Relocating the Narrative Self

An analysis of transnational migration experiences among highly educated young adults

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Research Master Thesis

June 21, 2019

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, the idea of home has been interpreted as central to people's lives and identities, connecting them to specific places of origin, communities or cultures. However, some scholars have suggested that the changes taking place in today's contemporary society - such as increased opportunities for mobility - have weakened these long-standing attachments to place and home. This phenomenon seems especially relevant for the lives of young people navigating transnational fields, as their processes of transition into adulthood take place in parallel with a transition from home to a transnational environment. Thus, the ways in which young adults connect to the idea of home may have a significant impact on their identity development away from home. Drawing on a transnational perspective, this study aims to answer the question: *what is the role and importance of home in the life narratives of highly educated transnational young adults in today's increasingly globalised and mobile society?*

For this investigation, I conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with 15 respondents currently residing in Rotterdam, Netherlands. The narrative analysis of data revealed several notable patterns. First, spaces of home emerge as highly relevant in the life narratives of transnational youths. In line with the born and bred discourse, the childhood home continues to provide young people with a connection to the place of origin. Second, mobility experiences are often perceived as "leaving home" in order to pursue their own identity projects and make independent homes. This narrative of development seems especially important as part of young people's transition into adulthood. In addition, early experiences of home and mobility seem to shape how young adults relate to place later in life. Third, the narratives analysed revealed combination of classical and new discourses that young adults employ to describe their understandings of home and mobility, including the established born and bred, progression and coupledom narratives and the emerging self-development (or *Bildung*) narrative. Overall, it appears that young adults' connections to place are not becoming weaker, but rather are reinterpreted and negotiated during their transnational relocations. The various homes inhabited by young people are integrated in their life stories, prompting different types of attachments through memories, feelings and relationships with other individuals.

KEYWORDS: Transnationalism, Young Adulthood, Place, Mobility, Narrative Identity

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Notions of home, nativity and birthplace have traditionally been considered to hold a special significance for people's sense of identity and belonging (Ahmed, 1999; Moskal, 2015), functioning as a crucial source of human identity and meaning (Havel, 1992:31; Tucker, 1994). Scholars have often described home as a place of refuge (Mallett, 2004) or a comfortable, safe space where individuals can escape the burdens of the outside world and find relaxation (Moore, 1984; Reijnders, 2019). For many people, home represents both a point of origin and a destination to which they eventually strive to return (Case, 1996; Mallett, 2004).

However, some scholars have argued that these long-standing attachments to place may be diminishing due to the fast-paced developments taking place in the contemporary society (Taylor, 2010). Increased mobility opportunities and easy access to global networks of people through communication technologies might seem to have weakened the importance of place in people's contemporary lives (e.g. Giddens, 1991; Sennett, 2000). Processes of globalisation and the commodification of place may have contributed to an increasing sense of placelessness in today's society (Arefi, 1999).

This seems especially true for young people transitioning into adulthood (Taylor, 2010). Particularly in the West, youths are expected to move away from their family homes at a certain age and make their own independent homes (Mallett, 2004). Whether this move is voluntary or imposed can be of great influence for young people's identities and their conceptualisations of past, present and future homes (Jones, 1995; Wardhaugh, 1999).

Mobility experiences are often interpreted as defining stages in people's life trajectories (Sheller and Urry, 2006), as they challenge the ways in which individuals relate to traditional notions of home and may allow for the adoption of new places as "home environments" (Nowicka, 2007). These processes of "home-searching" (Tucker, 1994:186) may impact young people in terms of identity formation, as this developmental stage involves the most opportunities for self-exploration, identity work and definition of worldviews. Indeed, Dovey (1985) argues that being away from home shapes both the traveller and her notions of home. On the other hand, one's experiences of home can influence her perceptions of mobility and the meanings attached to journeys or relocations (Dovey, 1985). Thus, for young people, discovering what constitutes "home" could reveal a great deal about who they are in terms of identity, and vice versa.

However, little is known to date about the specificities of young peoples' relocation experiences and the importance of place in their transnational lives. The experiences of transnational youths present an interesting case for inquiry, as their migration experiences are likely to differ from those of teenagers or (emerging) adults in terms of their formative impact on identity and self: young adults are amidst a process of intense self-searching and in active pursuit of independence (Levinson, 1978) – a stage of development not yet reached by children and teenagers, and already surpassed by older cohorts.

The present study focuses on the relocation experiences of young adults from a transnational perspective. The concept of transnationalism is typically used to describe the ties that individuals create and maintain across borders in the course of migration processes, as well as the negotiation of identities in more than one social environment (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Vertovec, 2009; Lam & Smirnov, 2017). Thus, this paper aims to contribute to the literature on the sociology of home and belonging in an era of globalization by answering the following research question: **What is the role and importance of home in the life narratives of highly educated transnational young adults in today's increasingly globalised and mobile society?**

Relevance

In the past decade, the topics of transnationalism and migration have been gaining increasing attention from scholars, yet there's still a literature gap in addressing the lives and experiences of transnational young adults (Reynolds & Zontini, 2016). With a few notable exceptions (e.g. Basch et al, 1994; Wessendorf, 2013), researchers seldomly addressed younger age categories as distinct from older groups. In some studies, migrant youths are occasionally discussed as part of broader migration dynamics, but an explicit focus on their experience, identity and transnational lives is often still missing (Reynolds & Zontini, 2016).

Moreover, an aspect often overlooked by existing studies is that the identities of migrants are not uniform, but rather mediated by factors such as age, gender, education, social class and race – all contributing to a high degree of heterogeneity in their experiences (Reynolds & Zontini, 2016). A transnational lifestyle is not equally accessible to all. Evidence suggests that social class and racial belonging are still conditioning people's migration opportunities – both in terms of the socio-economic resources available to them to take up transnational lifestyles, and in terms of the policies of receiving countries with regards to different migrant groups (Reynolds & Zontini, 2014). For example, the process and

experience of migration could differ dramatically for young students going on exchange and forcefully displaced refugees.

For this investigation, I conducted 15 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with highly educated young adults with transnational experiences currently residing in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Rotterdam was selected for two reasons: first, due to its reputation as an international city, which tends to attract transnationally oriented migrants - such as knowledge migrants and young academics (Van Bochove & Engberse, 2015) and second, due to practical considerations that allowed the researcher access to a rich network of potential respondents. Moreover, the international character offers a unique context to explore issues of identification, home and belonging in the relocation narratives of transnational young adults.

The relationship between education and migration has been gaining increasing importance in recent years, as Western countries witnessed a considerable increase in both levels of migration and in the number of people attaining higher levels of education (Quinn & Rubb, 2005). These developments are of interest to both scholars and policy makers, however there is little academic consensus on how education impacts the decision to migrate or the likelihood of migration (Quinn & Rubb, 2005).

This study adopts an intersectional framework that takes into account the ways in which different social divisions intersect with one another (McCall, 2001; Anthias, 2008). Such an approach considers different social positions to be relational, and thus allows scholars to develop deeper ontological understandings of migration than more reductionist approaches that look at individuals as part of only one social category (Phoenix & Pattemana, 2006). This it may enable policy-makers to consider how different inequalities are framed and develop strategies based not only on the common features of various inequalities, but also on their specific characteristics and implications (Verloo, 2006). Thus, this study aims to bring a novel empirical contribution to the study of migration and identity by looking at social identities of young adults – such as gender – as interrelated with class, age, education, race or ethnicity, rather than as separate categories with distinct and independent features (Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006).

With these considerations in mind, the present study aims to contribute to the current theoretical debates in migration studies and youth studies by giving central stage to the narratives of young adults with transnational experiences and disentangling the distinctive characteristics of this age group as interrelated with other social identities. Methodologically, it presents rich new data addressing the intricate dynamics of young migrants' experiences and the ways in which they position themselves in relation to place in contemporary society.

In this first section, I described how the mobile nature of today's society might be changing the ways in which people relate to places and questioned how this phenomenon may impact the experiences of home and relocation among highly educated young adults. In the following chapters, I discuss the theoretical underpinnings of this study, paying special attention to the theories of mobility and transnationalism in contemporary society and the established themes in young people's relocation narratives (chapter 2). Moreover, I provide an in-depth overview of the methodological considerations that informed this study's data collection and analysis processes (chapter 3). A comprehensive discussion of the analysis and main findings is presented in the next section (chapter 4), with illustrative examples connecting the emerging theoretical insights to everyday life practice. The last chapter provides the reader with concluding thoughts and places the findings of this study in a broader socio-cultural context. In addition, it discusses the limitations of this study and provides some suggestions for further research (chapter 5).

2. Theoretical Framework

In this theoretical section, I will describe the emergence of a transnational perspective as an alternative view of assimilationist approaches to migration. Moreover, I discuss the ways in which globalisation and increased mobility opportunities afforded by modernisation might have impacted the contemporary processes of identity work and feelings of belonging, in particular among young migrants. I will argue that this impact can be traced by looking at the ways in which young adults talk about place and relocation in their own life narratives. I then outline some of the classical narrative themes observed in prior studies in relation to people's stories of migration and place. Before discussing the methodological approach, I formulate the research question and sub-questions addressed in this study.

2.1. Mobility and migration in a transnational perspective

For a long time, scholarly understandings of migration were framed by the assimilation theory, which proposed that migrant groups became incorporated in the mainstream majority culture, and eventually fused with the host society by engaging in processes of acculturation, social integration and finally, identification with the dominant social groups (Gordon, 1964; Park & Burgess, 1969:735). This way, the differences between groups and ethic identities were expected to eventually erode, which should lead to a unified sense of society and culture (Morawska, 1994). However, assimilation theories have been

fiercely criticised for their "melting pot" ideological orientation and for ignoring the distinct characteristics of the various ethnic groups (Kivisto, 2001). Moreover, this perspective fails to account for the fundamental changes brought by modernity – such as increased migration flows, the dominance of capitalist systems, cultural hybridisation and the redefinition of citizenship in a time of "post-nationalism" (Kivisto, 2001; Appadurai, 1996).

The concept of transnationalism has emerged as an alternative to these rather traditional views of migration, suggesting that migrants create new roots in their host countries, while at the same time maintaining numerous and diverse ties to their countries of origin (Basch et al., 1994). From this perspective, migrants' participation in socio-cultural, economic or political activities are perceived as located at the intersection of their place of origin and new place of residence (Faist, 2000). Transnational perspectives reject the view of migration as a static phenomenon, through which individuals become "uprooted" in their new society (Dahinden, 2017). Rather, contemporary transnational migration is seen to occur in dynamic social places, where individuals can redraw and negotiate the meanings of place by forming connections with more than one social context or location (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004, Smith, 2005).

This perspective acknowledges that the ties between individuals and places are complex and multifaceted, extending beyond the dichotomy of "rooted belonging" or "rootless mobility" (Ahmed et al, 2003:3) or a strict opposition between "being at home" or "on the move" (Taylor, 2010). As such, it moves away from rather outdated conceptualisations of mobility and home/belonging as irreconcilable polar opposites and adopts a more flexible understanding that can account for the contemporary dynamics through which individuals connect to places in a globalised and increasingly connected world (see Ahmed, 1999).

However, transnational perspectives have been criticised for having a fragmented body of research and lacking a clear theoretical underlining (e.g. Portes et al., 1999:218; Pries, 2008; Waldinger, 2015). In particular, little is known to date about the individual identity processes among migrants from a transnational perspective. Some notable exceptions include a discussion of acculturation among diaspora communities (Bhatia & Ram, 2009), a review of contemporary notions of home and people-place relationships (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011) and an analysis of the aging experience of elder migrants in transnational environments (Zontini, 2015). Still, a focus on the experiences of young adults navigating transnational contexts is lacking.

2.2. Place attachment in a mobile world

As discussed above, a transnational perspective attempts to account for contemporary societal developments by departing from static views of migration and fixed conceptualisations of place. But modernity has shaped not only the way people move around and understand migration: it also fundamentally changed the ways in which individuals relate to places in the modern society.

The exact nature of place attachments in the modern society is a polarising matter, dividing scholarly opinion in two main sides of the debate. On the one hand, scholars from a particularist perspective agree that increased mobility has shaped the ways in which people connect to places and other individuals – however, this change is interpreted as a redefinition and recontextualization of people's place attachments rather than a mere decline in this relationship (Savage et al., 2005:85). They argue that modern individuals continue to form attachments to the places they inhabit, as these allow for a sense of home in a dynamic and mobile world (Duyvendak, 2011). Thus, particularists understand belonging in terms of the places that are meaningful and valuable for the self, rather than as rootedness in specific spaces or communities (Savage et al., 2005:85).

On the other hand, the universalist perspective explicitly links modernity to the decline in place attachment, for two reasons: on one hand, they argue that contemporary places have become increasingly generic and have lost their specificity, thus becoming "less attachable" in nature; and on the other hand, that increased mobility makes it more difficult for modern individuals to create and maintain attachments to place (Duyvendak, 2011).

In the context of relocation, Christie (2007:2445) argues that in today's society experiences of mobility are tightly interwoven with the "project of modernity", whereby moving away from the family home enables young people to break free from the restrictions of familial connections and home spaces, and allows them to create new, independent, own identities. However, from a transnational and particularist perspective, I would suggest that young people's self-making projects might not necessarily be characterised by a severing of ties with home and communities of origin, but rather constructed through a negotiation of various (old and new) places, identities and personal connections across borders.

2.3. Locating the narrative self in a global context

In contrast to more traditional "realist" understandings of the self as a coherent, stable and researchable entity, the social constructionist approach proposed an alternative view (Taylor, 2010), introducing an interpretation of the self as "social artefacts, products of

historically situated interchanges among people" (Gergen, 1985:267). Potter & Wetherell (1987) challenged the idea that individuals hold coherent and stable identities which can be directly expressed through talk as reflections of the "real self". Instead, they argued that identity should be perceived as constructed in social contexts and negotiated, disputed or embraced through talk (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). These arguments are in line with the performative approach to identity (see Goffman, 1959; Butler, 1993), which proposes that speakers make use of the medium of talk to *construct and negotiate* various identities and worldviews, rather than describing actual phenomena that exist a priori (Taylor, 2010). From this perspective, self-identity is not perceived as a well-established, cohesive entity but rather as constructed in everyday practice and narrative performance.

Langellier (1999:129) suggests that "the *personal* in personal narrative implies a performative struggle for agency rather than the expressive act of a pre-existing, autonomous, fixed, united, or stable self". Thus, the narrative self can be understood as an ever-evolving construct, formed in interaction n with other actors through the life stories we tell ourselves and others (Ochs & Capps, 1996). In this paper, I follow Gergen's conceptualisation of the self-narrative as "an individual's account of the relationship among self-relevant events across time", which serve the purpose of linking life events in an intelligible and coherent manner (Gergen, 1994:187).

In addition to creating casual links between life events and allowing for the expression of seemingly coherent identities, narratives are also important in shaping people's imaginations (Gottschall, 2013). Imagination plays an essential role for the human consciousness, as it allows access into various realms of existence that transcend everyday realities and liberate individuals from the constraints of time and space (Reijnders, 2019), thus opening a door to a world in which we belong and connect in an affective manner (Lennon, 2015). While imagination allows individuals to mentally explore any real or fictional location, the notion of home seems to dominate people's worlds of imagination, especially during challenging life events and moments of insecurity (Reijnders, 2019).

For young adults, the process of transitioning into adulthood is arguably one of the most challenging stages in life, as they are expected to define their own identities, worldviews and independent lives. For transnational youths, these identity processes may be even further complicated by their relocations, which may require the management of different identities in various social context and the maintenance of multiple ties across borders. In this context, imaginations and memories of home could provide an anchor for young adults' self-

identities during such tumultuous moments of transition, and act as a space of refuge while navigating transnational environments.

2.4. Discursive resources in migration narratives

The research of individual life narratives has gained increasing popularity in the field of migration studies, as it allows for an investigation of the "lived experiences" of migrants (Eastmond, 2007). In telling their stories, individuals draw on established conventions and narrative structures which act as "discursive resources" that shape the content and form of our narratives (Taylor, 2010).

Previous studies have mapped several narrative themes that recur in people's narratives of identity and place. The "born and bred" discursive resource has been often highlighted as a dominant theme that creates a link between identity and place by means of identification with the native or the local, by generational succession, blood ties, family and tradition (Taylor, 2010). A second example that has often been mentioned is the "property ladder" narrative: as young people enter adulthood, they tend to move out of their parents' homes and "step down" the property (and class) hierarchies; however, after a while youths gain the means to move back up the ladder and into properties that resemble their childhood homes in terms of status (Taylor, 2010). Related to this is the narrative of "progression", whereby individuals may express dissatisfaction with their former homes, but be content with their current dwellings (Taylor, 2010; Reijnders, 2019). The "dominant coupledom" narrative has also been noted for its importance, as people they tend to move from singledom to coupledom, and later – marriage and parenthood (Reynolds & Taylor, 2005).

The above-mentioned narrative themes exemplify some of the conventional understandings of place and identity. However, the way in which these themes return in the life narratives of young adults remains a relevant and scarcely explored empirical question. In the context of transnational migration flows, it is possible that young adults re-interpret and redefine their attachments to place, as well as complementing them with new and alternate discourses, specific to their socio-cultural backgrounds and experiences.

2.5. Research question

Drawing on the above-mentioned theoretical approaches, this paper employs a transnational perspective to investigate the narratives of youth migration in a contemporary context. In doing so, it aims to answer the research question: **What is the role and**

importance of place in the life narratives of transnational young migrants in today's increasingly globalised and mobile society?

As discussed in the previous sections, scholarly understandings of place attachment in a world defined by mobility are deeply divided (see Duyvendak, 2011). This study aims to contribute to this academic debate by analysing the various ways in which young migrants describe their transnational experiences and relate to the concept of home, paying close attention to the linguistic terminology and narrative structures employed. To allow for this investigation, the first sub-question addressed is how and in what contexts do young people with transnational experiences talk about their relationships to places and moments of mobility?

Second, while transnational perspectives have been applied to a wide spectrum of social phenomena, little is known to date about the identity processes of young adults with transnational experiences. In this paper, I analyse the values, feelings, imaginations and memories that are voiced in transnational migration stories and the ways in which these may influence how young adults connect to place in terms of identity and self. Thus, the second sub-question explores how and when do transnational youths relate to place in terms of identity, feelings and values?

Lastly, scholars have identified several narrative discourses that are commonly employed in people's stories of identity and place, however little is known about how these classical themes are integrated in the life narratives of young migrants. This study investigates the articulation of classical themes present in the migration stories of young adults, as well as trace alternative, emerging understandings that occur in contemporary narratives of relocation. Therefore, the third sub-question is formulated as follows: what classical and emerging themes can be identified in the modern life narratives of transnational young migrants and how are they articulated within the context of relocation?

3. Methodology

In the previous chapter, I have outlined the theoretical foundations of this study and presented some potential implications of transnationalism for the life narratives of young migrants. Next, I outline the methodological approach employed in this paper and discuss some ethical considerations.

3.1. Narrative data analysis

This study employs a narrative analysis approach to explore the stories of home and relocation among young adults with transnational experiences. Narrative analysis rests on the assumption that individuals ascribe meaning to the events in their life and the broader social context in which they unfold by constructing and telling stories of their past experiences (Schutz 1972: 99–100). As a methodological tool, it is often employed in migration studies because it provides an avenue to gather rich data about the daily lives and personal experiences of migrants, a process aimed at deconstructing totalising discourses of the migrant experience as a homogeneous, unified one (Eastmond 2007; Powles, 2004). In contrast to more traditional qualitative methodologies that regard individuals' accounts as objective representations of their "real life", through which the researcher can observe and reach conclusion about the "real individual" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011:11) and in line with the performative approach to identity, narrative analysis stresses the importance of stories as socially produced, constructed through interaction with other people (Riessman, 1993). The principal aim of this method is to unravel the various ways in which qualitative data can be interpreted as a story-telling process, during which the respondents create and communicate "narrative accounts of their life" (Earthy, Cuncev and Cronin, 2016).

In this paper, I draw on Taylor's (2010) narrative-discursive approach which provides two important advantages to the study of migration narratives. First, it provides a more holistic understanding of the respondent's life narrative by looking both at the individual identity of the speaker and the broader socio-cultural context in which it is constructed (Taylor, 2010). Second, it acknowledges that narratives are situated in specific social, cultural and historical contexts that might enable or restrict identity work, thus allowing the researcher to make sense of how changes in context and circumstances are "mediated by established understandings and expectations" (Taylor, 2010).

3.2. Data collection

Semi-structured interviewing is a widely employed technique in ethnographies and qualitative research in general. Its primary advantages lie in the opportunity to collect rich and extensive data, while also allowing for flexibility and adjustment of questions (for example, their phrasing or sequence) to the specific context of each conversation (Fielding & Thomas, 2016). In this paper, I follow Kvale's (1996:125-131) framework for qualitative interviewing, as it provides a suitable approach to inquire both into the individual experiences of people, and the ways in which they present life events.

Prior to the interviews, an interview guide (Appendix A) outlining the main topics for discussion was constructed, based on the theoretical insights discussed in the previous chapter. I typically began the interviews by asking my respondents to provide a brief overview of all the places (countries/cities) where they lived throughout their lives. Then we delved deeper into the meanings of each relocation, generally starting with the country of origin and family home and ending with their most current move (to Rotterdam).

For each (re)location mentioned, I inquired into the values, memories and associations with place held by respondents. Moreover, I asked about the social contexts (when, where, in what situations) in which they think back to or tell stories about these different places. To explore the role of place in processes of identity building, my respondents were questioned about their relationships with local communities (from both their country of origin and other places – especially Rotterdam), experiences of belonging (or not) and changes in everyday routines or personality that were assessed as prompted by migration and relocation. I also asked about the respondents' imaginations of ideal places or places of the future, as part of their (imagined) personal development trajectories. Lastly, I typically inquired about the overarching connections between places in people's lives and asked their opinion on the "rootless modern society" hypothesis. At the end of the interview, I always gave my interviewees the space to talk about any other issues they perceived as relevant in the context of the interview.

The interview guide was employed to give structure to the conversation, and help the respondents narrate their experiences. However, the interviews were flexible and conversational in nature as to allow the respondents to tell their story, at their own pace and in their individual voices. The freedom to choose how to tell their stories may have allowed respondents to share more comprehensive, holistic accounts of their life narratives (Earthy, Cuncev and Cronin, 2016; Cuncev, 2015) and experiences of migration. After this, clarifying questions were asked to gain a deeper understanding of the different facets of the respondents' experience (Ziebland, 2013).

The interviews lasted, on average, between 40 and 95 minutes, and were audio recorded with the participant's consent. The interviews were then anonymised and transcribed verbatim to ensure that all data provided by the respondents is accurately and faithfully recorded. To preserve the best sense of the original conversation, other speech acts such as utterances, silences, hesitations or moments of laughter are indicated in the transcripts. Thus, transcribing the interviews verbatim has ensured that no data that might

emerge as relevant at a later point in research is ignored or lost, and allowed for a thorough analysis process (Fielding & Thomas, 2016).

3.3. Data analysis

The transcripts were then analysed by means of narrative analysis. Following Seal's (2016) recommendations, the process of analysis began with a careful reading of the transcripts, identifying the narrative themes that emerged as important during the interview and observing how they varied within and across interviews. Themes are crucial to making sense of qualitative data, as they allow an understanding of how the data relates to the research question and indicate the patterns or particular meanings that are present in the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006:82). Initially, these themes were grouped into broader categories in order to "simplify" and order the data and allow for the easy retrieval of information grouped under the same categories. (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996:28). Subsequent readings have focused on the process of interpretation, whereby these categories were refined and attributed meaningful codes. In vivo coding was preferred in this analysis, as I aimed to closely capture the participants' voice and preserve as much as possible from the original conversation, language and phrasing (e.g. Miles et al, 2014). The final analytic step consisted in a return to theory and a reading of the coded data in the light of existing research and interpretive frameworks, highlighting the relationships that emerged from my data.

3.4. Participants and sampling

Given the scope of this study, respondent recruitment was done by means of non-probability purposive criterion sampling. Thus, rather than approaching participants in a random fashion, I strategically selected 15 participants who are directly relevant to the research question (Bryman 2012:418) based on three criteria: age, education and transnational experience.

First, my interest in the experiences of young adults has prompted me to approach respondents between 20 and 35 years of age. In terms of identity formation, this age group fits within the "novice phase of development" characterised by a high degree of change and lack of stability, as young people navigate various romantic or occupational prospects aiming to achieve stability and structure in life (Levinson, 1978). Transnational experiences of young adults may add an additional (and scarcely explored) dimension to the identity development processes already present at this life stage.

Second, this paper explores the experiences of highly educated young people. In recent years, attending university abroad has become a commonplace experience for many young people in the West, often framed as a significant "rite of passage" in their trajectory of achieving independence and becoming adults (Holdsworth, 2006; 2009). However, the migration of highly educated youths is still rarely addressed in relation to adulthood transitions and development of the self (Holdsworth, 2006).

Third, the transnational experience criterion involved selecting respondents who have moved across borders and were currently *not* living in their country of origin (see Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Lam & Smirnov, 2017).

In terms of gender, background and country of origin I was careful to select a sufficiently diverse sample, to ensure variability across narratives and observe how various social and cultural factors may influence the respondents' accounts (Reijnders, 2019). In total, I interviewed 7 female and 8 male participants from Asia, Western and Eastern Europe and the United States (a more detailed overview of the participants' socio-demographic characteristics is provided in Appendix B).

The interviews were conducted in two phases: 5 interviews were conducted in November-December 2017 and 10 interviews were conducted in April-May 2019. In both cases, an initial call for respondents was posted on social media in several on-line groups of which the researcher is a member. The remaining respondents were recruited by means of "snowball" sampling, being recommended to me by my respondents while following the purposive selection criteria (Bryman, 2012:425). This combination of sampling methods is not an unusual occurrence in social research, as originally designed sampling frames can be complemented by other approaches (Bryman 2012:427).

3.4. Ethical considerations and researcher's role

Prior to the interviews, all respondents were informed about the topic and aim of research and the implications for their participation in this study. I made use of informed consent forms to brief the respondents on the rights, risks and benefits associated with their participation. All respondents consented to be audio recorded. Some preferred to have their identities revealed, while others favoured anonymity. I acted in accordance with their wishes, using the real names of those participants who wanted to be identified, and using pseudonyms to protect the identities of those who preferred to remain anonymous.

Throughout the research project, I was aware of the fact that, as interviewer, I was part of the context in which my respondents told their stories of place and migration and that

the interactions between researcher and respondent may impact the way in which narratives are constructed (Earthy, Cuncev and Cronin, 2016). Therefore, I paid particular attention to these dynamics and tried to guard against the dangers of misinterpretation by transcribing the interviews verbatim and complementing these with careful observations of the non-verbal cues that might reveal the respondent's particular points of emphasis, interest or significance.

The participants were connected to different degrees to the researchers' social network: from individuals I have briefly or never met before to acquaintances and friends. Pre-existing relationships between researcher and respondent are sometimes criticised for their vulnerability to bias (Glesne and Peshkin, 1991). However, researchers from a feminist perspective have emphasised the value of shared experience and its advantages for depth of interviewing (Harris, 2002; McRobbie 1982). Similarly, Reijnders (2019) argues that a "basis of trust" is instrumental for a cooperative environment and depth of conversation.

Still, two strategies were employed to minimise potential biases. First, the topic of research – in this case, young adults' experience of migration and connections to place – was assessed as unlikely to lead the conversation into "dangerous ground" (Cotterill 1992). Second, while the interviews were guided by a topic list, the nature of the conversation was kept as open as possible, as to allow the respondents to say the things they find important whenever and however they felt comfortable.

4. Analysis

The previous chapter has detailed the methodological approach that guided the processes of data collection and analysis. In this section, I discuss the findings that emerged during data analysis and their relation to existing theories of migration, identity and place.

4.1. Homes of the past

4.1.1. Home and home-searching

Most participants still identify their hometowns and countries of origin as crucial parts of their identities. When asked where their home is, the majority of respondents still thought back to their parents' homes or childhood homes. For example, Kim has travelled extensively and relocated several times to different countries, yet she still maintains a close connection to her place of origin and identifies it as home: *"Well, my home is always Rome [laughs]. [...] And I always, for example, when I'm on the phone, I refer to going to Italy as going "back home", which is strange to some because my home is here right now [...] But still, it's*

something unconscious about me that calls you know, my, the, the house that I grew up in, my home." (Kim, 25, Italy).

The same terminology of going "back home" is used by Emilia, however in her case, it indicates a changing relationship to place: "*Every time I go to Vienna, I tell people "I'm going home" [...] But that, that's changing. More and more often I catch myself saying, "I'm going to Vienna" or "I'm going to my parents' house" or "I'm gonna go see my family", instead of "I'm going home""* (Emilia, 25, Austria).

Emilia's narrative is quite unique among the young adults in this study because she feels that she already found a place where she can make her own home in Rotterdam, after relocating several times within the Netherlands: *"I just feel like I... I might have finally found a spot in the Netherlands where I feel at home. I loved Haarlem, but I never fully felt at home there. And Groningen, absolutely not, either. And in Rotterdam I really feel like, OK, this is a place that I can make my home"* (Emilia, 25, Austria).

However, for the majority of respondents, the processes of home-searching and home-making are still ongoing and acknowledged as part of a more "mature" stage yet to come. This interpretation is reminiscent of the *Bildung* philosophy of the German Enlightenment whereby the self is perceived as being in a perpetual process of development through social, cultural and everyday life experiences (see Blake, 2015). As Ervin explains: "*Of course, I hope, when I get a little older I can, I can settle down in some place, but right now I have difficulties imagining where that should be. I have still to discover that feeling of, OK, this is where I belong, this is where I should be. Uhm, yeah, that is difficult for me right now to say."* (Ervin, 25, Denmark).

In this context, transnational experiences can be interpreted as a way of exploring the world and trying out different places to see if they fit as "homes" for young adults' developing identities. However, the relocation of young adults abroad doesn't necessarily mean that they replace their childhood homes with the new homes created in transnational contexts. Most often, the participants interviewed here related to place in diverse and complex ways, maintaining meaningful connections to various places inhabited.

4.1.2. Home and mobility

The interviews seem to suggest that today, young people with transnational experiences have a varied and complex understanding of relocation. For some respondents, mobility represents an opportunity for growth and self-development, where they can explore different facets of themselves by inhabiting different places. Ervin, for example, has dreamt

about moving away from home since he was a child. He actively pursues moments of mobility, and even equates them with belonging: "*I don't get that attached to a place, really. I learnt, I discovered that and every time I'm at a place, I get, I get a feeling of wanting to get out. […] I like to be challenged in that way. […] That's a feeling that I go after and maybe that feeling is not sustainable if I want to settle down in the future, but my ideal place of, belonging to a place, is moving around, yeah.*" (Ervin, 25, Denmark).

Similar discourses of wanderlust are found in the narratives of Ryan and Elena. However, other respondents struggle with their lack of place attachment. With no clear space to call his "home", Jeffrey feels suspended in between places and longs for rootedness: "*I'm so tired of moving so often, that at this point travel kind of becomes tiresome, I get tired of travel. Because I get tired, I get tired of feeling like I'm always moving in between things, uhm, that I just want to feel like I was... Like, I want to feel rooted into something.*" (Jeffrey, 31, USA).

In addition, even respondents who maintain strong place attachments to their country of origin feel affected by their mobility experiences. Kim mentions that although most places she visited or lived in have a special significance for her identity, the memories she has of those places lack specificity compared to the vivid place memories of her grandmother, who only visited a few locations in her life, but talks about them "like she was there yesterday".

However, most respondents acknowledged to some degree the formative effect of relocation on their identity development and identified moments of mobility as important phases in their lives. The different places they inhabit are often interpreted as milestones of growth and integral parts of young peoples' identities, even when the affective attachments to place are weaker. As Owen explains: "*And each of the times […] it's a different phase in my life... And I'm quite young, and I, you know, when I look back I see different things, you know... And so, although now I might not necessarily hold much of an attachment of wanting to go back and visit these places, definitely these places encapsulate the time of me.*" (Owen, 22, Ireland).

This illustration is in line with Halfacree's (2004) argument that migration is a "major event" in people's lives and of great relevance in the construction of personal biographies. Additionally, it seems to be an "extremely cultural event" that reveals previously unknown aspects of identity, values, ideas, commitments or ways of perceiving the world (Halfacree, 2004). In the next section, I discuss the specific ways in which such identity processes relate to young adults' relocations.

4.2. Leaving home

4.2.1. Relocation and self-making

For most respondents, the childhood home represents a comfortable, safe space (Tucker, 1994; Reijnders, 2019). However, for young adults it is not necessarily a place of the self in absolute terms: while the parental home provides comfort, security and support it also is described as limiting the opportunities for individual development and self-discovery. As Philip explains, "*Then [during relocations] you're put under a lot of pressure, especially when you come from a very catered, very catered home, so to say. Always been taken care of, always having a mom that dotes on you [...] So, to be able to really stand by yourself was actually what changed you, what you can do. [...] [I moved away] to test myself, to just turn myself into something.*" (Philip, 29, Sweden)

Moreover, many young adults feel restrained by the expectations of their families and local communities with regards to the values, identities and behaviours that are acceptable or not in specific locations and cultural environments. In this context, relocation to a different country oftentimes becomes a challenge that young adults give to themselves, in order to explore who they are, make sense of their identities and develop individual qualities and worldviews that might differ from the widely accepted community norms.

This discourse seems to mirror once again the classical concept of *Bildung*. In Goethe's (1821) classic Bildungsroman *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years*, the protagonist embarks on a journey towards self-discovery when he moves away from his childhood home to escape the restrictions of a bourgeoise life and pursue his passion for theatre. He distances himself from the protective, safe space of home and discovers the realties that lie beneath it, being confronted with violence, failed love and other such formative challenges that he needs to overcome in the course of his life.

A similar trajectory can be observed in Ervin's story. Ervin grew up in a small fishing town in Denmark, where the working-class ethic and the value of craftsmanship and labour prevailed over cultural and academic inclinations. Moving away allowed Ervin to (further) develop certain interests that do not align with those of his peers. Today, visiting home becomes a context in which identity cannot be performed with complete authenticity: "*In my hometown we were all interested in soccer, but academically and exploring different kind of art works, books and stuff like that was never something I could discuss with my, friends from my hometown. And it still isn't. […] It's specific things we talk about and it's, it's not totally me when I'm with them. I'm putting on the act from my primary school years, I would say.*" (Ervin, 25, Denmark).

However, the respondents in this study were often reflexive about their social positioning and aware that the mobility experiences of other people can be limited or very different from their own. Ervin acknowledges that peoples' opportunities to travel and relocate are constrained by class inequalities: "*I'm fortunate to get this opportunity to move around. And perhaps some of my friends, maybe it was because they didn't have the urge to go around, but also because they came from different working-class families, maybe they didn't have that opportunity.*" *(Ervin, 25, Denmark).* Ervin considers himself fortunate for having both the personal interest or "urge" to explore and the resources to do so. Similarly, Kim and Philip view mobility experiences as a privilege, and appreciate its role in their identity development.

In sum, relocation as a process of self-discovery is evaluated as an overall positive, formative event. The narrative of development (or *Bildung*) is the most striking pattern that emerges among respondents, trumping the other classical discursive resources in importance and frequency of occurrence. The development narrative emerged among male and female respondents, from both urban and rural backgrounds. One possible explanation for the prevalence of the narrative of migration as personal development could be obtained by looking at the identities of these migrants in terms of age, class and education level. Given the social expectations of growth and pursuit of independence present at this initial phase of adulthood, it is not surprising that highly educated young people perceive relocations in terms of identity formation and self-discovery.

4.2.2. "Forced" vs. voluntary relocations

I have shown above how for most respondents, relocations are framed as opportunities for growth and self-discovery. However, one interesting exception is that of Jeffery. In his early childhood, he changed residence numerous times due to his parents' changing personal relationships. These relocations were outside of his control and seem to have affected the way in which he relates to the notion of home. At 18 years old, Jefferey joined the army and had to relocate several times during his training, with little choice regarding his placement. For Jefferey, the experience of numerous relocations at a young age coupled with a limited choice in whether or not to move seems to have weakened his ties to places and the affective connection to home: "*I've moved probably 40 times in my life. [...] And now I live here, and so it's just like, everywhere it's home, but there's no emotional association with it.*" *(Jeffrey, 31, USA).*

Moreover, these former experiences of movement and (lack of) home seem to also affect how he perceives relocations today, even those that are voluntary and within his control: "*It's stressful [...] Because you never feel really situated, you feel like everything is so temporal, that you're just gonna move again. That at some point, you're just dreading that next move." (Jeffrey, 31, USA).*

What is interesting is that Jeffrey's profile is somewhat similar to that of another participant, Ryan, who also comes from a US military background and has experienced multiple relocations both as a child and in his youth. However, for Ryan the idea of relocation is met with excitement: "*My family moved so much, that moving was easy, right? Like, moving was actually fun, you know. [...] So, I remember, those moves were always exciting [...] And so, I think my feelings about, especially those early ones [early moves], really set the groundwork for, for my excitement for moving in general [...] There is a lot of, just exciting newness that goes on with it, and for me that brought joy." (Ryan, 35, USA).*

Ryan's links his enthusiasm for movement to his mobile upbringing, which is in stark contrast to the born and bred discourse. In his case, the lack of a clearly defined home throughout the childhood years does not seem to cause a feeling of homelessness or rootlessness, neither a wish to return to some specific place of origin. Rather, these multiple early relocations seem to have shaped Ryan's understandings of mobility as a positive, joyful and fun experience.

This contrast between Jeffrey and Ryan's mobility experiences could be interpreted as a result of the participants values and worldviews: while rootedness and belonging is something that Jefferey missed in his early years and strives to attain as an adult, Ryan (even as a child) felt less troubled by traditional notions of place attachments and viewed his relocation experiences as new and exciting opportunities to explore. These two examples are in line with Dovey's (1985) argument that experiences of place and mobility have a mutually reinforcing relationship, shaping people's understandings of home and away.

4.2.3. Relocation as progression

Among the young adults analysed in this study, a narrative of progression (Taylor, 2010) emerges as important: more than half of respondents have explicitly mentioned a dissatisfaction with their residences in the past but seem content with their current homes and attribute this positive change to their personal efforts and perseverance. Mi, for example, recalls how she moved into her current apartment after living for a while in student dorms. Mi expresses her desire to have an independent "proper" home and engages in active home-

making activities. Her current residence represents both a personal space of accomplishment and an ultimate place of the self: "*I just really wanted to live in a proper apartment with a living room. So, I just, I and another friend of mine, we paid a housing agency and chose this apartment. […] And I liked it so much that I kept this apartment even though my friend was gone [...] I moved here [...] I literally carried things by myself [...] I designed how the living room looked like [...]*" (Mi, 29, China)

This progression narrative is a lot more visible than the property ladder narrative in my respondents' narratives, partly due to the fact that at this initial phase of adulthood there is little opportunity for home ownership. As discussed in the first section, transnational young adults are often still looking to discover or make a place to call home for themselves, therefore the property ladder narrative may be yet to emerge at a later phase of adulthood. However, we can observe a pattern of progression from shared rooms or rundown flats in the initial relocation stage to more comfortable, spacious and conveniently located dwellings in the present. The progression narrative seems to be closely linked with age and the home-searching processes characteristic for this stage of transition into adulthood.

4.3. Returning Home

4.3.1. The born and bred narrative

The interviews analysed in this study suggest that the born and bred narrative still seems to organise most respondents' perceptions of home and away. Kim discusses how she is connected to her hometown both by the affective ties to her family and the intergenerational links to the city of Rome: "*Well, growing up in Rome I had a very Italian upbringing and my family was always very close, and my parents are together still, and my grandparents also. […] I'm a third generation Roman [laughs]*" (Kim, 25, Italy).

The born and bred narrative is most visible in the narratives of respondents who still maintain strong connections with their roots, but it occurs to some extent across all stories analysed. Even for those young adults who initially thought of relocation as escapism from the restrains of home, there is still a prevailing desire to return back to the places of their childhood. This desire is often the subject of young people's fantasies and imaginations of place. Ervin describes: "*In my youth […] I though this [my hometown] is a place that I need to get out of. This is not my kind of people, […] it is not what I want to do. But lately, I've sort of romanticised the place again, living on an old farm there […] I have a lot of imaginations about that [...]*" (Ervin, 25, Denmark).

It seems that relocations taking place in a transnational environment seem to redefine young adults' conceptualisations of home: while the reason to move abroad is often linked to the constrains of home and local ties, the experience of relocation seems to make young adults appreciate their home environments in a novel way. As described by Angela: "*I never got homesick or anything, because going away was so exciting [...] But now that I'm getting older and I'm... I don't know, it's the fourth time I think that I'm in a new social context, and [...] so actually now I do get homesick and miss the structure, mainly, that I have at home.*" *(Angela, 27, Germany).*

4.3.2. Place attachments through relationships

In addition to the discourses mentioned above, it seems that the idea of place is linked not only to the physical spaces they inhabit, but the people to whom they relate. Philip and Mi come from different countries of origin, but have met, moved in together and married each other in the Netherlands. Their relationship as a couple unfolds in a transnational context and involves multiple negotiations of place. Mi describes one of these negotiations: "*After the last roommate, I found my boyfriend and he moved in. I made him give up his own apartment, which was - according to him, it was bigger and nicer there, but you know, I like this place a lot.*" *(Mi, 29, China).*

However, for them the idea of home does not relate solely to the space they live in, but also to their personal relationship, their activities together and their pets. Philip explains: *"Home is my cats and my wife and stuff like that, what we do." (Philip, 29, Sweden).*

Another example is Jefferey: he moved to the Netherlands to pursue a short-term internship, but then met his current girlfriend and decided to prolong his stay. Presently they do not live together, but their romantic relationship seems to shape Jeffrey's connection to place. When asked about the specific places in Rotterdam to which he relates, Jeffery responded: "*Most of my weekends I haven't spent in Rotterdam, but with my girlfriend in Buinisse [...] So, I think I have more fun memories of doing things there [...] So, there's a restaurant that she worked at, where I initially would go visit her, so I always had that kind of landmark. In here, I just don't have that feel of places that we know together.*" *(Jeffrey, 31, USA).*

This is a relevant example of how young adults create "extended homes", places to which individuals are connected in terms of identity (Reijnders, 2019). Romantic relationships seem to have a high relevance indeed for the place connections of transnational youths, and often are the reason for young people's relocations. However, there are also

participants for whom their transnational lives present challenges for their romantic lives, either because they have to maintain long-distance relationships (Kim), or because they expect further relocations in the near future (Ervin).

This section has outlined the most relevant findings that emerged from data analysis. In the last chapter of this paper, I provide some concluding remarks and try to bring together most important insights that emerged from this study. Additionally, I discuss some limitations of this study and offer some suggestions for further research.

5. Conclusion

This study has discussed the role and importance of home in the lives of young adults with transnational experiences. Based on a narrative analysis of 15 semi-structured interviews, I explored how processes of globalisation and mobility affect young adults' connections to place in the contemporary society. The analysis revealed several notable patterns of conceptualising home and mobility among transnational youths.

First, the notion of home is central to young people's life narratives and has a special relevance both as a space from the past and a future goal to accomplish for themselves, supporting the assumptions from other recent studies on this topic (Reijnders, 2019; Duyvendak, 2011; Mallett, 2004). In most cases, the born and bred narrative is still important for providing a connection to place and an anchor for young migrants' self-identities. When relocation is seen as a challenge, it often prompts respondents to retreat in their imaginations of home, in which the country of origin is romanticised. This finding parallels Reijnders' (2019) interpretation of home as an "oasis of peace".

Relocations are also typically understood as "leaving home": it seems that being outside home(town) environments allows for more agency in creating own identity projects and discovering other values, interests and lifestyles that fit with the self, but cannot be pursued in local and familial spaces (c.f. Christie, 2007). Moreover, relocations are also seen as stages in a (often still ongoing) process of home-searching and discovering one's own place in the world.

Second, in line with Lennon's (2015) arguments, the results point to an affective dimension in people's relationships with places. The ways in which young adults connect to the idea of home seem contingent on the values, imaginations and feelings they associate with different places. Feelings of belonging and being accepted in the host community seem to matter greatly for young adults navigating transnational fields and may sometimes lead to

re-evaluations of the self in terms of (ethnic) identity. Moreover, young adults maintain multiple and complex ties to places through memories, fantasies of home and connections to other people (such as family and friends). Love also seems to be an important factor for young transnational adults: as a reason for relocating, as an affective connection to place or an opportunity for home-making. The specific ways in which romantic relationships relate to transnational relocations would be a fascinating topic for further research and could reveal interesting insights about the role of interpersonal relations in creating place attachments.

Third, the analysis revealed a combination of established and new discourses in young adults' narratives of place. The development (or *Bildung)* narrative emerged as a novel and highly significant theme in the relocations of young adults. The respondents interviewed here evaluated relocation mostly in positive terms: as a necessary challenge, an opportunity for growth and self-development. However, some exceptions were found: the nature of relocation – whether it's voluntary or not, as well as the number of times young people move home (especially during early childhood) seem to shape further transnational experiences. Still, different relocations seem to mark new phases in young adults' trajectory to adulthood and are perceived as integral parts of the self.

Among the classical narrative themes formerly observed in discourses of place, the born and bred narrative emerges as most significant, as all respondents mentioned (at least some) connections to their roots in terms of identity. Moreover, a narrative of progression can be traced in many of the narratives analysed: in the initial phase of relocation young adults typically rent small, cheap rooms in shared apartments. Later, through their own efforts and perseverance they move into more comfortable homes, living either on their own or with a partner. These findings are in line with Taylor (2010) analysis of place in the life stories of British women.

In terms of identity, some of these narratives can be linked to the socio-cultural background of my respondents. As highly educated and typically middle-class youths, they were reflexive about their privileged positions and were aware of the fact that other social groups may not have the same opportunities for migration and the same type of formative experience of relocation. Their specific identities in terms of class, education and age seemed to intersect and contribute together to their overall positive mobility experiences and evaluations of place. The progression narrative is best explained by looking at the age characteristics of respondents, as home-searching processes seem crucial in this phase of adulthood transition. Due to sample limitations, no reliable conclusions could be made with respect to the gender or ethnic identities of respondents: the born and bred, progression and

Bildung narratives occurred among both female and male respondents, of various ethnicities. Similarly, attachments to place in terms of (romantic and personal) relationships seem to be important to most young adults interviewed, regardless of background.

This study is not without its limitations. First, the insights presented in this paper are based on a limited number of interviews, and as such it cannot accurately represent the experiences of all transnational youths. Rather, this study aimed to reveal the various narrative and meaning-making mechanisms that young migrants use to relate their relocation experiences to their sense of self and relationship to places. Further research from both qualitative and quantitative approaches are needed to compare the common and distinctive features of transnational migration among young adults. Moreover, further emphasis on the intersection of different identities in the narratives of migrants is recommended, to allow for a deeper understanding of how various socio-cultural backgrounds matters for establishing place attachments and understanding mobility.

Second, this study could be criticised for its focus on "privileged identities" at a time when the migration issues of other groups (e.g. refugees) are more stringent. While highly relevant, such an inquiry requires a great deal of responsibility on behalf of the researcher and would ideally involve a meticulous process of cultivating relationships with respondents, of gaining access to their communities, and of becoming familiar with the cultural context, norms and values that structure people's stories of migration. Due to the limited scope of this study, it was not possible to pursue such an inquiry. Further research focusing on the experiences of young asylum seekers, refugees or lower educated transnational youths would be a necessary and welcome addition.

To conclude, this study has shown how conceptualisations of home and moments of mobility still play a significant role in young people's lives, especially in relation to processes of identity development and transition into adulthood. While at first sight it may seem that life in a transnational world has weakened people's attachments to their roots, I would argue that in the case of young adults the connections to home and place are re-negotiated and reframed as part of their individual identity projects and home-searching processes. This way, young adults seem to integrate both their childhood homes and their self-made homes abroad into coherent narratives of the self, creating various connections to places through personal relationships, treasured memories or imaginations, and affective associations.

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APPENDIX A: Interview guide

Interview Guide

[INTRO: Hello, thank you for joining me for this interview today. As I mentioned before, this study is about places that are important in your life, places you've lived in, moved or travelled to, or that are somehow relevant to you personally. I aim to discover new insights about the meaning of places and migration experiences in people's everyday lives today.
So, if you don't mind, let's begin with a brief introduction - could you tell me a bit about who you are, how old are you, where are you from, what do you study or work...?]

1. Transnational experiences
- Could you please start by giving me a brief overview of all the places that you've lived in throughout your life?
    - o What where the reasons you moved from one place to another?
    - o Can you describe the place in more detail?
- How did you experience this relocation, how did it take place and how did it make you feel?
    - o Do you ever think about those places now? When and why?
    - o What memories come to mind when you think about these places?
    - o What associations and memories come to mind when you think about these places?
- Are these places important in your life? Why?
    - o What meaning do they hold for you?
    - o Has this meaning always been the same, or did it change over time?
    - o What values do you associate with these places?
- Of all these places, where do you feel most at home? Why?
    - o In which of these places do you feel most connected?
- Are there any spaces associated with negative or annoying events?
    - o If so, which ones and what meaning do those spaces have?
    - o Are there other places (that you have not visited, or perhaps non-existing places) that really annoy or disturb you?

2. Places of the past ("born and bred narrative")
- What places of your childhood or youth were important to you?
    - o Can you describe these spaces?
    - o Why and in what way are they important?
    - o When and in what contexts do you think about those spaces? What images or associations come to mind?

3. Move to Rotterdam (Transnational mobility experience)
- Can you describe how did it happen that you decided to move to Rotterdam?
    - o Was there a specific reason why you chose Rotterdam in particular?
    - o How do you find it here, compared to the other places you've lived in? Can you describe what aspects you find similar and which are different?
- How does your day-to-day life in Rotterdam compare to the other places you've lived in?
    - o Do you have a different routine here, or is your life more or less similar?
    - o Are there any new activities you undertook since you moved here, or any that you had to give up?

- Which spaces in Rotterdam have a special importance to you?
  - Can you describe them? Why are they important? What do they mean to you?
- Can you describe the house in which you live in Rotterdam? ("property ladder narrative")
  - Do you live alone, or with housemates or a partner?
  - Do you rent or own the place? Or do you live with friends/family?
  - What specific spaces within your house (rooms, locations) are particularly important to you? Why?
  - Do you consider this to be home? Why?

4. Identity and Belonging
- When you first moved here, did you feel like you "fit in" with the place, people and culture or were there any challenges?
  - How did you cope with these challenges, if any?
- Did you know any people (friends or family) in Rotterdam before you moved here?
  - What about now, are you part of a Dutch community here in Rotterdam (e.g. a sport club, a hobby)?
  - Are you part of a [country of origin] community here in Rotterdam?
  - Are you in a relationship (do you have a partner) here in Rotterdam?
  - Do you live together? If not, do you imagine living together at some point in the future? ("dominant coupledom")
- What values do you associate with Rotterdam or the Netherlands?
  - What meanings does Rotterdam have for you? What do you associate it with?
- Do you imagine settling here, or do you think you will move to another place in the future?
  - Can you describe these places where you see yourself living in the future?
  - Why specifically those? What meanings do they have for you?
  - Is there any place where you would like to settle permanently? Where would your ideal home be?
- Can you think of a place that would be your perfect utopia?
  - How does your ideal place look like? What meaning does this place have for you?

6. Connecting places
- Thinking of all the places we discussed, what is their mutual relationship? If you compare these places, what is it that ties them together?

7. Place attachment today
- I have one last question before we conclude our discussion. Some say that in today's society, globalization and increased opportunities for movement between different regions of the world have weakened the connections people have with their "roots" (home countries, local communities).
- What do you think about this statement, do you agree or disagree?

Residual question*: I believe we've touched upon all topics I had in mind for this discussion. How about you, do you feel like you said everything you wanted to say, or is there anything you would like to add…?*

APPENDIX B: Participant overview

Nr.	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Country of Origin	Education	Occupation
1.	Elena	29	F	Russia	Master	Student
2.	Grzegorz	28	M	Poland	Master	Student
3.	Owen	23	M	Ireland	Bachelor	Bartender
4.	Angela	26	F	Germany	Master	PhD candidate
5.	Sebastian	24	M	Italy	Master	Student
6.	Lin	25	F	Taiwan	Master	Student
7.	Kim	25	F	Italy	Master	Student
8.	Jeffrey	31	M	U.S.A.	Master	Student
9.	Jens	24	M	Denmark	Master	Student
10.	Philip	32	M	Sweden	Bachelor	Corporate sales rep
11.	Yuxin	27	F	China	Master	Student
12.	Mi	29	F	China	Master	Student
13.	Ryan	35	M	U.S.A.	Master	Student
14.	Emilia	26	F	Austria	Master	Student
15.	Tobias	25	M	Germany	Master	Student