration and be successful, helped sustain her through the hardships she faced in London. But her time in London instead of building her up tore her down. She eventually had to go back home because working continuously as a low-skilled worker left her with little money and because her mother was sick. She found a job with a company in Korea, but she was so dissatisfied and felt she wasn't being treated fairly that she started to become depressed again. She found a new job thanks to her contacts from the alternative school she had attended and was finally satisfied with her job. However, the company went bankrupt later and she was left unemployed again. Her employment situation was continuously vulnerable and unstable in Korea even after studying in London, which made her want to go back to London even though she was aware that this solution was just an illusion and not really a way out.

18				
Age when first interviewed	Occupation before migration	Education course taken in London	Residence before migration	Father's occupation
29	Worked in a marketing company	MA	Seoul, South Korea	Employer

**Summary of Interviews**

Interviewee 18 came to London for the express purpose of studying fashion design but was very disappointed to find that she was enrolled in a management course specific to the fashion industry, a difference that had not been made clear by the faculty office. When I interviewed her, she was quite vocal in expressing her anger that the course was not even well-prepared, and she criticised the university for making up a course just to profit from international students' tuition fees. Not only was the university's course description so vague as to misrepresent the curriculum but the studying abroad broker (a private company in Seoul) gave her inaccurate information too. The broker's information on the location of the university was wrong, and as a result the room she rented that she thought was near the university was actually quite far from it and thus she had a long commute until she found new lodgings. The same broker gave an erroneous quote for the cost of living in London, and as a result she was not prepared for the expense and had financial problems during educational migration. She wanted to quit the course since it was not what she wished to study, and she didn't think

her language skills were improving either. She hesitated to apply for a job in London after graduation even though she wanted to build up her career partly because she felt she knew nothing about the subject and partly because she felt her language skills were poor. Before migration, she boasted that she was going to study abroad to her friends in Seoul. After her migration, her 'fantasy' about studying abroad was ruined. When I met her, she just wanted to go back home as soon as possible. However, she couldn't tell her friends the truth since they still envied the opportunity she had to study aboard and thought she was doing well. She didn't want to lose their admiration by telling them the truth.

19				
Age when first interviewed	Occupation before migration	Education course taken in  London	Residence before migration	Father's occupation
72	Housewife	PhD	Seoul, South Korea	Pastor
<b>Summary of Interviews</b>				

Interviewee 19 was one of the few pioneering intellectuals to go abroad to study during the South Korean military authoritarian regime, a government that before reforms in the late '80s restricted ordinary people's right to travel but allowed a few intellectuals to study abroad. But before she ever pursued her own studies, she accompanied her husband while he studied for his PhD in the US in the late '70s. At that time most women went along as trailing spouses, caring for their husbands while they studied, managing the households and taking care of the children. She wanted to study as well but in those days few women studied abroad, and it was taken for granted that women took care of their husbands first and studied after their husbands had finished. After returning home and after her husband became a professor at an elite university, she could finally go abroad herself to study for her PhD in the UK, but she had to take their children. She explained that as a mother it was her duty to take care of their children, so she cared for them while working to complete her PhD. Despite the challenges of juggling motherhood and her studies, she felt incredibly grateful for this opportunity. She was grateful to her family and in-laws who made it possible for her to study at all. She told me that by sending her to the UK, they proved that they were progressive and enlightened since it was uncommon for women to study abroad, especially married women. Apart from her family, she was also grateful for the South Korean government's study-abroad national scholarship she was awarded that only a select few were lucky enough to receive. It was very difficult for her to study, but when she felt overcome by the adversities she faced, she bolstered her resolve by thinking how lucky she was to be able to study in the UK. Both she and her husband were passionate about using their education to contribute to the prosperity and development of South Korea. They were so committed to their plan that her highly educated husband had turned down an offer to work in the US after graduation so that they could return home. It was relatively easy for them to become professors since South Korea needed intellectuals with advanced knowledge and skills in the modernisation process. For them, the West or developed countries were models they had to learn from and catch up to in order to modernise their nation. Though both are retired now, when I last interviewed her, she shared that they still contributed to society by leading a small intellectual Christian community where they shared knowledge, educated people, and trained young scholars.



## **Appendix 2.**

### Interview question lists

#### (1) Interview questions for those pursuing higher education

##### 1. Personal background

- 1) Age
- 2) Education
- 3) Occupation before departure from homeland
- 4) Father's occupation
- 5) Previous residence in South Korea
- 6) Why did you agree to do the interview?

##### 2. Reason for educational migration

- 1) What is your reason for studying in London?
- 2) How long will you stay in London?
- 3) Why did you choose London?
- 4) What do you expect to gain from living and studying in London?
- 5) How do you pay for your tuition fees and living expenses?
- 6) What does your family think of your move to London?
- 7) Why didn't you want to remain in Korea?

##### 3. Higher education and work

- 1) How long are you planning to stay in London?
- 2) What is your future career plan?
- 3) What do you plan to do after graduation?
- 4) It is said that it is difficult to find jobs in London. How do you plan to overcome this?
- 5) Did the economic capacity influence your decision to study in London?
- 6) Do you plan to return to South Korea? If yes, why?

##### 4. Schooling

- 1) How do you find your course?
- 2) Who are your friends? To what extent can you talk with them?
- 3) How do you find the university courses in general?
- 4) How do you find speaking English in class?

#### 5. Migration experience

- 1) How was your migration experience?
- 2) What was the most difficult thing about it? (for instance, the quality of life)
- 3) What are the differences between life in your hometown and in London?
- 4) How do you find speaking English?
- 5) Do you feel homesick and lonely? What do you do when you are homesick? How do your feelings manifest?
- 6) What are the differences between the relationships you have in London to those you have in South Korea?

#### 6. Everyday life in London

- 1) What is your normal weekly schedule? Please describe it.
- 2) With whom do you spend time? What is their nationality?
- 3) In what area of London do you live? What do you do there?
- 4) What do you do when you have free time?
- 5) Where do you go in London for recreation?

#### 7. Life in London/the Western country

- 1) What are the differences you have noticed between London and your hometown?
- 2) Have you experienced racism or discrimination?
- 3) How do you find British people?
- 4) How do you find living in a multicultural centre like London?
- 5) Have you changed your views on Korea since your migration experience?

#### 8. Family and friends at home

- 1) How do you contact your family and friends back home?
- 2) How often?
- 3) Are you ever homesick? If so, what do you do when you miss home?
- 4) How do you manage your homesickness or loneliness?
- 5) Do you use media related to Korea?
- 6) Do you keep current with Korean media and culture? How often and in what way?

#### 9. Gendered experience and single life

- 1) What was your experience as a woman in Korea?
- 2) Did this experience affect your decision to come to London?
- 3) What is your experience as a woman in London?
- 4) How do you find life as woman in London or in your higher education institute?
- 5) Does your gender affect your family's opinion of your decision to study abroad?

#### 10. Sexuality

- 1) Do you currently a boy/girl friend? What nationality is he/she?
- 2) Have you had British/Western boy/girlfriends before? (In case of having had a Western boy/girlfriend instead of a British one.)
- 3) What are the differences between having a Western boy/girlfriend and a Korean one?
- 4) Did your family know that you had a Western boy/girlfriend, or that you were living with a boy/girlfriend (if you did)?
- 5) What do other people around you think about the fact that you have a Western boy/girl friend?
- 6) How do you think your ethnicity affects your relationship?
- 7) Do you plan to continue your relationship after graduation?
- 8) What do you think of British/Western men/women?
- 9) Based on your experiences, how do you feel Asian woman are view regarding their sexuality? (For instance, stereotyping of Asian girls.)

## 11. Schooling

- 1) How do you find your course?
- 2) How do you find living/studying in London?
- 3) Do you feel you changed after your time in London?

## 12. Graduation and working plan

- 1) What is your plan for after you graduate?
- 2) If you are planning to return to Korea, what is your reason for doing so?
- 3) If you are planning to stay in London, how long are you going to stay?
- 4) If you are planning to stay in London, how will you finance your stay?

### (2) Interview questions for those staying in London after graduation

#### 1. Basic details

- 1) Since your graduation, how long have you been in London?
- 2) What do you currently do in London?
- 3) How do you pay for your living expenses?

#### 2. Staying in London

- 1) Why did you choose to stay in London?
- 2) What are your main reasons for staying in London?
- 3) Are there other countries/cities where you wish to live?
- 4) Why didn't you want to go back to Seoul/South Korea?
- 5) Do you plan to stay in London permanently? If not, how much longer do you plan to stay in London?
- 6) What are your future plans for staying in London?

#### 3. Working in London

- 1) What do you currently do for a living in London?
- 2) What is your salary?
- 3) Why did you choose the job you have?

4) How did you get our current job? Please describe your career path/job search after graduation.

5) List the job you currently have and those you have had in the past.

-Part-time or Full-time?

-Paid work?

-Fairly paid?

-Any discrimination in the workplace?

6) Detail your job search.

-Experience as a woman

-Experience as an ethnic minority

-Any discrimination?

-How do you feel about your job search?

7) What are the advantages and disadvantages of working in London in your experience?

8) What are the advantages and disadvantages of working as a woman in London in your experience?

9) What are the advantages and disadvantages of being an ethnic minority working in London in your experience?

10) What is your status regarding your visa? How do you feel about that?

(3) Interview questions for those who have gone back to South Korea or moved elsewhere after graduation

1. Basic details

1) Where are you living now?

2) What do you do here?

3) How do you pay for your living expenses?

4) Where were you and what did you do between the time you graduated and moving to where you are now?

2. Living in South Korea/Other destination

1) Why did you choose to return home/to move to your new destination?

- 2) Why didn't you want to stay in London after your graduation?
- 3) How have you adjusted to living in Korea again/in a new country? Please describe your experiences since returning to Korea/arriving in a different country.
- 4) Do you plan to permanently stay in Korea (or elsewhere)? Or do you plan to leave again to live in other countries/return to Korea?
- 5) What is your experience as a woman living here?
- 6) Do you plan to live in Korea/here permanently?
- 7) Looking back, how do you feel about your time in London?

\* Questions specially for those who moved back to South Korea

- 1) Did your relations with family and friends change after living in London? If so, can you describe how they changed?
- 2) What has changed for you living in Korea now compared to your life before you lived and studied in London?

### 3. Working

- 1) What do you do for a living?
- 2) What is your salary?
- 3) Why did you choose the job you have? Describe your career path/job search after graduation in London.
- 4) How do you find the work?
- 5) List the job you currently have and those you have had in the past.
  - Part-time or Full-time?
  - Paid work?
  - Fairly paid?
  - Any discrimination in the workplace?
- 6) Detail your job search
  - Experience as a woman
  - Experience as an ethnic minority
  - Any discrimination?

-How do you feel about your job search?

7) Are there advantages or even disadvantages to completing your degree in London as far as living and working in Korea/your new destination?

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