Carolin Landgraf

Aspiring to the Good Life in Seoul

Ethics and Economics
in the Narratives of Young South Koreans

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Language Note

I have chosen to use the Revised Romanisation of Korean to transliterate all Korean words. The Revised Romanisation was developed by the National Institute of Korean Language and officially issued by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2000 and differs from the transliteration system based on McCune-Reischauer in two important ways: first, the diacritical marks that characterise the McCune-Reischauer transcription were removed and second, the transcription is based on the pronunciation of general usage.[1] Thus, it aims to allow the reader to comprehend the general pronunciation more easily than the McCune-Reischauer transcription method. I have put the transcription of Korean words and phrases in parentheses after the English translation and, at the end of the thesis, I have included a glossary containing the transcriptions, the Korean spellings and translations, and the accompanying explanations.

I have arranged Korean names in accordance with general usage where family names proceed the given name. However, I have reversed this for authors who have decided to use his or her given name before the family name in their publications.

Finally, a short note on my use of gender. As the sentence above illustrates, when speaking in general terms, I use both genders.

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[1] For more information see the website of the National Institute of Korean Language: Romanization of Korean (https://www.korean.go.kr/front_eng/roman/roman_01.do, accessed 19 January 2021).

1   Introduction

This book is about the stories of young people living in contemporary Seoul who, I argue, aspire to nothing less than a life well lived. During an extensive period of field research in Seoul between September 2012 and September 2013, I met with a number of young people. Generally, we talked for a couple of hours, sometimes even for half the day, and they shared with me and let me participate in the stories of their lives. They told me about their daily lives as university students and working men and women, their everyday struggles, and the happiness they envisioned for their futures. A life well lived, a good life, is not necessarily something utopian; rather, it is comprised of ordinary practices, activities and social relations that have become meaningful for people. Living with the partner one loves, working diligently with friendly and helpful colleagues, obtaining advanced qualifications and expertise so that one can call oneself a professional, or engaging in academic discussions at university – these are some of the aspirations expressed by my research participants, just as they are the aspirations of a vast majority of young people living in South Korea today.

Aspiring to a meaningful life is a general ambition, and the practices that make up this aspiration are a general part of the ordinary lives of young South Koreans. In this "ordinary generality" (Highmore 2002:5), I discovered the particular, even exceptional, qualities of my research participants' lives. These qualities revealed how they defined a good life and aspired to achieve it in their everyday activities. How-

ever, these qualities also illustrate how young people are perceived in contemporary South Korea.

When I started my dissertation project in 2012, I wanted to learn about South Korean young adults who belonged to the '880,000 Won Generation,' so named for being well-educated but stuck in insecure employment conditions with the minimum wage of 880,000 Won. During my fieldwork in Seoul, I was told that the '880,000 Won Generation' were no longer the youth but were already in their early forties, and a new generation had emerged. These young people were in their early twenties to early thirties and called 'Spec Generation'. 'Spec' – derived from the English term specifications – refers to the practice of collecting qualifications and certificates by students to enhance their chances of attending one of South Korea's top-tier universities or to improve their job prospects. Yet, I have found that the term also indicates the material possessions and immaterial assets characteristic of a middle-class lifestyle, such as graduating from one of the top-tier universities in Seoul, obtaining a white-collar job in one of South Korea's major conglomerates, whose headquarters are likewise located in Seoul, marrying a heterosexual partner, and owning an apartment.

Living up to these social and economic requirements is becoming increasingly challenging for young people, and the term 'Give-up Generation' refers to those young people who have failed to do so. However, different terms are in circulation, listing varying numbers of things that young people have had to give up: '*Sam-po* Generation'[2] refers to three things, while '*Chil-po* Generation' indicates seven things, and '*Il-po* Generation' means that young people have had to give up life itself (Joy 2015:1). The description of the 'Spec Generation' and the attributes of the 'Give-up Generation' merge: young people work hard to reproduce the material and immaterial characteristics of the middle classes, but in the end, they cannot sustain this status. In public discourse, young people are represented as a distinctive generation, portrayed in the media (Joy 2015), in the academy (Cho 2015, Cho et al. 2017), or in novels and short stories written by young people themselves (Han 2013), as living in a collapsing economic environment.

With this in mind, how do I proceed and form an approach to understand my research participants' lives?

Aspiring to a life well lived indicates an orientation towards the future, towards a form of life that is different from the present. And to become meaningful, such a life is informed by values that give it importance and make it worthwhile (Fischer 2014, Appadurai 2013). As norms and social points of reference, values are public, but they are also formed in personal perspectives because people "reflect on themselves and their situations" (Keane 2015:138). However, values can juxtapose and even contradict each other, thus illustrating the complexity of practices in a social matrix. To

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[2] *Sam* means three while *po* is short for *pogihada* – to give up. The construction of the term remains the same, only the number changes to, as exemplified here, seven *(chil)* or one *(il)*. See the glossary at the end of this book.

Figure 1: Springtime at Changdeokgung Palace, Seoul. Photo by the author.

understand a) how my research participants shape practices in their everyday lives, b) the values that lie behind their aspirations, and c) what kind of change they aspire to, I ask the following core research question: How do young Seoulites negotiate contradicting values and practices in order to pursue a good life?

My main argument is that for these young Seoulites living a meaningful life means finding a balance between their aspirations and those of their wider social setting. Following Michael Jackson (1998:18), I define this balance as an "ongoing dialectic" between my research participants and their wider social settings about the value of aspirations and the level of "control" they can exert in achieving their aspirations. I suggest that the term 'specifications' in South Korea refers not only to qualifications that define a certain middle-class lifestyle, but also indicates aspirations – social and personal – that are highly negotiated and based on contradictory values. Young people reflect upon and evaluate these values, engage in a dialogue about them and, in choosing between values, they negotiate between their selves and others in trying to "achieve some sense of governing their own fate" (Jackson 1998:19).

Attending to the ordinary life of my research participants and their aspirations to a life well lived "means attempting to grasp the everyday without relegating it either to institutional codes and systems or to the private perceptions of a monadic subject" (Kaplan and Ross 1987:3). In my interviews with the young Seoulites, the themes of education, marriage, consumption and work dominated. I therefore took these four themes as case studies to analyse (Breidenstein et al. 2013), drawing on concepts Appadurai (2013) has used in his discussion of 'aspiration': 'imagination,' 'design' and

'planning,' 'anticipation' and 'hope'. Yet, I employ a more focused analytical lens to illustrate the complexity of my research participants' lives and look at two different qualities of the ordinary: 'ordinary ethics' (Lambek 2010a) and, borrowing a term from Emily Gilbert (2005), money as 'common cent'.

'Ordinary ethics' describes the reflections, explicit judgements, evaluations and reasoning of young Seoulites. I suggest that ethics becomes explicit as young people negotiate between and seek to balance the different, often contradictory, demands, values and pressures of their respective social matrices, while at the same time striving for excellence in their practices. Money has a significant social function for young people. I argue that values are expressed in practical deliberations on, and pragmatic ways of using, money. For my research participants, these values underpin the imaginations, designs and plans, anticipations and hopes that constitute aspiring to a life well lived. To understand the complexity of this process of negotiation and balance, I need to ask further questions, which will run like a thread through the ethnographic chapters that follow:

- To what do my research participants aspire? How are their aspirations framed by and developed with (or against) their respective social setting? And what constitutes the temporal and spatial frame of their aspirations?

- What kind of practices do young South Koreans consider to be in conflict? Between what practices do they have to find a balance?

- When does ethics become explicit?

- Who is using money and in which situations? Which values do young Seoulites express through using money?

While the term generation encompasses both a stage in life and a historically prescribed cohort (Abelmann 2003:3), people may not have a subjective feeling and awareness of belonging to the same generation, of sharing the same thoughts and ideals (Mannheim 1952:303–304). I spoke with young people aged between twenty and thirty-three who were students in different semesters or worked in different kinds of jobs, but all belonged to one or another stratum of South Korea's middle classes. Most of my research participants were female, but I also talked with male students and working men to familiarise myself with a variety of perspectives and experiences regarding young people's lives and aspirations in contemporary Seoul.

By paying attention to the everyday lives of these young Seoulites, I have been able to move beyond a focus on habit and cultural reproduction towards an understanding of how social values connect and convey the 'future as cultural fact' (Appadurai 2013). The diverse values that these young Seoulites needed to negotiate and balance reveal a complexity of social relations that goes beyond a straightforward conflict between self-fulfilment on the one hand and adherence to structural rules

on the other. Rather, I focus on the critical thoughts and reflections regarding a middle-class lifestyle that young Seoulites employed to emancipate themselves from societal expectations. These young people are social actors who have formed diverse perspectives on the social themes of education, marriage, consumption and work, and on the practices and values these themes entail. They have shaped these themes by giving them meaning. Yet, they did not do so in a vacuum but always in relation both to their social ties and to publicly available accounts and classifications (cf. Keane 2015). As Arjun Appadurai (2013:179) explains: "it is in culture that ideas of the future, as much as of those about the past, are embedded and nurtured."

The difficulties faced by young people in contemporary South Korea (see for example Kim 2005) have been written about and publicly commented on extensively by South Korean anthropologists and other social scientists, and in this area, my scope is modest. Furthermore, the existence of diverse institutions and organisations engaged in research on young South Koreans' diverse social relations and living conditions indicates a broad academic and political attentiveness towards young people's difficulties and obstacles.[3]

My dissertation makes a different contribution to the literature about young South Koreans. Instead of claiming to be representative, I have sought to write an ethnography of the particular, to borrow Lila Abu-Lughod's (1991) phrase, to show how aspiring to the good life is realised.

I aim to provide what Joel Robbins (2013) and Sherry Ortner (2016) call an 'anthropology of the good'. Robbins writes that "the good [in anthropological analysis] is something that must be imaginatively conceived, not simply perceived," and he asks anthropologists "to be attentive to the way people reorientate to and act in a world that outstrips the one most concretely present to them, and to avoid dismissing their ideals as unimportant or, worse, as bad-faith alibis for the worlds they actually create" (Robbins 2013:457). In studying 'the good,' I aim to understand how these young Seoulites shaped their lives in their respective social matrices and gave meaning to their practices without dismissing "people's investments in realizing the good as mere utopianism, to smother their hopes analytically" (Robbins 2013:458). Yet, I *do not* aim to negate the difficulties and hardships my research participants experienced, and the reader should be prepared to encounter narratives about suffering and distress. However, these same young people had ideals and hopes, and they sometimes found happiness. They talked about their understandings of the nature of education, how they anticipated, planned and designed their marriages, or how they hoped for good work. To help me conceive the good in the everyday lives of young Seoulites, I employ an analytical perspective that centres on approaches to the good life, aspirations and ordinary ethics. Yet, I also attempt to bring together two spheres

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[3] The Korean Association of Youth Welfare, for example, presents such an institution. On its website, it gives an overview of its members and the research done. For more information see: Korean Association of Youth Welfare, http://www.youthwelfare.org/eng/html/sub05_01.asp (accessed 19 January 2021).

in my analysis: the social and the economic. From the beginning, the conception of the 'Spec Generation' was economic in nature: on the one hand, the emphasis on collecting certificates and qualifications in order to secure a white-collar position at a corporation; on the other hand, the lack of career opportunities and increasing competition for rare jobs leading to a lack of financial resources to reproduce middle-class status. In my research participants' narratives, money was a constant theme: it was an important medium for expressing love and care, such as when it allowed a couple to finance a wedding, and its lack became a major problem when it stopped them from fulfilling obligations or demands, such as those of a dutiful child. Economic practices and social practices are "mutually enabling" (Ferguson 2015:128), and I aim to show that the economic sphere is an integral part of the social sphere, even in so-called capitalist societies.

A Brief Overview of This Book

The book is organised into nine chapters. In chapter 2, I discuss anthropological writings about young people in East Asia in general, and in South Korea in particular. In this review, I place special emphasis on how young people of the middle classes are portrayed and analysed.

A prevailing theme of these writings is how young people are affected by and react to macro-economic changes, power structures, regimes of conduct, and government rationalities in a neoliberal landscape. Neoliberalism is a prominent analytical concept in anthropological research on the changing economic and social conditions faced by young people today. However, the meaning attributed to the concept varies greatly: variously referring to a macro-economic doctrine, to growing social inequality, or to a new rationality of governance through which citizens are required to care for and discipline themselves (Ferguson 2009). In this chapter, I discuss literature that draws especially on the work of Michel Foucault and Bob Jessop, who have theorised the development and characteristics of neoliberalism and changing modes of production and consumption in post-Fordism, respectively. Moving beyond the importance of these theorists for anthropological writings about contemporary changing economic conditions, I re-examine their work to show that both writers developed highly differentiated positions that are only partially reflected in anthropological writings. In this way, I aim to make a modest contribution to the discussion on neoliberalism.

With this ethnography, I seek to challenge the dominant way in which anthropologists have used the concept of neoliberalism to analyse the life trajectories of young people in East Asia. While it is an important task to analyse young people's lives by concentrating on power structures and forms of external influence, this approach puts young people in a subordinate position (cf. Ortner 2006). In this book, I attend to the meanings young South Koreans give their activities and practices – the thoughts, feelings, and reflections about the themes of education, marriage, consumption and work that they shared with me in our interviews. Analysing these case

studies, I want to emphasise the complexity and heterogeneity of young people and the specific and different logics that inform how they live their lives with others.

In the title, I promised the reader that the central ideas in this book are "the good life," "aspiration," "ethics," "money," and "narratives." Chapter 3 discusses the writers who analytically developed these terms and who helped me to form my own theoretical and methodological perspectives. I understand the good life as a long-term aspiration comprising goals and projects of different temporalities. Aspiring to the good life entails an orientation towards a future life that is qualitatively different from the present; it involves imagining new projects, anticipating these projects, designing and planning goals, or hoping to achieve these goals. I use these "human preoccupations" (Appadurai 2013:286) to understand the aspirations of young Seoulites in more detail. In order to understand how my research participants *did* negotiate between and balance values and practices, I employ a more specific analytical lens, turning to conceptualisations of ethics and money. With this theoretical framework, I aim to contribute to an analytical perspective of the good life, aspirations, ordinary ethics and money.

Complementing my theoretical perspective, I also discuss my methodological approach to studying the everyday lives of my research participants. Following Nancy Abelmann (2003), I understand talk as a dialogic action that establishes social worlds; an action through which imaginations and aspirations are formed and that makes visible the diverse dimensions of the self. Talk conducted with the ethnographer is no exception. When we talked, my research participants formed their narratives for me to grasp their social lives, ordinary lives, and their aspirations. However, doing anthropology in the city with research participants who are highly educated, even anthropologists themselves, required me to reflect on the practical use of 'traditional' ethnographic methods such as participant observation and to think anew about my relationships with my research participants. Thus, I seek to contribute to the discussion about doing anthropology in the city.

My research participants developed their aspirations, imaginations and hopes within and against values which, they emphasised, have developed during South Korea's period of rapid economic transformation. Chapter 4 takes the reader into this recent past and provides the necessary context to understand the ethnographic case studies that follow. Public discourse refers to South Korea's economic development as the 'miracle on the Han River'. After the Korean War (1950–53), the country experienced an economic boom under an authoritarian political regime that built its economic strength on large enterprises and protectionism. This development led to a structural imbalance between large conglomerates and small and medium-sized enterprises that has characterised South Korea's economic landscape until today. Social scientists (see for example Yun 2010) attribute the difficult economic situation of young people to this development, which the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997/98 and subsequent restructuring of the economy did not change considerably. The South Korean middle classes prospered during the years of the country's economic miracle. Because I focus on meaning and value in this dissertation and use the themes of edu-

cation, marriage, consumption and work as case studies, I concentrate especially on a representation of the values associated with these themes rather than detailing the history of the middle classes. In this chapter, I aim to show how certain values came into place or become more meaningful, how public and academic discourses narrate the past, and how the recent history of South Korea is interpreted and constructed through experiences (cf. Wagner 2008).

Barbara Ehrenreich (1989) has noted the unstable character of the middle class because it can only pass on part of its economic, cultural and social capital to the next generation, leaving it up to the young to reproduce their position mainly through their own effort. In the following ethnographic chapters, I will take the reader into the stories of my research participants and illustrate how they perceived their lives within and against this context.

In chapter 5, I begin with narratives about education. Young people work hard during their years at high school to enrol in one of South Korea's top-tier universities, all of which are located in Seoul. Achieving this goal is a strong marker of success. Some of my research participants reached this social standard, some of them went to lower-ranked universities, and some did not study at a university at all. All of them, however, questioned the unilinear and standardised educational path and the prescribed form of success it entails. This chapter presents the diverse views, judgements and desires my research participants voiced with regard to studying at a university and how they understood and defined the value and meaning education should encompass. I use the concept of imagination (Appadurai 2013) to interpret their diverse narratives and show how these young Seoulites imagined different ways of being successful. This chapter aims to contribute to an understanding of the diverse values education encompasses.

Chapter 6 takes the reader into the world of marriage. Wedding ceremonies present a prominent object in anthropological research as they are important rituals of transformation and change. Getting married, however, was not only a ritual but the socially accepted way for my research participants to establish families and lives together with their respective partners. The chapter centres on the notion of marriage as a (gate)way to family life, and these young people's narratives illustrate the designs and plans of the wedding ceremony and the imagination of married life. However, I have a bias in this chapter: the young people I portray here were all working women. In her monograph *Getting Married in Korea,* Laurel Kendall (1996) wrote that working women who were supported by their families could decide for themselves about their weddings. In this chapter, I elaborate on her argument; yet, I aim to especially develop the question of the relationship between work and marriage. With the concepts of design and planning (Appadurai 2013), I show the complexity of decision-making processes about forming a family, thus contributing to an understanding of the diverse values associated with marrying in South Korea.

In chapter 7, I turn to the consumption of certificates and fashion and re-examine 'making Spec' as a characteristic of young South Koreans' life trajectories. Collecting 'Spec' meant first and foremost collecting certificates and qualifications needed to ac-

quire the material and immaterial assets by which a middle-class lifestyle was defined. In this chapter, I aim to sort out the diverse vectors included in 'making Spec': from the formation and interpretation of which qualifications came to count as 'specification,' to the evaluation of 'making Spec,' and the passion it aroused. Additionally, I attend to fashion. Following Arjun Appadurai (1986:25), I understand fashion as a structural equivalent of certificates and qualifications in that it defines and restricts status systems. Yet, I want to elaborate not only on the meaning and values behind fashion and appearance but also on the ways both clothing and beauty styles 'invited' my research participants to new projects and activities (cf. Keane 2005). The concept of anticipation – yet another "preoccupation" (Appadurai 2013:286) with constructing a good life – is a central concept here, and I focus on how my research participants gave meaning to consuming certificates and fashion and used both to anticipate their future. Thus, this chapter contributes to an understanding of the diverse values, actions and consequences of consumption in South Korea.

Chapter 8 introduces the reader to the stories of six working women. I portray their experiences at work and describe how my female research participants experienced their employment situation, what values they emphasised regarding their workplace, and how they defined 'good work'. I question the conception of working structures in post-Fordism and suggest that good work includes characteristics that exceed the simple realisation of long-term employment and a full-time contract. Rather, good work centres on possibilities to form good social relationships, personal development, and balance between work and private life. Here, I use the concept of hope (Appadurai 2013; Miyazaki 2004, 2006) to interpret the narratives of my research participants in this last ethnographic chapter, which contributes to an understanding of the diverse values of work in South Korea.

I conclude the dissertation in chapter 9, which comprises an analytical summary of my findings and reflections about the content and form of my research participants aspirations towards a life well lived. I revisit my research participants' imaginations of education, plans for weddings and families, anticipations for their future lives, and hopes of finding good employment in relationship to the wider social discourses that prevail in these four areas. Thus, I reflect on aspiring to the good life.

2   State of the Art

"Though it is rare to meet people who are completely and permanently satisfied with their lot," writes Michael Jackson, "it is rarer to meet people who expect nothing of life, abjectly accepting the status quo, never imagining their situations could or should be socially, spiritually, or materially improved" (Jackson 2011:ix). Jackson emphasises that most people are dissatisfied with the status quo and strive towards an improvement of their situation, comprehensively including "the rich as well as the poor" (Jackson 2011:ix). To this I would add the old as well as the young. Striving for a better, for a good life, means enduring difficulties and struggles along the way, and undertaking practices that the anthropologist views as critical.

Young people in East Asia live in 'uncertain times' (Anagnost, Arai and Ren 2013) in which the circumstances affecting their well-being are different from those of their parents' generation. An increasing precarity seems to characterise young people's living and working conditions and hinders them realising a specific biographical pathway that their parents considered to be the norm (see also Hardering 2011). Anthropologists refer to this change as neoliberalism, but they differ in how they use it. Employed as macro-economic doctrine, neoliberalism refers to economic policy measures such as the deregulation of the employment market, the deregulation of the financial system, and the privatisation of public services. Neo-Marxist scholars use the term to address the growing inequality within society, and in a third usage, anthropologists use it to describe a new rationality of governing the population

whereby citizens are increasingly required to manage, and care for, themselves, while the government regulates the population similar to a human resource manager (Ferguson 2009). In the first part of this chapter, I aim to show what sources anthropologists draw on when employing these usages of neoliberalism and why a close reading of these sources allows me to reflect on such usage.

For anthropologists who work with the concept of neoliberalism, the practices young people deploy to both manage the status quo *and* strive towards well-being are constructs derived from specific discourses. Young people manage and discipline themselves to adapt to the deregulation of the employment market; they plan, organise, and optimise their wants and goals to stay competitive in a deregulated economy and to become productive citizens who do not need to rely on state welfare. In the second part of this chapter, I briefly summarise how anthropologists have portrayed young people in South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and mainland China, and how they have understood youth as embodying specific discourses of self-management and self-discipline.

Here, I argue that such analyses only partly address the meaning young people give their practices and their lives. Anthropologists do rarely ask why young people value what they do?

In anthropological analyses, the concept of neoliberalism functions to emphasise that economic aspects increasingly prevail the social sphere and everyday life of people. These academic discourses about neoliberal discourses describe the effects of particular power relations and knowledge systems on young people and put forward the construction of specific subject positions. This is an important task because attributions by others are of great significance in the construction of the self. However, this mode of analysis puts young people in a politically subordinate position.[4]

I suggest that changing the analytical angle towards the meaning young people give their practices paints a more differentiated picture of their life trajectories. Accordingly, I will introduce anthropological and sociological studies whose authors shifted their analytical lens in this way and were thus able to show in greater detail the complexity of young people's subjectivities. In the last part of this chapter, I discuss authors who have written on values, ethics and money and inspired me to conceptualise the social and economic spheres together and write an anthropology of the good.

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[4] In formulating this critique, I took inspiration from Sherry Ortner (2006). She emphasises that discourse analyses produce very different conclusions from those that focus on thoughts and feelings to show how subjectivities are formed.

2.1 On Liberalism, Neoliberalism, Fordism, and Post-Fordism

Michel Foucault traced the development of neoliberalism back to how political economists perceived the market and how this perception changed practices of governance. The term 'governmentality' anthropologists use to describe current (neoliberal) practices of governance is associated with Foucault. Unlike the anthropologists who have drawn on his work, however, he did not critique neoliberalism but rather showed the historical specific and genealogical background of a political-economic theory. In the paragraphs to come, I briefly outline how Foucault described the development of the specific mentality to govern in liberalism and neoliberalism.

Yet, anthropologists tend to mingle the concept of neoliberalism with production and consumption patterns referred to as Fordism and post-Fordism, especially when describing changing working conditions for young people. Here, anthropologists draw especially on Neo-Marxist economist Bob Jessop. In describing his approach, I also discuss geographer Ash Amin.

The New Rationality in the Art of Governing – Liberalism

Michel Foucault (2010) traced the beginning of economic liberalism back to the establishment of political economy as a science. Its focus became the relationship between the market and governing practices. The market as place of economic activity had always been a site of the state's interest and intervention. However, the way governments understood the market's functioning changed with the development of economic liberalism.

Formally imagined as space in need of rules and regulations, "a site of justice" (Foucault 2010:30), where the buyer needed protection against fraud, economists of the 18th century started to conceptualise market's logic and function as natural. They imagined market mechanisms to appear and function "spontaneously" (Foucault 2010:31), and to operate properly when not interrupted; left alone, these mechanisms would generate the precise relation between production cost and demand, value and supply – that is, the "natural, good, normal" price (Foucault 2010:31). The price became the fundamental instrument through which the market functioned, and the seller and the buyer would make profit only through the natural "game of competition" (Foucault 2010:53), that is, freedom. The market became a "site of truth" and "no longer had to be a site of jurisdiction" (Foucault 2010:31).

Because, economists claimed, truth was inherent in the natural mechanisms of the market, the market's proper functioning would reflect good governing practices. Therefore, government must limit itself to governing in accordance with truth (Foucault 2010:32). Governmental rationality became a question of governing too little or too much – an oscillation between a minimum and a maximum.

> What is this new type of rationality in the art of government, this new type of calculation that consists in saying and telling government: I accept, wish, plan, and calculate that all this should be left alone? I think that this is broadly what is called 'liberalism'. (Foucault 2010:20).

Foucault characterised the emergence of the market as site of veridiction and the centrality of the question of the utility of government intervention as the "anchorage" (2010:44) of the new art of government. The market as site of exchange and the utility of government – that is self-limitation – are both based on interests. Thus, governing became the governing of interests – an interplay of collectivist and individual's interests, of "social utility and economic profits, between the equilibrium of the market and the regime of public authority" (Foucault 2010:44). There is a fundamental shift in how citizens are subjectified in liberalism: citizens became subjects of interest, because interests are personally bound and not interchangeable. Thus, the individual citizen is now a subject with rights – *Rechtssubjekt* – and a subject of interest – *Interessenssubjekt* (Lemke 1997:179). Liberalism appoints a new reason to governing practice: governing a "phenomenal republic of interests" (Foucault 2010:46).

The new art of governing in liberalism centres on the administration of life and the human body became the locus of interest: first, as a machine equipped with certain skills to be developed, strengthened and then used; and second, as biological organism who has a limited lifespan and inhabits a relative mortality rate (Foucault 2019). As politics located its object of governance – that is, the population and the potential of every individual – and its objectives – the prosperity of the nation state through the growth of the economy – politics discovered human capital (Sarasin 2005:166).

As stated above, liberal government is concerned with governing too much – a characteristic of the *Disziplinargesellschaft* – and instead focuses on manufacturing freedom with emphasis on enhancing life in "a republic" consisting of interests (Foucault 2010:67). The new art of governing circulates around a statistical constructed normality within which gradients, falls and curves exist; where risks are calculated and, if necessary, insured against to enhance life (Sarasin 2005:181). Foucault described the new approach of the government towards its population with the concept 'bio-politics' and introduced the concepts of 'technologies of power'– the ways individuals are managed, regulated, and dominated – and 'technologies of the self' – the ways individuals conduct, modify, and transform themselves – to analyse the relationship between the government and the population (Foucault 1988).

Just as Foucault understood liberalism to be a historically developed reflexive governing practice, so did he contextualise neoliberalism's development. The political, social and economic processes that took place with the beginning of the 20th century challenged liberalism's suppositions. The worldwide economic crisis in the 1930s and the development of National Socialism and Communism were potential dangers of and for freedom. Thus, political intervention was necessary to protect the

state's freedom from both these external dangers as well as internal dangers such as unemployment. Keynesian macro-economic theory and social welfare measures were supposed to produce this freedom. In this historical situation, Fordism developed as dominant form of production and consumption. Following Bob Jessop (1994), whom especially anthropologists working in a neo-Marxist tradition employ (see for example Song 2009), I would like to briefly characterise the diversity of Fordism.

Fordism

In theoretical approaches to Fordism and post-Fordism, there exists a diversity of analytical levels and models of interpretation as capitalism itself presents a concept with diverse characteristics (see Krumbein et al. 2014). Bob Jessop (1994) describes the characteristics of Fordism in accordance with theorists who follow the regulation approach to analyse capitalism. These theorists understand the crises of capitalism to be paradoxical: capitalism is inherently prone to crisis and instability; yet rules and norms regulated by institutions can sustain economic stability over a period of time. These theorists emphasise that phases of economic stability are grounded in historical and social contexts and can only temporally exist (Amin 1994). In order to explain the particular phases of capitalist development, they make use of five concepts to characterise the main mechanisms of a capitalist economy. First, the 'regime of accumulation' refers to macro-economic processes of capital accumulation. It includes diverse actors and activities such as "the organization of production and work […] common rules of industrial and commercial management […] norms of consumption and patterns of demand […] and other aspects of the macroeconomy" (Amin 1994:8). Second, 'mode of regulation' refers to the rules set by institutions as well as social actors that aim to reproduce a capitalist system.[5] Added to these two main concepts were 'labour process' – the 'dominant industrial paradigm' of industrial and work organisation patterns, 'mode of development' – patterns of development in the whole economy, and 'societal paradigm' – forms of domination and alliances that sustain social cohesion (Amin 1994:8). Using these five concepts, theorists of the regulation approach explain periods of economic stability and crisis.

Deriving from Henry Ford's organisation of labour processes in the production of motor vehicles, Fordism's labour process is characterised as "assembly line techniques operated with the semi-skilled labour of the mass worker" (Jessop 1994:253) to fabricate complex consumer goods. Although mass production does not involve all employees, it presents the main characteristic and origin of Fordism (Jessop

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[5] In his discussion of approaches to development, James Ferguson (1994:13) criticises the 'reproduction thesis' by making reference to Paul Willis's *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids get Working Class Jobs* (1981). Willis (1981) showed ethnographically the complex interplay and (power) relations as well as the resistances of and between social actors and institutions through which 'working class people get working class jobs'. Ferguson concludes that "[o]ne cannot, as Willis rightly notes, expect things to simply snap into place through mysterious 'black box' mechanisms simply because Capital 'needs' for them to do so" (Ferguson 1994:13).

1994:253). Associated with this distinctive labour process is the idea of an ideal-type macro-economy. Jessop describes the pattern of growth in Fordism as a "virtuous circle" (Jessop 1994:253) that includes: the production of large amounts of standardised products, the rise of productivity due to economies of scale, a rise in income because of increased productivity, a higher demand for mass-produced goods due to rising wages, and "increased profits based on full utilization of capacity and increased investment in improved mass production equipment and techniques" (Jessop 1994:253).

The mode of regulation and the societal paradigm were expressed in the state's intervention, management and compensation for economic shortcomings, for example by supporting labour unions or mediating between capitalist organisations and labour. The 'social partnership' between state and labour is referred to as the Keynesian welfare state. John Maynard Keynes taught, among other things, that state intervention was necessary to secure full employment and that rising tax revenues allowed welfare measures to be implemented to secure economic growth (Jessop 1994:253–255).

Anthropologists contrast current labour processes and accumulation regimes with this past, where labour was based on full-time employment, and a social contract between state and workers secured the welfare of employees. However, Jessop (1994:254) sums up that a "Fordist society is an urban-industrial, 'middle mass,' wage-earning society." Other social scientists have argued that it was mostly male workers who benefited from long-term and full-time employment or that Fordism was rather an exception than a norm (Neilson and Rossiter 2008).

In the 1970s, theorists of the regulation approach stressed that the 'virtuous circle' of Fordism became prone to crisis and saw the next phase of capitalism, post-Fordism, emerging. Anthropologists link the crisis of Fordism and the development of post-Fordist characteristics to the establishment of a neoliberal art of governing. However, Foucault (2010:70) pointed out that a crisis of capitalism need not coincide with a crisis of governance, nor does a crisis of governing necessarily arise from a crisis of capitalism. The crisis of liberalism and the crisis of Fordism are separated by a chronological gap, which I will attend to in the following.

Neoliberalism

Foucault showed that the development of liberalism presented a historically situated phenomenon that is closely related to the development of the discipline of political economy. Similarly, in his discussion of neoliberalism he also stressed the historical context and the theoretical schools of political economy that sought a solution to the crisis of liberalism.

Before and after World War II, German economic theorists started to re-evaluate the art of governing to overcome the crisis of liberalism (Foucault 2010). After the fascist era of National Socialism, the German state had to be not only physically reconstructed but also politically and economically rearranged. Here, German neo-

liberals raised the question of state legitimacy in regard to the German population and Germany's relationship to the world. The reconstruction of the German state proceeded according to Keynesian theory with high intervention from external supervision.

At this point, German neoliberals called for what 200 years before the physiocrats of political economy called for: the mechanisms of price should regulate the economy and not state intervention (Foucault 2010). They focused on competition as the main operating mode of the market because it is through competition that price stability is guaranteed and, therefore, the economic strength of the market becomes measurable and choices can be operated on (Foucault 2010:120). The naturalness of competition stressed by earlier economists, however, became the starting point for their re-evaluation. German neoliberals regarded the assumption that competition was natural to be naïve and instead emphasised the need to construct the proper conditions for the market to function according to its logic. "Competition is therefore an historical objective of governmental art and not a natural given that must be respected" (Foucault 2010:120). Because competition had to be artificially produced, the relationship between the state and the economy needed to be changed. Now government had to govern for the market to produce pure competition, "it must accompany the market economy from start to finish" (Foucault 2010:121). That raised the question of government's limitation as required in classical liberalism, and the answer of German liberals was an art of governing they referred to as 'positive liberalism' – that is, an active, attentive and thoughtful policy designed to create the framework in which the market can operate.

The problematic of unemployment was addressed with a new conception of the social. Foucault (2010:142) stressed that welfare policies in the Keynesian era had the primary objective of securing citizens' access to consumer goods. Economic policy conceptualised social policy as a kind of counterweight to the possible destructive effects of economic activity, functioning as a compensatory mechanism. German neoliberals opposed this concept. Because a neoliberal government had to make the market possible, its objective had to be the regulation of society itself "so that competitive mechanisms can play a regulatory role at every moment and every point in society" (Foucault 2010:145) – it is a government of society, not of the economy. In the context of post-war Germany, this appraisal assured the other European countries that the new (West) German state would not return to totalitarianism.

This art of governing is very different from what Foucault (2010:133) termed "anarcho-capitalism" as conceived by US-American neoliberals. Whereas the German neoliberals tried to establish a governing practice of the social on behalf of the market that preserves moral and ethical values to sustain society's cohesion, the 'anarcho' neoliberals in the US re-defined the social as part of the economy and applied formally economic analytical tools to sociological phenomena (Lemke 1997:248). Foucault pointed out that US-American neoliberals pushed the conception of human beings as entrepreneurs to its extreme. The 'homo economicus,' formerly imagined as partner of exchange, became his or her own capital and source of income; an en-

trepreneur whose "conditions of life are the income of capital" (Foucault 2010:233) and who will produce his or her own satisfaction on that basis.

Thus, economic theory expanded into the realm of the social. However, analysing social beings in economic terms does not automatically lead to what anthropologists call an expansion of economic theory into the daily life of ordinary people in form of self-management, self-discipline and self-responsibility.

The crisis of liberalism and the development of neoliberalism as means of solving and creating anew the relationship between governing practices and the market did not coincide with the crisis of Fordism and the development of post-Fordism. As Amin (1994:1) states, social scientists agree that changing modes of production and new forms of employment relationships started to develop in the mid-1970s. Next, I briefly describe this development.

Post-Fordism

The current economic situation is characterised as being very different from the Fordist past. The preposition *post* suggests an after Fordism, but also a continuity with Fordism. As Jessop states: "Without significant discontinuity, it would not be *post*-Fordism; without significant continuity, it would not be post-*Fordism*" (Jessop 1994:257, original emphasis). Thus, the post-Fordist point in history must have a "continuity in discontinuity" (Jessop 1994:257) regarding the characteristics of Fordism. Amin notes that the term post-Fordism, in contrast to expressions such as neo-Fordism or after-Fordism, implies "a genuine resolution to the crisis of Fordism" (Amin 1994:18), while at the same time labour processes, regimes of accumulation and modes of regulation emerged out of Fordism.

Jessop (1994) characterises post-Fordism based on the regulation and neo-Schumpeterian approach. Economies of scale, a characteristic of Fordism, were replaced by economies of scope, flexibility of production processes, and constant (technological) innovations that fostered the training of poly-skilled workers and the service sector. Anthropologists often highlight the specialised yet flexible labour that emerged in post-Fordism. However, they rarely take the labour process in Fordism – against which flexibility and specialisation emerged – into consideration. The assembly-line mass production in Fordism came at the cost of workers, best illustrated in Charley Chaplin's famous movie *Modern Times* (1936). In its most extreme form, known as Taylorism, the labour process was deconstructed in detailed and prescribed tasks with precise determination of the place and amount of labour performed. This process alienated workers from their work because they did not see the bigger picture or company goal. Furthermore, the mass production process focused on low-skilled workers performing tedious tasks. Thus, workers started to resist this mode of production, and all that is criticised about the new concept of the worker – that is, his or her subjectivity – was actually developed to overcome the opposition and detachment of workers (Jessop 1994:258).

The Schumpeterian workfare state that replaced the Fordist Keynesian welfare state downplayed "full employment […] in favour of international competitiveness and redistributive welfare rights take second place to a productivist reordering of social policy" (Jessop 1994:263). Yet, Jessop stresses that an underlying ideology that could foster a stable post-Fordism has yet to be made, and in a later work (Jessop and Sum 2006) he emphasises that Fordism and post-Fordism used as analytical tools need a careful consideration and critical examination. Other critics emphasise that a division and distinction of phases fails to acknowledge the diverse characteristics and possible combination of elements described with the concept of capitalism (see for example Thrift 1989 or Krumbein et al. 2014).

Anthropologists rarely attend to the historical route Foucault, as well as Jessop and Amin, took to describe liberalism and Fordism, neoliberalism and post-Fordism (cf. Laidlaw 2015). Rather, they use Foucault's concept of governmentality and biopolitics, and Jessop's explanations of a changing regime of accumulation accompanied by the Schumpeterian workfare state, as sources to analyse young people's life trajectories in East Asia. But let us see how anthropologists concretely employ the concepts I have briefly outlined so far.

2.2 On 'Specs,' 'Millennials,' 'Strawberries,' and 'Freeters' – the Young 'Homo Economicus'?

Aihwa Ong is a prominent theorist of neoliberalism in East Asia. In an interview she explains her approach: "As an assistant professor, I discovered Michel Foucault and have since evolved my own anthropological approach to the contingent play of strategies in everyday life, and the mobile modes of governmentality that are configuring contemporary subjects and life situations" (Ong 2009:91).

Ong argues for viewing neoliberalism as a set of calculatory techniques of governance rather than as structure or even culture. She develops Foucault's technologies of the self to 'technologies of subjectivity,' understood as expert and knowledge systems used to evoke self-management and self-discipline in citizens, and she elaborates his technologies of power to 'technologies of subjection,' defined as diverse mechanisms to regulate population's productivity. She argues that "it is important to trace neoliberal technology to a biopolitical mode of governing that centres on the capacity and potential of individuals and the population as living resources that may be harnessed and managed by governing regimes" (Ong 2006:6).

One of the most comprehensive works about young people in East Asia that follows the governmentality line is the volume *Global Futures in East Asia: Youth, Nation, and the New Economy in Uncertain Times* (Anagnost, Arai and Ren 2013). In the introduction, Ann Anagnost explains that the contributions focus on young people making their lives in the course of globalisation and economic restructuring in accordance with neoliberal principles. She states that "*[l]ife-making* here refers to investments in the self to ensure one's forward career progression as embodied

human capital" (Anagnost 2013:2, original emphasis). She emphasises that since the economic miracles of Japan, Taiwan and South Korea ended, young people are no longer guaranteed a middle-class life (or it might not be desirable for them) and thus their lives have become much less certain than those of their parents. While the different contributions aim to illustrate the technologies of governing and self-governing, Anagnost accentuates the volume's special emphasis on the future. This 'futurology' becomes visible in her stressing the characteristic spirit of neoliberalism. That is, the societies discussed need to produce self-relying, self-managing human capital that can manoeuvre in an increasingly fluid and unpredictable economy (Anagnost 2013:13).

Focusing on higher education, Nancy Abelmann, Sojin Park, and Hyunhee Kim (2013:101) illustrate how young people in South Korea formed new subjectivities based on "new ideas about self-styling beyond formal schooling and notions of personal character formation that extend beyond long-standing South Korean measures of effort and hard work." Based on the narratives of four university students, they conclude that young people embraced an individualistic lifestyle which hinders them taking on collective measures against the structural inequality induced by neoliberalism. Although they attend to broader structural aspects such as educational reforms, the technologies of the self of young South Koreans are their main focus.

Jesook Song (2009) explicitly analyses these technologies and their implementation in her work *South Koreans in the Debt Crisis*. She shows how biopower was shaped and expressed during and after the 1997/98 Asian Financial Crisis through actors she calls "social engineers" or "crisis knowledge brokers" (Song 2009:xi), and concrete measures such as the "New Intellectual Campaign" (Song 2009:104–105). Young people were imagined as a hope for overcoming the effects of the crisis; their skills and potentials would secure not only their employment in that difficult time but would also provide new jobs. She argues that "governing youth underemployment was a *proactive* attempt by the South Korean capitalist state to nurture and organize a post-Fordist labor population" (Song 2009:96, original emphasis), to build up the human capital needed in a new production process.

Furthermore, young people were trained to become entrepreneurs of their individual selves through self-management and self-discipline: to use their skills and expertise, fostered through self-discipline, to become flexible, adaptable and creative individuals who could overcome the difficult labour market situation (Song 2009:97). I quote her at some length to illustrate what she understands as technologies of the self:

> [The] beautification of the body with physical exercise, regardless of gender or vocation; development of skills for the efficient organization of time and scheduling […]; presentation of a professional and marketable self-image; further education for proficiency in computer and Internet technology as well as in languages, such as English (and in some cases, Japanese and Chinese);

and exposure to cosmopolitan culture and media through travels abroad and watching foreign TV programs. (Song 2009:100)

These forms of subjectification were implemented first by civilian actors, who emphasised that democratic processes need to be independent from the state directives, and second by what Song (2009:136) calls elites, who pushed for neoliberalism. In her view, the South Korean state developed from a developmental state with a state-directed economy to a neoliberal welfare state that follows market logic (Song 2009:136–137).

Like Anagnost (2013), Song defines neoliberalism as a social ethos. However, she emphasises how intellectuals and activists debated the meaning of liberalism, differentiating between 'good' (that which accompanies political development) and 'bad' (that which is politically conservative and market-driven) liberalisms (Song 2009:122). By contrast, Song understands neoliberalism, following Foucault, as modification of liberalism. In her later work, *Living on Your Own: Single Women, Rental Housing, and Post-Revolutionary Affect in Contemporary South Korea*, Song (2014:1) stresses a "global youth crisis." She aims to exemplify the relation between local and global financialisation and techniques of self-discipline through the narratives of young South Korean single women living alone in Seoul and Busan. Here, Song defines the dominant liberal social ethos that influences the behaviour of these young women as enjoyment.

Cho Haejoang (Cho 2015), who has also analysed young people in South Korea, but from the perspective of a professor teaching at one of South Korea's top-tier universities, differentiates between liberal and neoliberal young people and she uses the diverse narratives about young people in South Korea since democratisation to show how she defines the difference between liberal youth and neoliberal young people.

The 'New Generation' and the 'Spec Generation'

Cho describes students who entered university in the 1990s as creative, experimenting with alternative lifestyles, which included first and foremost the emerging internet and creative and culture industries. Engaging themselves in immaterial labour, they thought to establish "their own autonomous space by disconnecting themselves from the old establishment comprising their parents and teachers" (Cho 2015:443). University years were the time for them to experiment, travel, and find out what they wanted to do, while at the same time they used their activities to further democratise society. "They were individuals of a consumerist society […] They were fully committed to their own life projects of self-realization," Cho Haejoang sums up (2015:443). Cho experienced a different attitude among students who entered university in the 2000s. These students were occupied with collecting 'Spec,' managing their time systematically to develop their qualifications. "What is peculiar about the Spec generation is that these young people accept that life is a continuous process of competition, from birth until death" (Cho 2015:447). Cho describes this generation

as sinking back into being obedient children and returning to the lifestyle of their parents, which the 'New Generation' had tried so hard to overcome.

In contrast to Song (2009), Cho conceptualises young people in generational terms, clearly differentiating between them by describing the 'New Generation' as free labourers of a liberal capitalism, as opposed to the 'Spec Generation,' who are subjected to the neoliberal concept of human capital. While the liberal free labourer disconnects his or her inalienable subjectivity from the skills and knowledge "to be rented out" (Cho 2015:452), the neoliberal subject continuously invests in his or her human capital to remain a marketable person. "In the process, the boundary between the principles and values that exist in the marketplace and those one finds outside the marketplace erode" (Cho 2015:453), so that the boundary that characterised the free labourer becomes indistinct. "There is no clear split between spiritual aspirations and the pursuit of material interests," she concludes (Cho 2015:453).

Similar anthropological studies into the life trajectories of young people have been conducted in Japan (Arai 2013), mainland China (Ren 2013), and Taiwan (Pazderic 2013). Young people face similar changing economic situations (reduced economic growth, de-industrialisation, a post-Fordist employment market), while at the same time they experience high social expectations. In public discourses, it is young people's duty to develop into the next generation that secures their nation's (economic) growth. These expectations lead to high competition among them to gain entry to the most prestigious university, find the best job, and acquire the highest status. In order to achieve these goals, they develop a managed and disciplined self. In these anthropological accounts, young people developed into the 'homo economicus' Foucault described. They became entrepreneurs whose life trajectories are their source of income.

While not every anthropological writing about young people in East Asia combines their life trajectories with neoliberalism in an explicit analysis, young people in Japan, Taiwan, mainland China and Hongkong as well as South Korea are summarised as special generations in the respective public discourses which, in one way or the other, anthropologists and other social scientists trace back to their economic situation.

In the edited volume *Hell-Chosun In & Out* (Cho et al. 2017), for example, anthropologists attend to the diverse experiences of young South Koreans' global mobility: travelling to India for a yoga retreat, going to Ireland to learn English by working in restaurants, or moving to the US as exchange students. The authors stress the neoliberal transformation of the South Korean economy to understand the mobility of young people, and they use the term 'Hell-*Chosun*'[6] to describe the difficulties and struggles of young people in present times.

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[6] Composed of the English word hell and the name of the Joseon dynasty, it illustrates that young people feel their living conditions to be hellish and backward. It is used to describe a general feeling or specific experiences such as the hardship young South Koreans experience when preparing for the entrance exam.

However, there is another line of anthropological research on young people's life trajectories with a different analytical lens. Here, I want to discuss the 'Millennial Generation' in South Korea, 'Strawberries' or 'post-Reform Generation' in Taiwan, Japan's 'Freeters,' and China's 'Millennials' to briefly show what such analyses can accomplish.

'Millennial Generation'

Mun Young Cho (2018) analyses the life trajectories of young people in contemporary South Korea with a focus on the development and establishment of social ventures. To introduce the diverse youth discourses in South Korea that formed after the Asian Financial Crisis 1997/98, she starts her analysis with an overview of the different terms used to describe young South Koreans.

The employment difficulties that emerged after the Financial Crisis cumulated in a mood among young people captured in the book *880,000 Won Generation: Economics of Hope Written in Era of Despair* (Woo and Park 2007). The term was taken up in social narratives and expressed the subjective feeling of lethargy among young people. Further terms emerged, such as '*N-Po* Generation,' which is the equivalent of the term '*Il-po* Generation,' or '*Salkogi* Generation,' which refers to young people living alone due to the continuous search for work or the need to develop projects to improve employability. Cho, however, also draws attention to other discourses that foreground a changing attitude among young people towards work and life. '*Dalgwan* Generation,' for example, refers to young people who view wealth and reputation as less important. The 'Millennial Generation' emphasises the individuality of its members, and expressions such as *so hawk haeng* or 'yolo' *(yoro)* draw attention to the feelings of young people that although they do not possess respective status symbols or do not work in a conglomerate, they lead a happy life *(sosohajiman hwaksilhan haengbuk),* or that life is too short not to do things that make them happy ('yolo': you only live once).

Cho (2018) carefully describes and deconstructs these diverse discourses and attends to how young people used them to develop and establish social enterprises. In this way, Cho paints a more differentiated picture: first, of how young South Koreans engaged in their work and created employment possibilities, and second, how generation is performed.

'Strawberry/ Post-Reform Generation'

Tanguy Le Pesant (2011) analyses the ways young Taiwanese regarded, understood, and interpreted cultural difference in the context of political democratisation. People born in the 1980s were "the first generation whose socialization framework was [...] a democratizing society on the way to 'Taiwanization' while opening up to China and the rest of the world" (Le Pesant 2011:137). Ethnic categorisations played a

minor role for them because they identified first and foremost as Taiwanese nationals (Le Pesant 2011:152). Le Pesant emphasises that the 'post-Reform Generation' differs from previous generations not only in terms of political participation but also in terms of family size and growing wealth. In contrast to the 'Baby Boomers' who preceded them, these young people for the most part grew up as only children or had only one sibling. Experiencing rising income and living standards, they benefited in form of new consumer choices and technologies, easier access to education, and higher allowances from their parents (Le Pesant 2011:137–139).

Due to these living conditions, young Taiwanese are also publicly referred to as 'Strawberry Generation'. The term was originally used by Christina Ongg to describe the environment of care young people grew up in. She stated that young people entering work in the 2000s had several characteristics in common: "they had good points such as being proactive and innovative, a willingness to challenge received wisdom […] they also had bad points […] low EQ, low persistency, low sensitivity, low flexibility, and a high degree of self-centeredness" (cited in Chang and Chen 2007). Hence the term Strawberry, which stresses young people's softness.[7]

Le Pesant uses these descriptions and characteristics to analytically distinguish young Taiwanese as actual generation (Mannheim 1952) and shows how they conceptualised ethnicity. Thus, Le Pesant draws a diversified portrait of young people that makes visible how their living conditions improved compared to those of their parents' generation, and how public discourses react to young people's changing perceptions of social demands.

'Freeters'

Mark Driscoll (2007) attends directly to the public discourses when analysing the 'Freeters' in Japan. 'Freeters' (composed of the English word free and the German word *Arbeiter* – "worker") is a term used to refer to un- or underemployed young people. The meanings behind the term oscillate between what Driscoll calls "good" 'Freeters' versus "irresponsible" 'Freeters' (2007:171); "the freeters-positives," who emphasise that young people actively choose to resist the Japanese work culture, versus "the freeters-negatives," who emphasise the negative consequences young people's resistance has for the national economy (Driscoll 2007:175–176). Driscoll stresses that young people became the focus of political, economic and public actors to conceal the cause of Japan's recession while restructuring the employment market in accordance with neoliberal principles of downsizing and new forms of exploiting labour (Driscoll 2007:174–175). Japan experienced an economic downturn in the 1990s, the "collapse of Japanese Inc." (Driscoll 2007:170), due to the burst of the

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[7] Young people have actively started to play with the phrase and used it for their own purposes. The 'Wild Strawberry Movement,' a student movement that formed after the visit of Chen Yunlin, ARATS chairman, to demonstrate against violence and abuse incidents of Taiwan's police during the visit, made ironically use of the phrase (Wang 2008).

Japanese 'Bubble Economy' caused by over-speculations. Although he takes neoliberalism to refer to macroeconomic changes in Japan's economy, he does not use the term analytically but rather stresses that young people and their flexible employment situation – voluntary or not – became the centre of what he describes as moral panic: young people could not reproduce economic growth.

Various contributors to Gordon Matthew's and Bruce White's edited volume *Japan's Changing Generations: Are Young People Creating a New Society?* (2004) concentrate on how young people navigate such public discourses. They compare young people to older generations to show how they oppose social demands. These young people developed different ideas about how to live and enacted these ideas without open resistance. In a similar vein, Noritoshi Furuichi (2017) illustrates the struggles and difficulties young Japanese faced after the bubble of 'Japanese Inc.' burst. However, he adopted a different approach. Being a young sociologist during the time of his research, he felt dissatisfied with academic theories about and public "neologisms" of Japanese youth "that were emblematic of the 'unhappiness'" (Furuichi 2017:vii) young people must have experienced because they lived in economically difficult times. In contrast, the focus of his book became happiness and how young people could accomplish it. Critically examining the different, and historically prescribed, discourses (academic and public) that surrounded young people in Japan since the 1930s, he asks "What are young people thinking and feeling? Where do they come from? Where are they going?" (Furuichi 2017:9).

China's 'Millennials'

Young people living in mainland China have to deal with a political issue different from South Korea, Japan and Taiwan: a socialist state with a 'Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics'[8]. In his ethnography, Eric Fish (2015) describes how middle-class post-90s young people in China first, passed through an examination hell to secure a place at a prestigious university; then, as university freshmen, underwent military training aimed at building their patriotism and collectivism to secure the next socialist generation; and finally, as only children in an economy that Fish describes as a "painful hangover" (Fish 2015:8) after its boom years, tried to find white-collar employment to secure both their and their aging parents' livelihoods. While also labelled as spoiled and selfish in public discourses (Fish 2015:8), these young people started to voice their discontent in "cynicism and dissent" (Fish 2015:15) as they experienced a growing gap between white-collar and blue-collar work, youth unemployment, gender imbalance, environmental problems, and demographic change. "China's capitalist excesses clash with the socialist veneer that the Communist Party still struggles to uphold. As a result, the Chinese have been left unsure of what to believe in or what moral code should be their guide" (Fish 2015:16).

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[8] Ellen Hertz (1998) critically discusses this term.

Cho, Le Pesant, Furuichi and Fish angle their analytical lenses towards an exploration of the social, economic, and political circumstances of young people in historical context, and attend to the meaning young people give their lives. Thus, they can show what Deborah Durham (2004) summarises as discourses of and on behalf of youth that bring forth moral issues concerning the reproduction of society, as well as the complexity and diversity of the ways young people form their subjectivities.

In this book I seek to take a similar approach to the life trajectories of young people. In the final section of this chapter, I introduce the reader to some of the writers who inspired me to turn to an anthropology of the good and to bring the social and economic spheres together in my analysis.

2.3 Anthropological Problems, Ethics, and Money

In line with anthropologists such as Jonathan Mair (2015), James Laidlaw (2015), or James Ferguson (2009), I am struck by the similarities of anthropological studies that use the concept of neoliberalism. Arguing that the concept of neoliberalism has become an obstacle in anthropological research, Mair (2015:917) writes that "every case study further undermines the effort to arrive at general characteristics empirically." One of these characteristics, and one of the most problematic for anthropologists, is the diffusion of economic values into the social realm and daily lives of ordinary people. Aiwha Ong (2006:23) states for example that "[i]f contemporary regimes of living are increasingly brought into interaction with neoliberal logic, then ethical subject formation is forged in a particular constellation of elements, rather than indexed to a universalized notion of the human."[9] The question of how to live is at stake for anthropologists (see for example Collier and Lakoff 2005, Rabinow 2005).

Such an assumption presumes that the social and economic spheres are essentially different and even opposed. But does such a separation produce helpful results? Marcel Mauss (2016), at least, already stressed that economic activities are embedded in social and cultural formations and anthropologists working in so-called non-capitalist societies have frequently demonstrated this. [10] Yet, when it comes to

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[9] Collier and Lakoff (2005) use the concept 'regime of living' to emphasise that answers to ethical questions are pervaded with "normative, technical, and political elements" (Collier and Lakoff 2005:23). A regime, once invoked, provides only one possible way to reflect and act in accordance to what is perceived as good. The relationship between regimes of living and the good life is fraught with problems, since a certain regime can produce as many problems as it aims to solve. Nevertheless, they present a possible solution and are thus able to provide structure and moral norms, "modes of possible action, and techniques for working on or forming subjects" (Collier and Lakoff 2005:34).

[10] Mauss writes in his famous monography *The Gift* that "[e]verything mixes in, everything that constitutes the life that is strictly social of the societies that have preceded our own – as far back as those of protohistory. In these 'total' social phenomena, as we propose to call them, are expressed all at once and at a stroke all sorts of institutions: religious, judicial, and ethical (morale) – these being

capitalism and neoliberalism, all the "possible moral/economic settlements we [anthropologists] already know are out there" (Mair 2015:917) are often neglected. Michael Jackson (2011) emphasises that almost all of us strive to improve our situations, although the concrete form this takes differs. Then, would it not be fruitful to ask why people value the practices and activities, the goals and projects they work towards and strive for (cf. Mair 2015:919)?

Based on these considerations, I follow Joel Robbins (2007) and take culture to be structured by values. David Graeber defines values as possessing contrasting qualities and "even though value is by definition always comparative, different values can be compared in different ways: proportionally, as with money […], through some sort of ordinal ranking system, or as unique, particular values" (Graeber 2013:225). Yet, Michael Lambek (2010a, 2010b) emphasises that values can be too abstract and he reminds the ethnographer to acknowledge concrete practices.[11] Thus, a concept of value needs to acknowledge that values are dynamic and processual; that is, not only do they form *in* social relations and are publicly recognised, but people *establish* social relations through the meaning they give their practices and activities (Graeber 2001:47). Following Graeber (2001, 2013) and Lambek (2010a, 2010b), I emphasise the capacity of human beings that lies behind practices. That is, young Seoulites possess the capacity to aspire, to imagine, to anticipate, to hope, and to design and plan their lives so that it will become worthwhile living.

The importance of social values is stressed by Robbins (2015) and his attempt to contribute to what he (Robbins 2013), and later Sherry Ortner (2016), term an 'anthropology of the good'. Robbins (2013) contrasts an anthropology of the good to recent developments in anthropological research. He argues that the place 'otherness' captured in early anthropologists' writings was replaced by approaches that focus on the unity of humanity through accounts of trauma, violence, and suffering "to make us and our readers feel in our bones the vulnerability we as human beings all share" (Robbins 2013:455). Anthropological interest changed from the "savage slot" to the "suffering slot" (Robbins 2013:448). In this context, he developed a different, yet complementary, ethnographic approach that centres on "how people living in different societies strive to create the good in their lives" (Robbins 2013:457). This perspective follows the notion of earlier anthropologists' writings to engage with

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political and familial at the same time; economic – and they presume particular forms of production and consumption […] without forgetting the aesthetic phenomena which brings things into final form" (2016:58).

[11] Such an approach towards practice is different from Sherry Ortner's (2006) concept of agency. As Laidlaw (2014:5–6) critically notes: "analysts writing in this framework always take it for granted that what social agents are or ought to be 'really' doing is aiming at their own advancement – resisting and challenging structure that limit their capacities and improving their position within them." Nevertheless, Ortner provides an analytical framework in which she attends to the dynamic relationship between structure and agency and emphasises a "view of the subject as existentially complex, a being who feels and thinks and reflects, who makes and seeks meaning" (Ortner 2006:110; but see Gregory 2009).

other ways of living in order to be able to compare and critically evaluate their own society, while trying to avoid the weaknesses of these early writings. Anthropologists taking this approach engage in questions of 'well-being' (Jackson 2011), 'happiness' (Walker and Kavedžija 2015, Robbins 2015), 'empathy' (Hollan and Throop 2008), and the one I will build my analytical perspective on: 'ethics'. In what follows, I introduce a critical discussion about how ethics and morality feature in anthropological writings.

Long-term fieldwork and the reliance on research participants – the discipline's primary way to gather 'data' – has what Harry Wolcott (1995:115) describes as a 'dark side' that makes ethical questions in anthropology explicit. Questions about the exploitation of research participants, the access to fieldwork sites, or the handling with personal and sensitive information require contemporary and past anthropologists to reflect about their "good practice" (Fassin 2014:7). "[A]nthropology is therefore shaped by moral issues related to the very particular nature of its topics, fields, methods and engagements" (Fassin 2014:7). At the same time, anthropology itself is often performed with a moral stance, aiming at making the world we live in a better place, and sometimes developing a moralising tone (Laidlaw 2015, Mair 2015). Thus, the discipline is itself pervaded with ethical questions and morality systems. Yet, Laidlaw (2002:311) notes that "[t]here is no connected history we can tell ourselves about the study of morality in anthropology, as we do for a range of topics such as kinship, the economy, the state, or the body." The visibility of morality systems – rituals, texts, laws – makes them a leading theme in anthropological research. However, these systems were often absorbed into the sphere of culture. Only recently have anthropologists begun to develop a framework for the study of ethics and morality (Fassin 2014).

One of these perspectives emphasises duty and norms placed on the individual by society, defining what is right or wrong to do, and what one should or should not do. "The idea is that above and beyond individual variations there exists a certain coherency allowing local moralities to be defined with precision, even when history has also had its impact" (Fassin 2014:5). Signe Howell's (1997) edited volume *The Ethnography of Moralities* presents such an ethnographic approach towards moral systems where the focus lies primarily on the effort to "delineate arenas suitable for empirical investigations which can yield pertinent material for the understanding of moral orders" (Howell 1997:2). Yet, the plural form indicates, Howell argues, that people can not only draw on many morality systems in their lived practices, but the values that lie behind these systems also change (Howell 1997:4). In a similar vein, Webb Keane states that the coherence of morality systems cannot be presumed; rather, morality systems need social conditions such as institutions, written accounts or other forms that make them endure, and they need a "host of semiotic technologies" (Keane 2015:163) through which people can recognise them across timespans. These processes produce historical ethical objects. Although the generalisability of morality systems makes them an easy target for criticism, it cannot, in the first place,

be presumed that these systems will determine people's ethical life; the "ethical out-come" (Keane 2015:164) is not fixed and definite.

In contrast to the approach that centres on the normative character of ethics and morality, Foucault developed a perspective on ethics that emphasises individual's judgement and reasoning, which is possible due to a certain freedom granted by society. Distinguishing between different levels – "the moral code," "morality of be-haviors," and "the manner in which one ought to form oneself as ethical subject" – Foucault stressed the important role of practices individuals undertake within the tension of given rules and "the attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behavior" (Foucault 1990:27). Anthropologists widely use the notion of technologies of the self to show how young people in East Asia conduct themselves under specific rules. Yet, Foucault (1990) emphasised that there are diverse modes of subjection, and the individual acknowledges and relates herself or himself differently to different codes of conduct and given rules. The individual can even reject certain rules, as James Faubion (2011:46) puts it: "[Foucault's] problematic […] is not that of reproduction alone, and not of reproduction primarily. It rather gives privileged place to change, and especially to change generated through processes of problema-tization, of putting into question the taken for granted"

Foucault's approach inspired anthropologists to develop an anthropology of eth-ics (Faubion 2011) which "endeavours to give subjects back their individual leeway and to reveal their ability to escape the ascendancy of the social, to debate social dilemmas and to produce ethical subjectivities" (Fassin 2014:5).[12] In my dissertation, I want to contribute to an anthropology of ethics. However, I follow Keane (2015) and Lambek (2010a), who argue that a strict distinction between morality and eth-ics is not fruitful in an analysis. Yet, both stress that ethics is more encompassing, and I want to emphasise here that ethics cannot be reduced to culturally prescribed systems. "Ethics concern a manner of life" that encompasses historical grown moral-ity systems and make them a "special kind of ethics" (Keane 2015:133). As Fassin notes: "[i]t is no longer a question of defending a particular moral meaning in a given society, but rather recognising that all human beings are capable of acting like ethical subjects" (2014:5). With Keane (2015:127), I argue that "humans are ethical crea-tures" and, in line with other anthropologists (Stafford 2013, Fischer 2014), I adopt a "small-is-beautiful" (Stafford 2013:6) ethnographic perspective that stresses ethics as a quality of the ordinary. I aim to contribute to discussions about 'the good' in anthropological research with perspectives of ethics that foreground its ordinary and common aspects. Yet, I aim to contribute to these discussions especially through an

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[12] Yet, Fassin notes that a third perspective needs to be taken into considerations, and he emphasises the responsibility and consequences of ethical actions. "Unlike the two previous approaches, this perspective does not isolate morality and ethics as the product of society or of subjectivity, but rather historicises and politicises them" (Fassin 2014:6). His focus is especially on contemporary discourses and narratives that relate to ethics and morality such as human rights discourses, their "historical past" and "political significance" to stress his perspective of 'consequentialist ethics' (Fassin 2014:6).

ethnographic approach, where I focus on situations that made ethical questions explicit – that is, situations where values contradicted each other or were juxtaposed, or situations where my interlocutors strived for excellence in their practices. In proposing that young Seoulites reflect on and judge the values of their social matrices and have to find a balance between their own categories of values in pursuing what they define as good, or better, I want to emphasise that I look at the intersections between structure – that is, duties and norms – and personal perceptions and meanings.

In my research, I have found that young Seoulites expressed the values they hold important through their different uses of money. In the following, I present the literature on money that inspired me to form my own analytical approach.

Turning to the complexity of so-called modern money and the diverse ways it is conceptualised in anthropological research, Keith Hart (2005) critically asserts that the lack of interest anthropologists have in modern money and the institutions and approaches towards money that exist outside the discipline caused theoretical shortages leading to an ongoing repetition of what he terms the 'myth of modern money': modern money's origin in barter (but see Mauss 2015, Ingham 2001, Humphrey 2002), the depersonalisation of modern money and its dis-embeddedness from social relations (but see Hann and Hart 2009, Kwon 2007, Hart 2017), not to mention the negative impact of modern money in so-called non-capitalist societies (Hart 2005). In his review *The Anthropology of Money,* Bill Maurer (2006:19) questions especially the "Western folk theory [of] money's role in commensuration, abstraction, and quantification" to introduce anthropological and some sociological accounts that persist with such assumptions as well as those who challenge them. He aims to show the – made and inherent – paradoxes of money, emphasising that anthropologists should be attentive to how they represent them. While discussing diverse analytical approaches, he stresses especially the importance of turning to money's pragmatics (Maurer 2006:17).

Following this emphasis on the pragmatics of money, I attend to the young Seoulites' common use of money in their everyday social interactions and aim to show the broader sphere of meaning and values that such ways of using money reflect.

The anthropologists Jonathan Parry and Maurice Bloch (1989) developed an extensive analytical approach to show the mechanisms through which economic and social values are linked. Although they do not apply their analytical framework to so-called capitalist societies, and are criticised for not doing so (Hart 2005), I found their approach towards money inspiring because they broaden the scope of analysis and incorporate the uses of money into wider notions of transactional orders to show how the instrumental and social spheres are related.

Parry and Bloch (1989:21) state that it is a specific social conception of the world that "gives rise to particular ways of representing money." Although they acknowledge that this statement is rather relativistic, they develop a framework through which this relativism is itself relativised. They refine the concept of short- and long-term transactional orders to address the diverse and often contradictory ways money is used. The cycle of short-term transactions encompasses activities of individual

competition, acquisition but also "creativity and vitality" (Parry and Bloch 1989:26) while the long-term transactional order reproduces the social and cosmic order that extends the lifespan of the individual. These temporalities form the "totality of transactions" (Parry and Bloch 1989:1).

Parry and Bloch argue that the transformation of these two transactional orders into each other depends on how they are evaluated. They reason that the long-term cycle is always received in a morally positive way, whereas the short-term cycle is "morally undetermined" (Parry and Bloch 1989:26) unless the individual activity in the short-term order threatens the maintenance and stability of the long-term order. Then these activities become ethically loaded. As Maurer (2006) summarises: "Money determines the morality of exchange only insofar as previously existing moral orders maintain, in the long run, their durability in the face of short-term individual competition" (Maurer 2006:19).

It may seem, Parry and Bloch further explain, that in capitalism this very danger developed, or rather that the individual pursuit of personal benefit now sustains the long-term order and secures its reproduction. They stress, however, that this approach might just as well result from the distinctiveness attributed to the two spheres (social and economic) in 'Western' thinking. Yet, anthropologist Jane I. Guyer (2004:20) stresses that Parry and Bloch (1989) remain in a "conceptual binarism" that can be found throughout anthropological analysis, for example in conceptualising societies as capitalist vs. non-capitalist, or contrasting gift exchange with commodity exchange (see Appadurai 1986).

I aim to make a modest contribution to the discussions about money and consumption in economic anthropology by stressing the importance of values in the everyday use of money. I adopt a perspective that challenges anthropological dichotomies and rather attends to "disjunctures" (Appadurai 1990) and "multiplicity" (Guyer 2004:21) that characterise economic practices. I found the approaches of Guyer (2004) and Katherine Gibson and Julia Graham (2014) fruitful in developing a theoretical framework that captures the diverse economic practices of young Seoulites.

Gibson and Graham (2014) draw attention to the disadvantages of a theoretical framework that centres on "powerful discourses that organize events into understandable and seemingly predictable trajectories" (Gibson-Graham 2014:148). They criticise "capitalocentrism" as the principal way of trying to understand change, emphasising that a theoretical perspective that allows the ethnographer to attend to people's diverse practices can be more fruitful in analyses of the economy because it "directs interpretive attention not only to material practices but to the nuances, affects, multiple codes and meaning, silence, jokes, parodies, and so on, that accompany them" (Gibson-Graham 2014:148).[13] Just as Gibson and Graham (2014)

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[13] It is in this sense that anthropologists such as Caitlin Zaloom (2010), Ellen Hertz (1998), Arjun Appadurai (2016) and Karen Ho (2009) have shown how even the stock market, *the* capitalist place, functions only through social interactions and even ethical considerations.

foreground the manifold articulations, voices, values, and meanings that accompany economic practices, Guyer, in order to grasp "empirical richness" and "life-world" (2004:14), turns to "scales of values" (Guyer 2004:19–20) and the ways these scales are constructed. She develops a framework which centres on "multiplicity" and "questions of equivalence, difference, and commensuration as a creation from experience in the world" (Guyer 2004:21).

In turning to meaning and value, I take an analytical and methodological path to understand how young Seoulites conceptualise their dissatisfaction with the status quo – their difficulties and struggles, but also their happiness and joy – as they aspire to a life well lived. Writing in the context of an anthropology of the good and combining the instrumental sphere and social sphere again I aim to contribute to anthropological discussions about young people living in South Korea in particular, and East Asia in general. Thus, I now want to take the reader to my theoretical reflections about the good life, aspirations, ethics and money.

3   Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives

The central reason to build a theoretical framework is to make possible the most important purpose of anthropological work: thick description. Theory presents the means to "ferret out the unapparent important things" (Geertz 1993:26) and to make the reader understand the perceptions from which I proceed to analysis.

In the ethnographic chapters to come, I will take the reader into the everyday lives of the young Seoulites who participated in my research, and I suggest that they aspire to live this life meaningfully and well. Living a good life is the long-term goal behind my research participants' considerations and projects, and I will begin this chapter with a discussion of how to analytically approach this all-encompassing goal and how to understand the concept of aspiration. When these young Seoulites discussed their experiences, perceptions, ideas and views with me, we talked about particular issues and specific social relations. In order to understand and interpret how these issues and relationships shaped and added to their aspirations of a good life, I complement the concept of aspiration with perspectives on imagination, design and planning, anticipation and hope.

These young Seoulites' imaginations about how education could be organised, their plans and designs for a wedding ceremony, their anticipations of working expertise and competence through consumption, or their hopes of achieving the status of a professional by working diligently were general themes in our conversations. However, the meaning they gave these themes were individual. They had to negotiate

and balance their values and practices with those of their respective social matrices, and to understand how they gave meaning to and valued their practices, I draw on conceptualisations of ethics and money.

Ordinary ethics – the everyday reflections, judgements and reasoning of young Seoulites about values and practices of their social matrices – and the use of money – another quality of the ordinary that illustrates my interlocutors' valued practices – are the specific analytical lenses through which I elaborate and interpret the narratives and experiences of my research participants. In the final part of this chapter, I will introduce the methodological considerations that underpinned my research and writing processes.

Because I was doing my research in the city with research participants who were sometimes anthropologists themselves, I had to adjust the central methods of anthropology – interviews and participant observation. How I formed the relationships with these young Seoulites and approached and established the research site present a matter of critical reflection just as the way I conceptualised these young Seoulites as 'young' and represented their narratives about education, marriage, consumption and work.

3.1 On the Good Life and Aspirations

As I will show while following my research participants' narratives, the definition of a good life, its form and content, varies from context to context and does not need to be utopian. Edward Fischer (2014) offers a framework which allows me to conceptualise 'the good life' according to certain criteria while illustrating its complexity and diversity. These criteria encompass material conditions that allow people to sustain an adequate livelihood, social relations in which they feel comfortable and which enable them to move forward, as well as a good state of health and the feeling of being safe in general. In addition, more subjective perceptions must be included such as the capacity for aspirations, the feeling that things run fairly, and the possibility to engage in larger life projects (Fischer 2014:5).

Moreover, the young Seoulites I spoke with formed their ideas about their good life in a continuous tension with notions of hardship and suffering, signifying that "striving for the good life involves the arduous work of becoming, of trying to live a life that one deems worthy, becoming the sort of person that one desires" (Fischer 2014:2). The good life involves an orientation towards a future which Arjun Appadurai (2013:286) summarises as a "form of difference," and he stresses that the effort to achieve it comprises "three notable human preoccupations": aspiration, imagination, and anticipation.

In this part of the chapter, I want to further elaborate on how I conceptualise these 'preoccupations'. First, I concentrate on aspirations regarding specific ambitions and the ability of young Seoulites to strive for their respective form and content of a good life. Second, I complement the concept of aspirations with those of imagi-

nation, anticipation, design and hope to deepen the understanding of these young Seoulites' actions and projects of making their future.

3.1.1 Aspirations and the Future

Both the noun 'aspiration' and the verb 'to aspire' stem from the Latin origin of *aspirare,* which means 'to endeavour to obtain, to strive to, to reach to'.[14] Appadurai (2004) treats aspiration as an explicit cultural concept; that is, aspirations are formed within and in relation to local ideas, notions, norms, and values. Aspirations evolve within such a specific frame which makes not only certain aspirations local specific ones, but their significance and intensity local as well. Thus, aspirations are "never simply individual" (Appadurai 2004:67); rather, they are formed and brought to life in social relations and everyday experiences within a specific local frame. My research participants' aspirations towards a good life present the broad picture and main theme of my dissertation. However, this broad aspiration is built upon and the result of short-term wants as well as long-term goals and projects. These aspirations differ not only in terms of their content; they also vary in terms of the manifold social relations young Seoulites engaged in. Furthermore, these young people modified their aspirations in the context of different perceptions of the temporal and spatial frame for and of achieving them. Paolo Boccagni (2017), in his research on migration, draws special attention to the transformation of aspirations over time and foregrounds how aspirations change when people move to different places. This point is also addressed by Jin-Heon Jung (2015, 2016, forthcoming) in his research on North Korean migrants. In contrast to Boccagni, however, he draws special attention to processes of subjectification.

Different from these particular "wants and choices" (Appadurai 2004:68), goals and projects, is the capacity to aspire. Arjun Appadurai (2004, 2013) conceptualises the capacity to aspire as a navigational practice that enables a "journey" towards the future, a journey from a present here to a future there (Appadurai 2013:292). However, he critically notes that a study of how the future is made is left to economics, which conceives the actor goal-oriented, calculating and expecting returns. By contrast, anthropologists have tended to retain an understanding of culture as custom, habitus, and tradition and concentrated solely on the reproduction of a cultural frame. Aspirations as a cultural capacity bring forward the idea of the 'future as a cultural fact' (Appadurai 2013). Aspiring to the good life is an "ongoing aspiration" (Fischer 2014:2), oriented towards a future state of being or achieving that includes both notions of the past and ideas about the future (Appadurai 2013:179). Thus, Appadurai asks anthropologists to move from a study of the reproduction of cultural frames to a study of how these frames provide ideas and concepts of a good life and how notions of a good life develop in this frame. The capacity to aspire provides a

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[14] "aspire (v.)" in Online Etymology Dictionary, written and compiled by Douglas Harper (https://www.etymonline.com/word/aspire, accessed 19 January 2021).

"key to changing the status quo insofar as recognition and redistribution are concerned" (Appadurai 2013:292).

Because I am applying the concept of aspirations to young middle-class Seoulites, I need to adapt the terms redistribution and recognition, which Arjun Appadurai (2013) deploys in his study of urban poor in Mumbai, to my research context. Here, redistribution and recognition relate to young people who negotiate their aspirations towards a good life within a wider social context that views middle-class standards such as graduating from a prestigious university, working in a conglomerate, and buying an apartment as the status quo. Thus, redistribution refers in the narrowest sense to money, but also to material needs more generally. It is expressed when these young Seoulites discussed how to pay their tuition fees, finance a wedding ceremony, or buy an apartment. At the same time, these young people struggled to have their social and cultural life recognised by their parents, friends, teachers, and society in general.

In these young people's endeavour to live a good life, they imagined different temporalities, and they had to balance their imaginations with those of others. Jennifer Cole and Deborah Durham (2008) draw special attention to temporalities in their research on young people's life trajectories. They conceptualise three dimensions for understanding how people form their future. First, they ask "how the future is imagined through specific representations of temporality" (Cole and Durham 2008:11). As I will show below, young people's life trajectories were closely monitored by other social actors and a certain "discipline of temporality" (Cole and Durham 2008:13) defines when to go to school, when to marry, and when to find employment. Second, Cole and Durham (2008) emphasise hope, anxiety and risk as central feelings in the process of making the future. Hope includes certain expectations, which can become actual obstacles, as discussed for example by Lauren Berlant (2011). But hope as well as anxiety helped my research participants to orientate themselves while they considered when to take risks and when to avoid them. Third, Cole and Durham point to the active creation of the future through "designing and normalizing new kinds of practices" (2008:11). Both state that young people's practices in particular are said to make the future in the sense that they create something new; they bring about social change. I suggest that this does not need to be a complete societal overhaul but can also refer to small changes in everyday life.

The future young Seoulites aspire to and create can take on many forms, because affect and sensation give imagination, anticipation, and aspiration their "gravity, their traction, and their texture" (Appadurai 2013:287). Next, I elaborate on sentiments that complement my research participants' aspirations: imagination, anticipation, design and hope.

3.1.2 Imagination, Anticipation, Design, and Hope

To aspire, to strive for something, means also that my research participants can imagine new ideas and concepts different from past and present ones, that they invest their time in concrete planning and design processes of their future life, that they anticipate and hope to achieve what they aspire. Thus, I focus on imagination, anticipation, design and hope to zoom in on my research participants' aspirations. Here, I once again draw on Arjun Appadurai's conceptual language, but I adapt his abstractions to my research context, also adding considerations about the liminal state that young people are said to exist in. Furthermore, I draw on Hirokazu Miyazaki's approach towards hope (2004, 2006). Together, I will use these perspectives in the ethnographic chapters to come to describe my research participants' imagination of education, their plans towards getting married, their anticipation through consumption and their hope for good work.

Imagination

Imagination was a pervasive theme in my research participants' narratives, especially with regard to education. As they reflected on their everyday experiences as high school and university students, they imagined new, different forms of being educated.

Imagination derives from the Latin words *imaginare* – 'to represent' – and *imaginari* – 'to picture to oneself'.[15] The ability to picture diverse ideas, concepts, or images is different from fantasy, which is merely referred to as an escape. Instead, imagination is a "projective sense" (Appadurai 1996:7); the representation of concepts, ideas, and notions to oneself can be an important stage in or impetus for further actions. Appadurai uses imagination in his earlier work *Modernity at Large* (1996) to show that locality is always a work in progress, and imagination presents an important element in both social reproduction *and* future-oriented strategies and planning. As Sarah Pink (2009:40) notes: imagination is "not simply about the future." People's imaginations are also directed towards the present and (recent) past. Although imagination has always been a vital resource in all societies throughout history, in a globalised world it has become "a collective, social fact" (Appadurai 1996:5) which has taken on a new quality as it entered people's everyday lives.

Appadurai (2013:287) stresses that imagination is a "quotidian energy," an important asset people and communities draw on to start processes and projects. Anthropologists emphasise the energy of imagination especially in their research on liminal moments (Appadurai 2013:288); moments especially young people are largely connected with. The concept of 'liminality' (Turner 2005, Bräunlein 2012) is only partially appropriate for the young people who participated in my research

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[15] "imagine (v.)" in Online Etymology Dictionary, written and compiled by Douglas Harper (https://www.etymonline.com/word/imagine, accessed 19 January 2021).

for several reasons. First, the concept of a liminal phase requires the people undergoing it to return, after a fixed period of time, into a common-sense world (Bräunlein 2012:161). In my research context, this time period is not definite. As I have discussed in the introduction and sub-chapter 2.2, discourses in South Korea present young people as vital actors within globalising processes while at the same time questioning their ability to produce and reproduce social and economic achievements. Thus, the return into a common-sense world – the world of the middle classes – might be impossible, rendering my research participants' liminal phase open ended (cf. Ibarra and Obodaru 2016). Second, the creativity, the "impulsive, immediate, and concrete" (Bräunlein 2012:59, my translation) character Victor Turner (2005) ascribed to a liminal phase is partly voiced by my research participants, but more often they expressed difficulties, hardship, or boredom. Third, these young Seoulites questioned the significance of important rituals and discussed socially difficult and problematic issues rather than talking about a socially legitimate phase (cf. Ibarra and Obodaru 2016). Finally, my interlocutors often distanced themselves from the standardised middle-class values and the people who produce and reproduce them. They strongly distinguished between 'us' and 'them' in their narratives of their social frames, which resembles the conflict between what Victor Turner (2005) called 'communitas' and 'structure'. However, the rather rigid dichotomy between 'us' and 'them' does not illustrate a communitas–structure polarity. Rather, they also distinguished between themselves and their fellow students and friends – peers of their communitas – leading me to question the homogeneity and equal status of my research participants. Therefore, I consider other characteristics of the concept of liminality as fruitful components in combination with the concept of imagination.

The phase of liminality can be characterised as 'betwixt and between' (see for example Bräunlein 2012, Ibarra and Obodaru 2016) – the human being is situated at a threshold. Within this position, rules and norms as well as skills and knowledge are taught and learned, and the human being gets to know its own society, albeit in concentrated form, reduced to its essential symbols. As Dae-hyun[16] and other research participants pointed out in their narratives, education presents the essential means through which they are taught and prepared to enter the world of work and become 'whole' adults. Thus, I consider education as a liminal period in which young Seoulites reflect on the content and form of society, and imagine new configurations of its fundamental elements (cf. Bräunlein 2012). But their practices as university students present only one part of their everyday lives, and thus I will not reduce them to individuals in a liminal phase. I understand their imaginations of education to be a significant energy in the "production of the everyday life" (Appadurai 2013:288) which enabled my research participants to combine the past and present to provide "a map for negotiating and shaping the future" (Appadurai 2013:288).

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[16] I have provided an overview of my research participants in the appendix. I use pseudonyms to protect the identity of my research participants.

Anticipation, Design, and Hope

In my research, I found that my research participants actively prepared themselves for possible circumstances in their future through investment in and acquisition of goods and services. Certificates and qualifications, for example, were considered to be necessary assets for a future career or were interpreted to be necessary for gaining practical experience. Although these preparations served to reduce risk (for example, of unemployment), young Seoulites acted proactively to design their futures and fulfil their hopes. Thus, I take anticipation as closely linked to design and hope, but I employ these two concepts separately in further chapters about marriage and work, where my research participants voiced them more concretely.

Arjun Appadurai closely relates imagination to anticipation. The derivation of 'to anticipate' from the Latin *anticipare* stems from the notion of 'take (care of) ahead of time'.[17] Thus, it is different from 'to expect' in that it refers to preparation or acting in advance. In conceptualising anticipation, Appadurai (2013) is concerned with the topics of uncertainty, risk (taking) and forecasting. In the process, he analyses anthropological work on these topics; while earlier anthropological work was concerned with how people avoid danger, he notes that later anthropological work on capitalism emphasises especially the "highly specific forms of risk-making and risk-taking" (Appadurai 2013:295). I am, however, critical of taking crisis and risk-taking in so-called capitalist societies for granted. As Karen Ho (2011:549) notes: "financial norms and ideological assumptions (the acceptance of the economic equation of 'risk reaps rewards' or the generalized assumption of an ever-increasing risk society) have been problematically incorporated into the anthropological toolkit." But people do not only actively engage in risk, they also very much avoid taking risks.

In their everyday practices, people are constantly investing their time and energy in efforts to meet their aspirations – as my research participants did when arranging weddings, contemplating when to marry, and planning their married lives. However, these young people emphasised: first, their efforts to balance their ideas of wedding designs with those of their parents; second, how important a congruence of their life designs with those of their respective partners was; or third, that a wedding would bring about such a drastic change of their own life designs that they considered not marrying at all.

People produce and construct daily life, ordinary life, social life through "an endeavor that requires effort and imagination as well as an uncommon amount of deliberate investment" (Appadurai 2013:253). Social life is not a default outcome but is the result of design and planning processes. Appadurai (2013:254) argues that design is the "fundamental human capacity and a primary source of social order." Zooming to a broader level, he advances the thesis that "human history, from this perspective, could be re-written as a history of design" (2013:254).

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[17] "anticipate (v.)" in Online Etymology Dictionary, written and compiled by Douglas Harper (https://www.etymonline.com/word/anticipate, accessed 19 January 2021).

Hope is a central sentiment in these efforts, and it became especially visible in my interlocutors' narratives regarding work. Cole and Durham (2008:15) conceptualise hope as an "active […] modality" that is tied to a particular time and place and is future oriented.[18] In everyday life, hope is saturated with anxiety, fear, and risk-taking.

I mentioned above that young people are considered to be, even expected to be, more willing to take risks than other socially constructed age groups. They therefore become "increasingly central to more general, social processes of hope, risk taking, and the production of new knowledge" (Cole and Durham 2008:15), indicated in the sentiment that young people are the hope for the future. Hope is detached from its subjective context and put forward into what Appadurai termed "politics of hope." That is, "hope is the political counterpart to the work of imagination. For it is only through some sort of politics of hope that any society or group can envisage a journey to desirable change in the state of things" (Appadurai 2013:293). He contrasts the concepts 'ethics of possibility' and 'ethics of probability' to indicate the political dimension of hope. Ethics of possibility refer to "those ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that increase the horizons of hope, that expand the field of the imagination, that produce greater equity in what I have called the capacity to aspire, and that widen the field of informed, creative, and critical citizenship" (Appadurai 2013:295). Ethics of probability, by contrast, describe "those ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that flow out of […] the capillary dangers of modern regimes of diagnosis, counting, and accounting" (Appadurai 2013:295).

Appadurai identifies a tension between these two forms of ethics on a global scale and urges anthropologists to pay attention to the cultural forms and spaces in which ethics of possibility are developed. As the discourses regarding the 'Spec Generation' show, it is in the domain of work that the political dimension of hope in form of ethics of possibility and ethics of probability is most dominant. These 'politics of hope' merge with the subjective, individual hope of my research participants in their narratives. Following Hirokazu Miyazaki (2004, 2006), I conceptualise hope as a method through which these young Seoulites reoriented and redirected their knowledge. Thus, hope becomes an 'active modality' (Cole and Durham 2008) within which these young Seoulites looked for good work or worked diligently to achieve the professional status. This modality is unlike merely dreaming of the future because it involves discipline, effort, but also patience to achieve one's hopes (Appadurai 2013:127).

My research participants' future-orientation and future-making consisted of aspiring, imagining, anticipating, designing and hoping for a life that is worth living.

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[18] Jarrett Zigon (2009) emphasises that a conceptualisation of hope as either passive or active proves less fruitful in an analysis of the everyday social life of people. He also questions whether hope is always oriented towards a better future and stresses that, in his research context, hope was oriented towards "continuity, stability" (Zigon 2009:257). In my research context, however, hope became prevalent as an active method through which young female research participants aspired towards professionalism. I also depart from his conceptualisation of ethics.

Living a meaningful life means to "realize direction and value in what we do" (Lambek 2015b:8). I argue that my research participants have to balance and negotiate complex, juxtaposing and contradicting values in their everyday lives because they are imbedded in a dialectic with their respective social matrix. To make visible how they *did* balance and negotiate these different values, I turn now to a more specific lens through which I will analyse and interpret their narratives: my perspectives on ordinary ethics.

3.2 On Ordinary Ethics

In sub-chapter 2.3, I explained that I focus on ethics as a part of the ordinary, everyday life of young Seoulites and, following Webb Keane (2015) and Edward Fischer (2014), I want to draw attention to personalised thoughts and reflections about what is good or better, bad or worse, because people constantly judge and evaluate themselves and others in their everyday practices and activities by these premises. To understand how my research participants judged their own and other peoples' activities, and how certain situations, experiences and ideas became a matter of consideration, I need to define ethics. An ethical life is about values, taken because they are good in their own right (Keane 2015:133). Following Keane, I take ethics to centre on the question of how one should live. 'Should' directs attention to different, and often contradicting, values and puts forward young Seoulites' considerations and processes of negotiation, their judgement and reasoning as they chose between these diverse values. These processes of negotiation and consideration are ongoing because the question of how one should live comprises a "manner of life" rather than a momentary happening (Keane 2015:133).

These processes are "enacted through the dialectic of social life" (Stafford 2013:12), and the question of how one should live encompasses both young Seoulites' sense towards themselves, the self-cultivation they enact, and their flourishing in the sense of virtue ethics (see also Laidlaw 2014, Lambek 2010b), as well as the social rules – the 'duty' towards society – they feel obliged to follow. Moreover, the question directs attention to the important function of the social relationships in their lives, "not just as objects of one's ethical concerns or acts but for the very recognizability of concerns or acts as falling within an ethical domain altogether" (Keane 2015:135).

Following Lambek et al. (2015), I suggest that ethics in my research participants' narratives never stand alone; there is no pure ethical quintessence to be studied or foregrounded. Rather, my research participants presented me with descriptions of situations and experiences that made ethical questions explicit, that called for an "ethical evaluation" (Keane 2015:144). Thus, although I acknowledge the tacit dimension, embodied knowledge, and unselfconsciousness psychological processes that ethics comprises (Keane 2015, but especially Keane 2016), I centre my perspective on the dimensions of conscious awareness and reflection, my research participants' judgement and reasoning and thus, will ask questions such as what kind of practices

do they judge as conflicting and have to find a balance between, when does ethics become explicit.

In this part of the chapter, I first explain and conceptualise how I understand this explicitness. None of my research participants except for Eun-ji mentioned the term ethics. Rather, they talked about what a fair education system should be like, why they valued or were critical of the collection of 'Spec,' how they perceived themselves in their married life and the principles they wanted to follow, and the self-cultivation they enacted on their skills and even bodies to become professionals in their respective fields. In the following section, I delve more deeply into reflections about judgement, reflexivity and evaluation that were central in the narratives of my research participants and through which I can interpret their ethical considerations. Finally, I reflect on how to understand the role of others in their considerations because they always expressed these considerations about how they should live in relationship to their social matrices – family, friends, colleagues or fellow students.

3.2.1 Different Stances and the Explicitness of Ethics

In their narratives, my research participants related different situations and events they had experienced or explained to me their thoughts, reflections, and judgement. Most of the time, they narrated from a point of view that Keane (2015:129) calls the "first-person stance": they explained to me how they understood theirs and other people's actions. Sometimes, however, they changed their perspectives and took a self-distancing point of view. Keane (2015:129) calls this position "third-person stance." Yet another stance became apparent in our interviews: the "second-person stance" (Keane 2015:164). My research participants always voiced their reflections in relation to others, sometimes parents and friends, sometimes a vague 'them'. In my ethnographic approach to ethics, I consider the tension between the first-, second-, and third-person stances and how the dialectic between these stances makes ethics explicit.

The first-person stance is most prominent in my ethnographic accounts. However, Keane (2015:129) notes that it is limited: "If we privilege people's self-understanding, how can we justify any critical perspective at all that departs from people's self-interested grasp of things?" People do engage critically from a third-person perspective, using known ethical vocabularies and concepts (Keane 2015:164). These concepts and descriptions are publicly known and used to characterise certain acts or events as "posing a distinctively ethical question (rather than, say, a question of practical efficiency)" (Keane 2015:137), or to portray a person as having distinctive ethical qualities. Furthermore, they play a critical role in people's capacity to reflect. People use the concepts they know (third-person stance) to help them understand their subjective experiences (first-person stance). At the same time, the reflections about subjective experiences (the first-person stance) help to induce and to develop the stance as distant observer (third-person stance) who voices critical questions (Keane 2015:138).

The second-person stance is important in this process of reflection. This stance describes the social interactions people engage in; "[t]he second-person is someone who addresses me, and whom I address" (Keane 2015:165). In these interactions, people access "generic terms" (Keane 2015:164) such as dignity, respect, or fairness. That is, I (first-person stance) address another person (second-person stance) by using the concepts I know from a third-person perspective. For example, while talking with me about the education system, my research participants criticised other people by using publicly known ethical vocabularies to discuss how they thought education should actually develop.

Social interactions are the "natural home of justifications, excuses, accusations, reasons, praise, blame, and all the other ways in which ethics comes to be made explicit" (Keane 2015:138), because it is especially in social interactions that the self must account to someone else. That is, for example, a person has to take responsibility for his or her actions, so others can understand the purpose and intention. In palpable social interactions – either face-to-face or through other forms of communication – people describe situations and activities that "call for ethical evaluation" (Keane 2015:144); that is, they are judged to need an account. It is in the dynamics of social interaction that people's "self-understanding as ethical beings" (Keane 2015:141) is developed and sometimes even verbalised, as was most explicitly the case in Eun-ji's narrative. When Eun-ji spoke about her neighbourhood in Seoul, she stressed the dominance of economic values, values of appearance and political influence. She judged this situation as ethically wrong and emphasised that practices of kindness and friendliness should characterise community life.

Thus, although a third party was never present at our interviews, my research participants always addressed their social surroundings because it was living in social relations that brought about judgement, evaluation, and reasoning. But just as the first-person stance has its limits, so does the third-person stance (Keane 2015). For example, while my research participants critically evaluated their social matrices using a publicly known ethical vocabulary, they also saw the values behind other people's actions and emphasised the respect they felt towards 'others'.

Thus, Keane (2015:166) describes a dynamic, even a tension, between people's self-understanding – the first-person stance – and people's critical reflections from an outside perspective – the third-person stance. People "are embedded in social relationships that are crucial to their sense of self-worth. But they are also purposeful agents who respond to the ideas and arguments their social histories have produced and are prone to contributing new ones" (Keane 2015:168).

The impossibility of overcoming this tension might also lead people to "make new ethical discoveries and inventions" (Keane 2015:168). People's self-understandings can take place in retrospect or be reconstructed, and the process of ethical self-awareness can "lead to ethical discoveries and innovations, as people respond to newly apparent affordances in themselves, in the ideas, practices, and institutions their context makes available" (Keane 2015:141). Thus, ethics can provide people with goals rather than putting restrictions on their actions. I take this tension, and the processes

of negotiation and balancing it requires, as central aspects in my research participants' imagination, anticipation, planning and hope for their futures, and I want to foreground especially the possibility of ethics to provide goals for a good life.

However, Keane (2015) and Fischer (2014) remind anthropologists that the meaningful projects of research participants do not have to be positive from the ethnographer's view. As Laidlaw (2014:3) notes: "The claim on which the anthropology of ethics rests is not an evaluative claim that people are good: it is a descriptive claim that they are evaluative."

With this caution in mind, let me elaborate further on people's reflexivity, the judgement and evaluation they enact, and the role of others in this process.

3.2.2 Reflexivity and Judgement

Laidlaw (2002) and Lambek (2010a, 2010b) argue that thought, reflexivity and judgement are necessary conditions through which ethics becomes explicit. In specifying how an anthropology of ethics could be conceptualised, Laidlaw (2002, 2014) turns to the later Foucault and his concept of technologies of the self:

> [T]echniques which permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on. Let's call this kind of techniques a techniques [sic] or technology of the self. (Foucault 1993:203)

As I discussed in sub-chapter 2.2, anthropologists working on neoliberalism have made extensive use of Foucault's technologies of the self to show how young people adopt practices of self-management and self-discipline and conduct themselves under specific power relations in the broader context of governmentality. Yet, Foucault conceptualised these technologies of self-fashioning as "practice of freedom" [19] (Laidlaw 2002:322, see Foucault 1991) and Laidlaw (2002, 2014) emphasises that Foucault characterised the practice of freedom as a process, summarised in four questions:

> First (ontology), what is the part of oneself that is the object of thought and work? […] Second (deontology), what are the ways in which people position themselves in relation to their ideals […] or rules? […] Third (ascetics), what form does one's self-forming activity take? […] Fourth (teleology), what is the mode of being the subject aims to achieve? (Laidlaw 2014:103–104)

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[19] Michael Lambek (2015a:2) critically discusses the term freedom, preferring to speak of "underdeterminism."

These questions illustrate Foucault's understanding that human nature changes as the individual answers and acts upon these questions.

However, Laidlaw (2002:323) stresses that freedom as exercise is different from freedom as achievement of one's interests. And of course, freedom does not mean the absence of power relations[20]. Instead, the concept of freedom is one "of a definite, historically produced kind. There is no other kind" (Laidlaw 2002:323). That is, to exercise freedom means that the individual human forms him- or herself with practices drawn from his or her specific local and historical setting.

The young Seoulites who participated in my research found in their respective social matrices the freedom to think and reflect about how they should live; they could question certain practices and use techniques to modify their skills and knowledge to move towards their definition of perfection.[21] Following Laidlaw, I emphasise that these young Seoulites formed their selves in the dialectic of different practices, and they were able to reflect about the person they wanted to become in this dialectic. As Laidlaw (2002:324) puts it: "actively answering the ethical question of how or as what one ought to live is to exercise this self-constituting freedom."

Ethics, in Foucault's notion, is the conscious exercise of freedom by engaging in reflection (Foucault 2000, Laidlaw 2002). Reflective thought allows for objectification, which "facilitates praise and blame, explanation and excuses, and the disciplining of self and other" (Keane 2010:69). Presenting something or someone as an object of thought to oneself means bringing the regular, the usual, the "habitual and taken-for-granted" to consciousness; that is, the everyday life is (differently) described again (Keane 2015:159).

Once people express concepts, ideas, or practices, they become the subject of other people's awareness and can be generalised. "It is being able to take the third-person stance (my feelings are an instance of a general category) *and* reasserting the first-person stance (those feelings are mine) in a new context" (Keane 2015:160, original emphasis). However, Keane emphasises that these explicit ideas, concepts and practices do not automatically lead to a coherent system. Rather, he stresses that although reflective thought can have a "catalyzing role" in the production of knowledge that makes people react to themselves and others (Keane 2016:14), it is not necessary for an ethical life per se. He proposes analysing reflection and thought not as isolated facts, which might convey "preexisting cognitive or emotional dispositions, moral codes, ethical precepts, cultural values, or social categories" (Keane 2016:26); rather, he treats them as one element out of others of an ethical life. He proposes the concept 'affordance' to show that not just objects "but anything at all that people can experience, such as emotions, […] habitual practices, linguistic forms, laws,

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[20] Foucault (1991) was very consistent in speaking of power relations rather than power, and he emphasised that "if there are relations of power throughout every social field it is because there is freedom everywhere" (Foucault 1991:12).

[21] Laidlaw (2015) and Mair (2015) draw attention to concepts of self-management and self-discipline that already exist in particular social and cultural settings, thus questioning anthropologists' use of neoliberalism as inducing these technologies.

etiquette, or narratives, possess an indefinite number of combinations of properties" (Keane 2016:30) that people can draw on when they evaluate, judge, and decide.

Affordance refers to the properties of an object which lead to a specific use; yet, the possible uses are restricted physically as well as through cultural and social routines. Using the properties an object possess is a practical activity rather than induced through reflective thought (Keane 2016). For example, a chair's uses derive from the particular activity people seek to perform (from sitting, to blocking the door, or using it as ladder). The concept of affordance, however, is neither deterministic nor implies pure self-innovation. Rather, it allows us to understand "how the kinds of data found within the distinctive research traditions into humans' natural and social histories might be connected" (Keane 2016:31).

I consider the accumulation of 'Spec' to be an important example of affordance. Young Seoulites used the possibility to do certain activities and involve themselves in certain practices not only to enhance their qualifications but also, for example, to seek practical contact with the 'real world,' contrasted with the secluded life at university. Engaging in internships, voluntary work, or student jobs neither determined that they collected 'Spec' nor that they developed new ideas. My research participants used the experiences they made in these practices, the conversations they had during these practices, and the emotions they felt for processes of ethical evaluation. In the end, however, they had to negotiate with their social surroundings which practices and values to follow.

In everyday life, Lambek (2010a, 2010b) states, people have to constantly find a balance between different, even contradictory practices, or even move between them. Filial piety, for example, is not simple to cultivate. People must not only know what kind of piety is appropriate in a specific setting, they need also to balance filial piety with other practices, such as caring for their own offspring or being hard-working (Lambek 2010a:23).

People make decisions based first and foremost on judgement. Judgement can be first, oriented towards the future – the evaluation process of how to live and what to do. Second, it is formed in present circumstances – utilising what is at hand – and third, in retrospective – admitting what was done (Lambek 2010b:43). However, judgement must be based on criteria. While Keane (2015) writes that people draw on public categories and descriptions, Lambek (2010b) stresses practices and performative acts as origins that establish criteria and make them recognisable. Drawing on ritual theory, he clarifies that a ritual consists of "the conjunction of indexical and canonical dimensions," that is, "me undergoing it here and now ('indexical'), and that it is these previously inscribed and relatively unchangeable ('canonical') utterances and acts […] that I hereby repeat" (Lambek 2010b:45). In other words, rituals establish a state of affairs (criteria) which I, as participant, accept (message and form). I build up a commitment to exactly these criteria and not alternative ones, which I consequently use to judge other people and myself. Lambek states that this understanding can be applied to everyday situations, and he turns to acts and

speeches in ordinary life. He argues that it is through acts and language "understood as illocutionary performance" (2010b:63) that criteria are established.

An illocutionary performance describes the performance of an action by means of an utterance (Regenbogen and Meyer 2013:307, see also Austin 1975). A wedding ceremony is an example of an illocutionary performance: it realises the condition of being married. It follows certain criteria; however, it "does not determine whether people remain 'faithful' or practice 'adultery'" (Lambek 2010b:39), although it does inform other people's evaluation of the spouses' actions. But, Lambek (2010b:39) states, "practice also inevitably reveals the inadequacy of such acts and limits of criteria and descriptions, especially their vulnerability to scepticism, and hence the need to start anew." Practical judgement can produce new performances, which can develop into formal declarations and thus become established as publicly held knowledge (Lambek 2010b:56).

Nevertheless, the ethical not only includes a good and wise judgement but also a commitment to the pursued path, method, criteria or object of ambition (Lambek 2010b:55). Having chosen a person to marry, to remain in this context, one cannot simply engage in another relationship, or at least the act would be evaluated in a certain way. Keane (2015:168) notes that "[e]thical life is not just a matter of knowing the rules of the game, something any idle bystander might accomplish as well: It is being committed enough to that game to care how it turns out." Lambek (2010a:21) emphasises that it is not about winning a game but about striving for excellence in both specific and general practices – that is, living a meaningful life.

However, sometimes people begin to feel that the criteria underlying a practice are not sufficient any more, or they feel the absence of criteria at all, as was the case when some of my research participants judged wedding ceremonies as mere pomp, an opportunity to show off. "Performance then takes place on thin ice, appearing as 'mere' or 'staged' performance, and sometimes the ice begins to melt" (Lambek 2010b:59). Acknowledgment, avowal but also disavowal are central elements in this process, and judgement can function as mediator between obligation on the one hand, and freedom on the other (Lambek 2010a:25–26). In the end, young Seoulites had to find an agreement with the values of their social matrices. They needed to reconcile old practices with new ways of doing things, and they had to live with the consequences of their activities.

Next, I elaborate further on the crucial role of social relations in these processes of reflection, judgement and commitment and how I understand culture in ordinary ethics.

3.2.3 Culture and the Importance of Social Relations

Above, I described how Keane (2015) argued that ethical questions become explicit in the relationship with others. Reflecting on how anthropologists view the relation between morality and the social, Laidlaw (2014:21) states that "anthropologists have often deemed practices and processes 'moral' simply because and insofar as they have

the effect of strengthening collective cohesion, and values 'moral' just because they are shared, or collectivist in content." Joel Robbins (2007), who alludes to Laidlaw's (2002) approach towards ethics, illustrates one way to conceptualise culture in ordinary ethics.

Criticising the concept of morality that anthropologists employ, Robbins (2007:294) remarks that "when every observance of a collectively held rule of etiquette is as much a moral act as is refraining from killing someone who has injured you, there seems to be little to say about morality beyond the obvious claims about the force of culture in guiding behaviour." Robbins (2007:294) argues against a "conflation of the moral and the cultural or social" in anthropological approaches to describe daily practices. Rather, he emphasises the importance of culture by employing the concept of freedom Laidlaw (2002) developed, and he stresses the space cultures create for reflective thought and choice-making.

Robbins argues for a concept of culture centred on values because it allows the ethnographer to analyse the tension between freedom and social requirements, makes visible the particular circumstances and situations where cultural actors can choose, and illustrates the ethical dimension such situations present for the actor (Robbins 2007:296). He emphasises that the room for choice comes into being when otherwise hierarchically ordered values that organise social life come into conflict with each other.

The young Seoulites I met expressed the view that the things that were meaningful to them contradict with those of their parents, friends, and society more generally, inducing, I suggest, a conflict between values. Unlike stable value conflicts found for example in religious systems, I attend to value conflicts that "arise as a result of change" (Robbins 2007:300–301). As Robbins (2007:301) notes, anthropologists are "more sophisticated when it comes to ferreting out cultural continuities" than in attending thoroughly to cultural change.

Vanessa May (2011) is very critical about sociologists' presentation of and approach towards social change, and although she specifically discusses sociological literature, her evaluation is worth noting here as anthropologists frequently draw on sociologists such as Zygmunt Baumann (2000) or Ulrich Beck (1992) in their analyses. May critically stresses that these works often present the past as "fixed and stable" where social structures determined and predicted the individual life (May 2011:363). In contrast, uncertainty and insecurity characterise a modern present; it is "fluid and unpredictable" (May 2011:363) – "liquid" as Baumann (2000) named it – leading to processes of "individualization and social fragmentation" (May 2011:365) because guiding structures eroded. May (2011:367) critically states that these findings overstress not only the stability of the past but also the significance of social structures on the personal life, and she emphasises "the creative ways in which people interact with pre-existing social structures." Anthropologists such as Elfriede Hermann (2003) and Dorinne Kondo (1990) show that people always conceptualise their selves in relation to others. Hermann (2003) argues that both processes of identification with the Other – sameness is stressed in discourses and practices – *and*

processes of differentiation from the Other – a distance is foregrounded in discourses and practices – constitute the self in social relations (Hermann 2003:77–78). She emphasises that "differentiations, long seen as characteristic of the egocentric model ascribed to Western societies, are also able to express relationality – particularly when they are integrally and reciprocally linked to manifold identifications" (Hermann 2003:85).

Kondo (1990:34), in her study of a Japanese workplace, criticises anthropological approaches that treat the self as a bounded entity with a fixed identity. She stresses that "identity is not a static *object* but a creative *process*" and that "human beings create, construct, work on, and enact their identities, sometimes creatively challenging the limits of the cultural constraints which constitute both what we call selves and the ways those selves can be crafted" (Kondo 1990:48, original emphasis).

Transformation of the self and social change can occur for diverse reasons, for example when new values become important or the ordered hierarchy of old values is reorganised. Lambek (2010b:59) invokes the image of melting ice to illustrate when people feel that specific criteria are not reliable anymore and they start to question the legitimacy of practices. Keane (2015) speaks of a loss of a sense of shared reality when disagreements arise in social interactions. Didier Fassin (2014, 2015) illustrates that political commitment and philosophical understandings are situations which invoke someone to step back and question oneself. In any case, social change threatens established power relations and conflict arises. I take dissent to centre on values that conflict, juxtapose or contradict each other. Such conflict becomes the norm during times of value change and people feel their actions to be strongly ethical during such periods (Robbins 2007). People develop a higher sensitivity to morality, and ethics becomes a central theme in everyday live. Conflicting values are negotiated in social interactions – ranging from highly loaded circumstances of, for example, political or religious significance to more banal moments in everyday interactions where one wants to "be seen as normal" (Keane 2015:143).

Robbins (2007) suggests that anthropologists should not only analyse values but also focus their attention on their reproduction, on narratives that foreground morality as well as freedom and possibilities to choose, and Laidlaw (2014:23) stresses that anthropologists should not assume the role of values as "functional devices for social control" but rather ask why people hold (old and emerging) values as important.

In my approach towards the substance of local values, I attend to the good and to the meaning young Seoulites give their practices. As Lambek (2010a:23) notes: "culture is a matter of passionate engagement rather than passive contemplation." I aim to show how practices motivate young Seoulites and how they find pleasure in them.

3.3 On Money

I take money to be another quality of the ordinary because it is a basic need in our present world and a necessary precondition in the everyday lives of young Seoulites. As Eun-ji emphasised, "money is one of the biggest problems." I understand money not only to be necessary for consuming goods and services but, as James Ferguson (2015:137) puts it, "a need so basic that it must be in place before a range of crucial forms of social relations and social beings can even exist." Following Ferguson (2015), I want to emphasise the mutual relationship between money and the social, and challenge oppositions such as interest vs. disinterest, selfish calculation vs. altruism, that often characterise the literature on money. Then, how do I define money? Following Emily Gilbert (2005), I understand money to be a means that makes exchange possible, as a store of value, as a symbolic reference, *and* as a complex social whole. This explanation seems to be contradictory, but money is a paradox. People use money in different times and places; money both circulates through and constitutes social hierarchies and contexts (Gilbert 2005). Reflecting these diverse functions, anthropologists differentiate between so-called general-purpose money, which enables at least three of these purposes, and so-called special-purpose money, which allows only one or two of these tasks (Maurer 2006:20). Yet, Parry and Bloch (1989) argue that money's diverse economic functions mean that the ethnographer cannot know its meanings in advance. Instead, money derives its meaning from the diverse ways it is used as medium of exchange, unit of account, and store of value. To understand what money means for my research participants, I turn to money's pragmatics: Who is using money in which situations? Which values do young Seoulites express through using money? Accordingly, my theoretical perspectives concentrate on considerations about money which situate it as "social fact" (Mauss 2015:27). In the following, I first present how I conceptualise the diverse ways money is invested before describing my perspective on the relationship between money, commodities and value.

3.3.1 The Common Use of Money

Money in South Korea is a state-issued currency made visible in the head and tail of a South Korean Won coin. The head symbolises the state, signifying that the state issues and backs up its currency and illustrating the relationship between the state and the South Korean society – it is a token (Hart 1986). The tail side underlines "the coin as a thing, capable of entering into definite relations with other things, as a quantitative ratio independent of the person engaged in any particular transaction" (Hart 1986:638). These two sides materially express that money *is* a social organisation.[22]

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[22] Keith Hart (1986) criticises the tendency of social scientists to separate money into its functions as

Yet, Maurer (2015) emphasises that the common understanding of money as means of exchange disconnects it from social relations. In my research, I follow Maurer (2015) and particularly focus on money's function as means of payment because in their everyday practices, young Seoulites used money for the purpose of acquiring tickets for a baseball game to take out parents on a free Sunday afternoon, paying tuition fees to accomplish the social standard of higher education, or buying new clothes to look appropriate to others. Approaching money as means of payment allows me to study the diverse relationships of these young Seoulites and the values they assigned to them, the practices involved in transferring values, and the networks their use of money comprises.

So-called modern money is a "single currency" (Zelizer 1997:22) and its function as means of payment makes it look like it is culturally neutral, but the particular ways money is represented depend on specific cultural and social conceptions (Parry and Bloch 1989). Zelizer (1997) argues that money is used widely outside the sphere of the market and that a distinction between a monetary sphere and a non-pecuniary sphere of value artificially narrows the diverse ways money is employed. Furthermore, she questions the uniformity of money and maintains that people make multiple monies in their everyday practice. These can be indivisible and divisible, exchangeable and unexchangeable – in other words, "qualitatively heterogeneous" (Zelizer 1997:19). Thus, money's purported power to change whole societies is eventually restricted by the latter (Zelizer 1997:19).

Following Viviana Zelizer (1997), I stress that young Seoulites use money differently according to their diverse social relations, which they attribute with various meanings and values. They "earmark" money (Zelizer 1997:5). In their everyday practices, these young people designated the state-issued currency for a particular purpose: to establish, express, restrict and/or separate their network of social relations. Thus, although the state-issued Won is transferable, my research participants attempted "to embed money in particular times, places, and social relations" (Zelizer 1997:18).

In my discussion below, I show how Hyun-ae tried to improve the relationship with her parents by using money to "create and dissolve social ties" (Zelizer 1997:26), and I describe and analyse Yun's wedding to show how the importance of the ritual is marked through gift money. Zelizer (1997:25) emphasises that "people adopt especially elaborate controls over money and establish differential earmarks when and where they are engaged in delicate or difficult social interactions" rather than "individual random preferences."[23] Yet, she reasons that the amount of money is less important in these specific circumstances than its source. Following Marilyn

token and as commodity, reducing it either to its form or to its substance respectively. Here, he refers to the debate between substantivists and formalists (see for example Martin Rössler 1999 for an overview of the different viewpoints).

[23] Geoffrey Ingham (2001) criticises Zelizer's approach because she "overstates" the social meaning of money at the expense of an analysis of the functions of money in the economic sphere, a distinction which he finds "unhelpful" (2001:313). Yet, I think that the embeddedness of so-called modern

Strathern (1992), I suggest that it is both the amount and money's history that determine the 'right' money to spend in such contexts. In the case of Yun's wedding, it was not only 'good' money that marks a socially important rite when it changed hands, but the amount depended on the relationship the respective guest had with Yun and the value of that relationship was made visible through a detailed account keeping.

Thus, questions about how people distinguish between monies, when and for what reason, and how people act when earmarking money emerge, and the anthropologist needs to understand the rules of money's diverse usages (Zelizer 1997).

In emphasising money's function as means of payment that is nevertheless differently invested and whose usage is culturally and socially restricted, I challenge the common assumption that it is simply *a* commodity that is exchanged with money. Appadurai (2016:2) suggests that "money is by definition the most abstract form in which value of commodities can be expressed." I argue that the diverse ways money is used express the values of my research participants. Let me explain how I conceptualise the relationship between money, value and the commodity.

3.3.2 Money and Commodities

Appadurai (1986) critically notes that anthropologists tend to be highly dualistic in their approach to describing money in exchange relations. In analysing shopping in North London, Daniel Miller (2001) contests the dichotomy of money-less and altruistic reciprocity – usually described as gift exchange – and self-interested and money-determined consumption as follows:

> The first of these spheres is based on an explicit classification and representation of social relationships in terms of money. It allows people to develop highly rationalist and instrumental perspectives based on explicit calculation, perspectives that are employed in the process of selection. This sphere is gift exchange. It exists in opposition to the second form of exchange, which is based on the use of commodities that are not translated into gifts. In this sphere, which I call 'provisioning,' the primary agenda appears to call for either the creation or the acknowledgment of a transcendent goal in life that might well be termed the spirit of the inalienable. There are many elements within commodity exchange that seem to negate the elements of calculation, individualism, monetization, and explicit rationalism that are most characteristic of the gift. (Miller 2001:91)

Miller stresses that the tendency of anthropologists to separate the instrumental sphere from the social sphere leads to a reduction of the complexities of social relations and the role commodities play in these relations. He stresses further that cri-

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money in social relations cannot be overstated because it is so widely neglected in anthropological research.

tiques of consumption are especially directed at shopping for 'unnecessary' objects, such as clothes, make-up, or luxury goods, while provisioning, by contrast, redirects the use of resources back to the society through the domestic sphere and is thus viewed positively.

Miller challenges this distinction and argues that shopping for seemingly unnecessary things often includes thoughts and responsibilities beyond 'hedonistic' individual desires, and he argues that the social relations in which the individual human being is embedded *create* the need for these 'unnecessary' goods. For instance, people have to consider "wider obligations," that is for example, "whether the shopper should buy goods that suggest a desire to 'age gracefully' or insist on retaining clothing styles that now embarrass her teenage daughter" (Miller 2001:111). In contrast to the exchange of gifts in which social relations are primarily classified, the act of shopping "is a continual practice that objectifies relationships" (Miller 2001:108) and also aims to improve them.[24] Shopping for seemingly unneeded things is a "process of value creation and not merely one of passive acquiescence to capitalist motivation or mindless hedonism" (Miller 2001:109). Miller argues that this characteristic allows for 'the social life of things' as described by Appadurai (1986). I want to give substance to this argument with an elaboration of Appadurai's approach towards commodities.

In analysing economic exchange, Appadurai (1986) proposes that anthropologists should focus on the exchanged objects rather than the function or form of exchange. He suggests that exchanged commodities incorporate value. However, this is not an inherent property of commodities but is created through people's judgements about the respective commodities (see also Guyer 2004).

Commodities are usually distinguished from other objects based on the assumption that the former only exist in capitalist societies in connection to a capitalist mode of production. Appadurai, however, proposes "that commodities are things with a particular type of social potential" (Appadurai 1986:6), which he distinguishes from products, objects or goods to the extent that an object becomes a commodity – transfers into a "commodity state" – when the social circumstances make it relevant for the thing to be exchanged against another thing (Appadurai 1986:13).[25] The historically and culturally prescribed notion of exchange declares certain objects to be potential commodities. In any case, the life biography of an object is not restricted to its commodity phase; rather, it is regulated and restricted in the respective social setting, which resembles the restriction and control of money referred to by Zelizer (1997).

Appadurai's explanations show that local and social conceptions determine whether an object becomes a commodity or not, which implies that not only do commodities differ from social context to social context, but so do forms of ex-

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[24] Miller (2001:108) notes, however, that an improvement of these relationships is difficult to achieve because persons are also subjectified in the practice of shopping and cannot "live up to the ideal."
[25] He uses the concept of 'lifespan' to illustrate the different states objects can occupy.

change. The underlying principles of these conceptions are values, and Appadurai summarises the complexity and diversity of values that characterise exchange with the concept 'regimes of value'. However, he stresses that this concept "does *not* imply that every act of commodity exchange presupposes a complete cultural sharing of assumptions, but rather that the degree of value coherence may be highly variable from situation to situation" (Appadurai 1986:15, original emphasis). As individuals, people unevenly apply cultural and social standards and criteria to commodities, as the example of Miller (2001) above illustrates. Young Seoulites invested their money differently due to their diverse social relations and the commodities they bought were – locally and socially – appropriate objects that expressed the value of these social relations.

Yet, just as the use of money is restricted through local and social notions, so too is exchange in so-called capitalist societies restricted through coupons, licences, and fashion (Appadurai 1986). Zelizer (1997) states that coupons are a form of money. Appadurai, however, argues that although licences and coupons echo money, they cannot function as medium of exchange due to specific qualities: licences can only be obtained under certain limited and controlled conditions. These conditions create a relationship of dependence which strengthens power relations. Societies in which licenses and coupons are used seek to reduce competition "in the interests of fixed patterns of status" (Appadurai 1986:25). Conversely, fashion is a "functional equivalent but technical inversion" (Appadurai 1986:25) of licences and coupons. In societies where status systems are protected through fashion, it is taste that is restricted.

I suggest that certificates and qualifications are part of the domain of licences and I refer especially to these two forms in my approach. Certificates and qualifications are exchanged in "restricted systems of community flow" (Appadurai 1986:25). They are not straightforward commodities; rather, they share characteristics with the gift – "insensitivity to supply and demand, a high coding in terms of etiquette and appropriateness, and a tendency to follow socially set paths" – *and* their exchange resembles commerce (Appadurai 1986:25).

As the name implies, certificates and fashion both play central roles in the construction of the 'Spec Generation'. On the one hand, certificates restrict access to highly valued institutions, such as top-tier universities or conglomerates. On the other hand, gossip articulates what clothes are appropriate to buy and wear in young Seoulites' respective social matrices. Yet another kind of commodity becomes significant in the restriction of status systems: luxury goods. Luxury goods, Appadurai proposes, are goods "whose principal use is *rhetorical* and *social,* goods that are simply *incarnated signs. The* necessity to which *they* respond is fundamentally political" (Appadurai 1986:38, original emphasis). He stresses that luxuries are not specific commodities but rather that commodities can become luxuries in a specific context. Among other characteristics, luxury goods are highly restricted – although not necessarily short in supply – to specific groups of people and the consumption of luxuries is linked to the consumer's "body, person, and personality" (Appadurai 1986:38). They are highly complex in their semiotic representation of social relations, and

people need specific knowledge in order to appropriately send and receive the message – that is, the underlying meaning of luxury goods.

"The distinction between humble commodities and more exotic ones is thus not a difference in kind, but most often a difference in demand over time or, sometimes, a difference between loci of production and those of consumption" (Appadurai 1986:40). This demand, like the demand for ordinary products, is regulated through an agreement about what is and is not desirable, what is a reasonable price and, most importantly, who is allowed to demand goods under what circumstances. Luxury goods such as designer handbags were a favoured gift during my research stay, but they were only given in specific contexts, such as for the bride on a wedding day or for graduation from university. Although they were desired objects to acquire because they convey a certain meaning, my research participants emphasised that the social evaluation and judgement about the appropriateness to wear them were very high.

Thus, money, licenses and fashion are not only signs that convey a specific meaning; they also generate "actions, consequences, and possibilities" (Keane 2005:184). Keane stresses that the social and historical dimension of signification, that is, "causation and contingency, as well as […] openness to further causal consequences" constitute the "logic of signification" (Keane 2005:186), and he emphasises in particular the processual character of signs. That is, "signs give rise to new signs" (Keane 2005:186), and there exist diverse relations between a sign, people's reading of it and an object (Keane 2005:186). Specific, historically grounded, semiotic ideologies determine what counts as a sign, how people interpret a sign and what they infer about its meaning and purpose. However, these semiotic ideologies do not present a totalising context of reference for objectification but instead are "vulnerable, not least by their exposure to the openness of things" (Keane 2005:194). As discussed above, the chair "invites" (Keane 2005:194) us to sit down, but it does not determine the actual usage.

Keane argues that things always embody a bundle of qualities – qualities that are bound up by ways of contingency rather than logic – and things possess these qualities with or without being taken to be an icon. "Since all objects have qualities, any given object potentially resembles *something*. This means any object can suggest possible future uses or interpretations" (Keane 2005:189, original emphasis). The openness of things for iconicity allows for a thing to be taken as symbol which is, however, determined by larger social values.

It is this openness of things that allows for the development of new practices and habits. For example, Keane draws attention to the limited ability of clothes to change people. Instead, he stresses that "the experience of comfort and discomfort, both physical […] and social" (Keane 2005:192) cannot be separated from clothes, but have "little to do with meaning, expression, identity, nor even […] some universal phenomenology of bodily experience" (Keane 2005:192). Clothes enable people to show a certain surface – a specific practice or skill – but it is still a surface. Thus, just as Miller (2001) reversed the meanings of gifts and commodities, Keane argues that

clothes do not make an intangible meaning tangible but rather that their texture, form, and "practical capacities" (Keane 2005:193) create the possibilities of intangible meaning in the first place. Nevertheless, "the outcome is not settled" (Keane 2005:193). For Keane, the futurity of material signs is important, and he emphasises that a certain style or a new piece of clothing can provide orientation for the future and that it "invites new projects" (Keane 2005:193). Thus, what needs to be explained, he argues, is how clothes come to be viewed as having a meaning in the first place.

Keane's (2005) considerations complement Appadurai's (1986) and Miller's (2001) approaches towards consumption in general, and licences and fashion in particular, and further strengthen the argument that consumption is a highly "social, relational and active rather than private, atomic, or passive" process (Appadurai 1986:31). I suggest that my research participants' diverse uses of money as means of payment in their everyday lives express their values.

I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, following Clifford Geertz (1993), that theory is needed to make thick description possible. However, thick description needs thorough fieldwork. In the last part of this chapter, I reflect on my methodological approach and how I came to the interpretations that I elaborate in the ethnographic chapters.

3.4 Doing Anthropology in the City

'I Seoul U,' with a red and a blue dot in between, has been the capital city's logo since 2016.[26] It was selected in a cooperation between the Seoul Metropolitan Government and the city's citizens through a contest and is currently used as identifying marker for the capital city. Modified for diverse contexts the meaning remains:

> Between people, there is Seoul. Between 'you' and 'I,' among citizens and among people all around the world […] Seoul is a city where diverse nationalities and generations, mountains and rivers, ancient palaces and skyscrapers, and all disparate elements coexist in harmony. […] It is a picture of Seoul connecting between the differences.[27]

The 'o' in Seoul is replaced with the Korean ㅇ consonant to symbolise the local, regional and global connection emphasised in the quotation, a red and blue dot separating Seoul from I and U represent passion and relaxation. The logo captures

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[26] The website of the Seoul Metropolitan Government provides various forms of the logo, see http://english.seoul.go.kr/policy/culture-tourism/iseoulu/ (accessed 19 January 2021).

[27] Seoul Metropolitan Government: I • SEOUL • U (http://english.seoul.go.kr/policy/culture-tourism/iseoulu/, accessed 19 January 2021).

Figure 2: I • SEOUL • U sign at Yeoeuido Park in Seoul. Photo by surachat treekidakorn / Shutterstock.com.

diverse themes, aspirations and understandings of the city. I use it to introduce my methodological reflections and the urban context in which I did my research.

Translated into the context of my methodology, the I and U of Seoul's logo could be interpreted as a form of difference, as 'us' and 'them,' where the 'us' is the anthropologist and the 'them' is the 'native' (see Appadurai 1988). In the first part of this section, I challenge this dichotomy. My research participants belonged to the urban middle classes. All of them had graduated from high school and most of them where enrolled or had finished university education. Thus, they were all highly educated, and some were even anthropologists themselves or had at least done some coursework in the discipline. Thus, rather than seeing my research participants as "natural units of difference" (Marcus 2011:19), I understand them as being in a process themselves, defined by a "system of relations," "moving between and constituting 'sites,'" making their knowledge (and lack of it) an "object of explicit reflection" (Marcus 2011:19). My field depended on their self-positioning, their movements and their reflections, which I followed physically and verbally (see Coleman and Collins 2006). However, the field is not a natural given but is always made. In the next section, I use an "auto-ethnography" (Jaffe and de Koning 2016:15) to reflect on my position, interactions and experiences in 'the field'. Here, I want to draw attention to my "sensory experiences" (Culhane 2017:46), which I connect, again, to a methodological interpretation of Seoul's logo. The pronunciation of Seoul in English is the same as the word soul. Thus, for me, the logo applies to the knowledge I embodied while living in Seoul with my heart and soul.

In the final section, I reflect on the process of writing this ethnography. My own position as subject with a history led me to write an ethnography from a particular point of view. As Kirsten Hastrup (1992:125) stresses: "What we write is the meaning of action and speech, not the actions and speeches themselves as events. And meaning is positioned." Thus, this chapter contains a lot of 'I's,' not to be mistaken for self-adoration but to show the reader the awareness through which I do anthropology (see Okely 1992, Hermann 2017).

3.4.1 On How I Got Access.
Or, Why Young Seoulites Had an Interest to Take Part in My Study

The Seoul Capital Area, comprising the capital city of Seoul and the neighbouring city Incheon and Gyeonggi-do, is one of the largest metropolitan areas in the world with nearly 26 million residents. Seoul capital city has 9.9 million residents and one of the highest population densities in the world.[28] I lived and worked primarily in the capital city Seoul.

Seoul is neither a static context for my research participants to live in nor a precise bounded locality in relation to its adjacent areas. Following Appadurai (1995), I approach Seoul as a locality that is constantly produced through the everyday lives of its residents, their idiosyncratic ways of movements, their connections and social relations. Setha Low (1996:384) conceptualises the urban as "a process rather than as a type or category," and Ananya Roy (2009:827) stresses that "[t]he 21st-metropolis is a chameleon. It shifts shape and size; margins become centres; centres become frontiers; regions become cities." The making and re-making of Seoul is based on the aspirations of its residents as well as its governance. Both the Seoul Metropolitan Government and the South Korean Government have plans for Seoul, especially regarding broader geopolitical aspirations and the global flow of capital. Seoul is produced through design and planning processes, which I will illustrate in sub-chapter 4.3 with regard to the production of Seoul as 'Global City' and 'City of Design'. Yet, the city cannot be reduced to a place of economic and global aspirations. It is a place where people live, work, and dream (see Roy 2009).

As diverse as their life trajectories were, the young Seoulites I met during my research had one thing in common: all of them were highly educated. All had, or were, in the process of completing either a bachelor or master's degree at one of Seoul's numerous universities, or they had finished vocational training. Some were social scientists themselves; others had taken courses in anthropology to enlarge their perspectives. All of them, however, knew what anthropology was and what I was doing in the field. They were not only highly educated, but were, like me, travellers. Almost all had travelled to neighbouring countries in East and Southeast Asia, and some of them travelled to study abroad in the USA or had travelled through Europe.

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[28] World Population Review: Seoul Population 2021 (http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/seoul-population/, accessed 19 January 2021).

And they were also highly cosmopolitan, having studied languages such as English, Japanese, Spanish, or German.[29]

I did not study the "usual protagonists or institutions of urban ethnographies" (Monge 2012:216), the 'subaltern' or 'marginalised'. In my research, I engaged with young people who belonged to South Korea's middle classes and thus shared a similar social position and possessed similar social and/or material resources as I did. Thus, I call my approach, with Ulf Hannerz (2004) and Sherry Ortner (2010), 'studying sideways' to acknowledge "the relative complicity between us and our informants, and […] our own elite status more fully" (Ortner 2010:223). Here, I especially stress the reflexivity with which young Seoulites viewed their everyday lives, their social position relating to status and power, the diverse narratives that constituted their social world, and how they presented their knowledge to me and commented on my questions and demanded my opinion. They would often ask 'don't you think so?' or question my preliminary findings. In an urban context, Rivke Jaffe and Anouk de Koning (2016:15) note, "informants are more likely to engage with and speak back to the anthropologist's findings and analyses." I worked with young interlocutors who welcomed, but also challenged me, and whom I think of as, with Marcus (2011), 'para-ethnographers'.

The term 'para-ethnographer' acknowledges that research participants are not just unchangingly situated in their specific social setting but are "in development – displaced, recombined, hybrid in the once popular idiom, alternatively imagined" (Marcus 2011:19). My research participants were engaged in "future-oriented cognitive practices" (Marcus 2011:31), that made them *knowledge-holders* as well as *knowledge-makers,* and sometimes they became my counterparts (cf. Coleman and von Hellermann 2011:5). This understanding questions the divide between 'us' and 'them' and stresses our interactions as a "genuine cooperation" (Ortner 2010:223). Thus, I emphasise that the participants in my fieldwork were selves that "also speak, think and know" (Salmond 1995:45); they had their own logics and interpretations that they used to make sense of their worlds.

Simon Coleman and Pauline von Hellermann (2011) note that there exists no natural field the ethnographer immerses into; rather, the field is made by the ethnographer her- or himself. Thus, they suggest the term 'fieldmaker' (Coleman and von Hellermann 2011:3). My field-making becomes visible in how I got to know my research participants and the chain of contacts I was able to establish. I was living in Seoul before I decided to do my Ph. D., first as graduate student doing a semester abroad, and then as Korean language student, both times attending Ewha Womans University. The relationships I developed during these years helped me to develop a

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[29] Following Glick Schiller, Darieva and Gruner-Domic, I understand cosmopolitism as "simultaneous rootedness and openness to shared human emotions, experiences, and aspirations" (2011:399). Rather than implying a dichotomy between what Hall (2008:347) named "cosmopolitanism from above," referring to the so-called mobile elite, and "cosmopolitianism from below," emphasising the enforced mobility of people, I stress these young Seoulites' capacity "to create social relations of inclusiveness and openness to the world" (Glick Schiller, Darieva and Gruner-Domic 2011:402).

chain of contacts with young working Seoulites. I was able to use the resources of my professorial contacts and fellow students to find research participants. I formulated a short text in which I explained my background and research, circulating it through the web resources of my university contacts:

> Dear Students,
> my name is Carolin Landgraf and I am a German Ph. D. student in Cultural and Social Anthropology at Georg-August-University Goettingen. At the moment I am doing the research for my dissertation here in Seoul and I wanted to ask you for your help.
> In my Ph. D. work, I am dealing with young people (age 20–26) who are facing life insecurities and uncertainty due to a newly emerged economic ideology called neoliberalism. This concept has an incredible influence not only on economic structures such as the job market, but also on social aspects and, therefore, on society as a whole. Especially young people have to deal with these new structures. The South Korean society has labelled their young people '880,000 Won Generation,' 'Give-up Generation,' 'New Generation' or 'Spec Generation' to characterise their lives in this new economic and social framework. But how do young people see themselves? That is what I am interested in and doing my research about: the self-perception of young South Koreans in times of neoliberalism. In my opinion, subsuming young people in a certain category means denying their diversity. Rather than being victims of neoliberalism, I think young people have developed various life designs and life strategies to cope with the changing environment. Therefore, I would like to talk with you and find out more about your life. How do you deal with social and economic insecurities, what life designs are you creating, what are your thoughts about the present and dreams for your future? I am interested in your experiences, feelings and hopes. How do you think about your life?

Finally, I participated in workshops that were associated with the university. The symposium "Reflection of 'University Students' through the Eyes of University Students," organised and undertaken by Yonsei University students, and several visits to Haja-Center, an alternative school founded by Yonsei Professor Cho Haejoang, helped me to make contact with young people. Thus, except for Ye-eun who worked as a silversmith, I found all my research participants through academic connections and channels. Subsequently, I conducted in-depth interviews with 20 young South Koreans living and studying/working in Seoul and 10 written interviews in the form of a survey. I began my interviews by asking my research participants about their personal biographies. In the next phase, I proceeded to specific questions with a thematic focus, such as marriage, and biographical accounts prevailed again in the narratives of my research participants. In the final phase, I discussed how my research participants saw their futures.

In order to understand the narratives of my interlocutors, I needed to be proficient in their language. Anthropologists Choi Jin sook (Choi 2010) draws attention to mis-communication that can arise between interviewee and interviewer, and she stresses the importance of vocabularies and words used in interviews. The wording of the questions asked, and the specific words used, play important roles in the communication process between researcher and research participant. Although my proficiency of spoken Korean was high enough to conduct interviews, I let my research participants decide which language to speak as they were highly skilled in English and even German. Thus, I ended up conducting interviews in Korean, English, and at one time a mix between Korean, English, and German.

Nevertheless, a research assistant transcribed the interviews. I met my research assistant Seon-ae regularly during my fieldwork to talk about the interviews I had given her, and I asked for her view on the subjects discussed. To guarantee the anonymity of my interviewees, I kept their names to myself. In this book, I use pseudonyms not only to protect my interviewees' privacy but so that the reader can follow them throughout the book as characters with their "particular quirks and idiosyncrasies" (Kondo 1990:46).

I should note that there is a gender imbalance in my research. As a young female researcher, I have found it easier to get to know female young Seoulites. This status has allowed me to gain insights on specific issues, while not on others. It influenced not only my interactions with young Seoulites, but also how I experienced the field-work as a whole (Okely 1992); a point I will address in the next chapter.

There also exist "slippages between the ethnographer and the para-ethnographer" (Mand 2011:50). Sometimes, I found it more fruitful to place myself as an apprentice, as for example when I met Bora, a young Seoulite who had responded to my announcement with the following email:

> Dear Carolin,
> I read your writing and got interested in your research.
> These days I feel so lost in my job searching.
> I'm not sure if I could give you the proper answer, but at least I could be very honest about this problem. And I think it would be helpful in terms of under-standing South Korean university students of these days.
> (Bora, email conversation 12.04.2013)

Bora presented herself as knowledge-holder who could not only answer my questions concerning 'the problem' but also help me to understand the viewpoint of South Korean university students. However, her response also shows that she had self-con-sciously reflected about 'the problem' in regard to her own situation, imagining her years after university. She positioned herself (cf. Bamberg 1997), making it clear she wanted to tell me certain conditions but not others. In our interviews we did not only talk about aspirations, imaginations, or hope for a good life. Often, hardship

and distress dominated the conversation. The tension between suffering and enjoyment runs like a thread through this dissertation, and sometimes I experienced a personal unease while listening to my interlocutors' narratives. Yet, this unease and the questions that emerged after I listened again and again to the interviews were not only an emotional reaction but a resource for my research – an illustration of the importance of interviews in anthropological research (Forsey 2010, Hermann 2017). Emphasising this importance, Forsey is critical of the overemphasis placed on sight in anthropology and argues that "ethnography is at least as much about conversation as it is about observation" (Forsey 2010:563). He proposes a "democracy of the senses" (Forsey 2010:562) and stresses the importance of "engaged listening" (Forsey 2010:567) in the research process. Similarly, Hermann proposes the method of "observing partial participation in discourses" (2017:53) to acknowledge interviews as valid method besides participant observation. "Deep listening" and careful note taking of "meanings assigned to concepts, discursive formations, and ways of acting" (Hermann 2017:53) are important tools for the ethnographer. Furthermore, Kondo draws attention to the changing and "complex negotiations over meaning" (1990:41), emphasising that the ethnographer should be attentive to power relations and context. However, Hermann stresses that the ethnographer can only partly participate in the discourses of her or his research participants because both the research participant and the researcher her- or himself set limits on the ethnographer's participation (Hermann 2017:68).

Nancy Abelmann stresses that "talk is an integral element in the constitution of social life; that talk is dialogic […] such that individual discourse reveals a dispersed, not centred, self; that conversation is integral in social change [and] imagination is constituted through narratives" (2003:11), and she makes no exception for the dialogue between the ethnographer and the research participant. The "life stories" (Peacock and Holland 1993) that these young Seoulites narrated to me as researcher were partial and "part of myriad processes involving numerous relationships and aspects in addition to that of the relationship to the ethnographer" (Peacock and Holland 1993:376). My interlocutors let me participate in their stories and discourses, but it was I who interpreted and analysed them. Thus, the unease and tension I felt during the interviews showed me that these young Seoulites were experiencing a tension themselves. They felt their social lives to be in tension, and I interpreted this tension as comprising ethical questions.

For my interviewees I was of course conceptualised as someone from 'there,' that is Germany; I was the foreigner, the *uigukin.* In most everyday encounters, people I met assumed I was from the US. When I introduced myself as an anthropologist from Germany, my image changed. Germany's recent history as a divided nation evoked the feeling of understanding the divided nation of North and South Korea. During interviews, I was asked if I was from West or East Germany, if I could recall the unification (which I could not because I was only six years old), and what I thought about the unification of the both Koreas. Germany (and Europe more

broadly) was also known for its welfare system, something especially Dae-hyun made me aware of, and some participants at the symposium "Reflection of 'University Students' through the Eyes of University Students" directly reflected about the difference between the rental system in Seoul and Germany. Some of my research participants had even learned German in high school or at university. The most frequent question I was asked, however, was how young people in Germany lived and how they experienced the changing working conditions. Thus, while my ethnic and social background positioned me as outsider, my similar position as a 'young adult' and the topic of my research made me a sort of insider, and my research participants could speak, like Bora did, openly.

3.4.2 On How I Participated. Or, How I Did Anthropology in the City

Seoul required me to change my rhythm of life. *Ppalli ppalli,* quick quick, often structured my fieldwork in the city; I had to learn how to move through the city. I embodied this knowledge (cf. Okely 1992) not through speech, but mostly through my senses. Here, I want to bring attention to how my own urban "positioning, experiences and interactions" (Jaffe and de Koning 2016:16) influenced my analysis. It is possible to reflect on the ethnographer's personal experiences in the field in diverse

Figure 3: Me in the Seoul Museum of Art (SeMA). Photo by Sungwoo Jung.

Figure 4: Window painting of a coffee shop. Photo by the autor.

ways,[30] but here I want to take the reader on "an urban tour" (Pink 2008) to show how I experienced Seoul through my senses and explain how I extended participation from a merely visual activity to my senses of hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching the urban (see also Clifford 1986, Pink 2009, Culhane 2017).

Coming back to Seoul was returning to a familiar place. However, coming back as researcher was very different from 'just being' in Seoul (see Wolcott 2005). Suddenly "everything was fieldwork" (Rabinow 2007:11), and I felt that fieldwork knows no regular working hours, break times or weekends. The 'work' in fieldwork already suggests a state of accomplishing a "productive, effortful activity" (Wolcott 2005:215) in both a physical and emotional sense. My favourite place to work was in coffee shops, which had become popular in Seoul and were found almost everywhere, but especially near universities, shopping malls, or other places that attracted large numbers of people. There were both franchise coffee shops with standardised interiors and coffee offerings as well as individually owned ones with a more individualised character, for example taking inspiration from nature in their interior design and serving a broad range of coffee brands, mostly hand dripped.

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[30] Marcus distinguishes different forms of reflexivity and proposes the concept of 'messy texts,' emphasising that the ethnographer's object of research is never fixed in the analytical categories she or he uses to circumscribe them (1994:390).

Coffee shops[31] were the places where I generally conducted interviews, and I paid for my research participants' coffees to compensate them for their time.[32] I chose coffee shops for these meetings because they were familiar enough that both my interlocutors and I felt comfortable but also anonymous enough for talking. I usually chose shops near my interlocutors' universities or places of work.

Coffee shops were also important locations for me to undertake what James Spradley (1980:59) has called "passive participation." Coffee shops offered me the possibility to obtain an "observation post" where I could start the work of participant observation with a degree of "detachment" as a "bystander" (Spradley 1980:59). Doing participant observation in urban contexts is different from working in rural areas, especially in public spaces. Jaffe and de Koning note that "it is often impossible to reproduce the 'traditional' conditions of intensive participant observation in the social life of a spatially circumscribed community" (2016:15). The rapid expansion and density of coffee shops allowed me to observe without drawing attention to myself. Furthermore, I liked to think, reflect, write up and draft in coffee shops because they created a calm atmosphere where I was able to slow down after the hectic of the city. Just as they offered a place to relax, as the blue dot of Seoul's logo expresses, so was the mood they created a necessary precondition to speak with these young Seoulites without any disturbance.

My research participants' social relations and everyday lives expanded across and beyond the city, diverging along individual routes into domestic, work/study and leisure spaces. At some places I was able to deeply "hang out" (Jaffe and de Koning 2016:15), at others I had no access. I did not visit the homes of my research participants. However, when I came to Seoul as Korean language student, I had stayed for some days at a friend's home and had thus experienced living in an apartment complex. Sometimes I was able to visit places that expanded the ordinary movements of young Seoulites, such as a wedding hall in the outskirts of Seoul when I attended my friend Yun's wedding (see sub-chapter 6.1). At these occasions, I was able to engage in what Spradley (1980:60) termed "moderate participation." The method of participant observation is inherently a contrary activity – to participate while simultaneously to observe (see Wolcott 2005). Moderate participation aims at balancing out both activities (Spradley 1980:60). At Yun's wedding I was able to observe, but taking pictures with the bride and groom, enjoying the happiness they both felt, and waiting for the bridal bouquet to be thrown made me a participant.

Yun married in spring, along with autumn one of the most beautiful seasons. I could watch the energy of spring and the slow decline in autumn. Summer, highly contrasted to winter, is very humid and hot. The heat concentrated in the streets, where no refreshing wind could blow. The use of air conditioning in most buildings

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[31] In my field notes, I listed the coffee prices in various shops in detail. Coffee shops are rather expensive. A cafe latte cost 4 Euro in a franchise, and 5–6 Euro in one of the 'creative' shops.
[32] Mary Louise Pratt (1986) and Harry Wolcott (2005) discuss the exploitation and compensation of research participants.

Figure 5: Enjoying *kimchi* stew at lunch time. Photo by the author.

during summer made it difficult for me to adjust to the heat and I caught colds more often than during autumn and winter. Summer was also called the rainy season, and at times the rainwater overflowed whole streets. To preserve my shoes, I bought rubber boots, which however soon proved to be too warm. I most intensely, however, smelled the seasons. The winter in South Korea is rather dry and cold and the atmosphere in the city changed to become almost transparent. However, the smoke of restaurants, heaters and cars intensified in contrast to the clarity of the air. A perfect research day consisted of the scent of fresh-brewed coffee in the morning hours, the spicy aroma of *kimchi* stew at lunch time, and the oily smell of fried sweet potatoes in the evening.

As I explained above, I came back to a familiar place when I started my fieldwork in Seoul. As an exchange student, and later a Korean language student, I had experienced life at a prestigious university. Coming back, I moved in a small apartment in the neighbourhood of theatres: Daehangno, within the district of Jongno and Seodaemun. My apartment was close to the historical wall accessible via a small walking trail leading up to a mountain, where I had a wonderful view over parts of the city. Here, I could escape the heavy traffic and density of people and I retreated often to such quiet places to escape the noise and find the balance that is also exemplified in the blue dot in Seoul's logo.

The high density of cars and people symbolised the energy of Seoul (a city said never to sleep), and the passion exemplified in the red dot in the logo of Seoul. But it was also music that was my regular companion when I moved through places such as Hongdae, Daehangno or Sinchon. The continuous stream of Korean-Pop out of

the shops made every walk through the city either enjoyable (when I liked the song for example, as my research assistant did as she scribbled a note on one of her transcripts), or nerve-wracking (when it was played very loud and added to the mass of people in extreme). Yet, at times I used such "cultural 'texts'" (Jaffe and de Koning 2016:16) from pop-culture expressions, online media, public and political discussions and debates to acquire additional information.

A sharp contrast to the noisy streets were the campuses and the subway trains. The campuses of Yonsei University and Ewha Womans University were quiet, the buildings partly covered by ivy and shady trees here and there, making them oases in Seoul. Taking the subway was part of my daily routine and I made the following note while doing it: "All people around me are busy with their smartphones: playing, writing at Kakao Talk, reading news, watching TV. Nobody is reading a newspaper or book. Nobody is talking" (field notes 18.06.2013). Thus, the subway was one of the quietest places in Seoul. My apartment was also close to subway and bus stations, which made travel through the city easy, and I spent a lot of time in the subway due to Seoul's expansion.

Still, the field was "created anew" (Coleman and Collins 2006:12) every time I visited these "numerous sites within a site" (Coleman and Collins 2006:13) together with young Seoulites, my friends or colleagues, or while writing up this dissertation. How I constructed the field was based on these diverse interactions and relations. For example, I frequently visited Hongdae, near the Hongkik University, one of the most prestigious universities of arts. Here, the creative scene was most visible. Hongdae was famous for the craftsmanship exhibited in small stores and at flea markets, and for its small boutiques, where designers presented and sold their individual pieces. It was also famous for its coffee shops, restaurants and bars, each furnished in a unique way. And during summer, student indie-bands played in front of the subway station, attracting listeners.

Many of my female research participants liked to shop in Hongdae. Clothes were affordable, and many small boutiques sold unique items. I will address clothing and prices in sub-chapter 7.2, when I turn to narratives of appearance and appropriateness. However, I myself thought about my style during my research, and I made the following field note midway in my studies: "Note to myself: I feel the strong need to change my clothing style!" Thus, to go shopping was a mixture of trying to adopt an appropriate style for life in Seoul and doing what Spradley (1980) terms "active participation," that is, "to do what other people *do* […] to more fully learn the cultural rules of behaviour" (Spradley 1980:62, original emphasis). While shopping, I explored the famous fashion districts of Hongdae, Dongdae-mun, Myong-dong and Samsong-dong. During my time as a student, I had already observed how to shop – that is, to differentiate between the places to shop in terms of style, price, and fitting, how to ask for the price and a sample to try on, and how to pay. When I returned to Seoul as researcher, I possessed the embodied knowledge of how to shop.

Participant observation is a strategy of collecting various 'data' (Wolcott 2005), and although everything seemed to be research while I was doing my fieldwork in

Seoul, I also enjoyed living there. I experienced Seoul with my body and soul and although I had to adjust to the speed and density of the city, to the passion it expressed, I was able to find calmness and relaxation. In my view, doing anthropology in the city requires the anthropologists not only to redefine and extend her or his methodological toolkit, but also to think the city in its "material, aesthetic, social, political, economic, moral and spiritual dimensions" (Michael Dickhardt 2016, my translation), and to experience these dimensions through the individual pathways of the research participants.

3.4.3 On How I Reflected on Writing about the Lives of These Young Seoulites

Coming back from research with a bundle of notebooks containing fieldnotes, interviews transliterated and my diary-like journals about doing anthropology in the city, now was the time to "make sense," to borrow a phrase from Mike Crang (2003:127), out of the diverse elements that I heard, saw, smelled, gathered and wrote. Yet, the material I would lay out at my desk or neatly file in folders was not a total mess. I had already organised it while I was in the field in accordance with my research questions, my methodological approach, the narratives of my interlocutors, and of course, the ideas I developed after listening to their narratives and reading through the fieldnotes (cf. Crang 2003:128). Searching for "underlying patterns, relationships, and meanings" (Wolcott 2005:5) is the task of the ethnographer when reviewing the material, and I started to find themes repeated again and again in the interviews. And although I did not structure my interviews in the beginning, instead asking participants to tell me about their life trajectories, some of them directed me in specific directions that I followed in more detail towards the end of my fieldwork.

When I came back to Goettingen, I needed to "discipline" my material. That is, I was faced with "a range of choices […] about how to shape the material" (Crang 2003:131), and I arranged and re-arranged the categories I devised to form a linear argument. This led me to the main themes of my dissertation: education, marriage, consumption, and work. This process is not unproblematic. Hastrup points to the emerging change of status between the researcher and the research participants in this process: "At the autobiographical level ethnographers and informants are equals; but at the level of the anthropological discourse their relationship is hierarchical. It is *our* choice to encompass their stories in a narrative of a different order" (Hastrup 1992:122, original emphasise). While I emphasised that my approach during my research was studying sideways, I acknowledge the authority I had while analysing and writing (see Clifford 1986, Kendall 1996).

Yet, "[a]nalysis is not simply an issue of developing an idea and writing it up" (Crang 2003:127). Rather, it is a process where thinking is done while and by means of writing, and where "we make interpretations, not find answers" (Crang 2003:127). The analytical framework I outlined above developed in a process of writing and re-writing, pushing me to think and re-think the material, but my interpretations are just one possible way to understand the narratives of young Seoulites (the reader

got to know other perspectives in chapter 2). As Crang (2003:135) states "each researcher at different periods, with different questions, and working in different intellectual and historical contexts, makes something different out of the same document or piece of information."

The subjective position of the researcher affects not only the fieldwork but also the interpretation of the collected 'data' and the representation of research participants. As Robbins states: "one has to acknowledge that the choices social scientists make about what to study in the first place, and the way they define clear objects of study out of the ever-shifting reality of social life, are always driven by the values they hold to be most important" (Robbins 2013:448). Noritoshi Furuichi (2017) states for example that he could only write his book about happiness among Japanese youth because he was in his twenties at the time he did his research and thus had opportunities to speak with young Japanese people comfortably, informally and naturally. Furthermore, he boldly challenged the representation of young people in public and academic discourses and drew attention to the limitations of theories about young people. In anthropology, the representation of young people is diverse, ranging from romantic descriptions of the agency of youth at one end to a portray that includes advises for politically and socially behaviour (Durham 2004). Julia Vorhölter (2014) points to the contemporary change of meaning of social categories such as 'youth,' which also affects how anthropologists represent them. These categories undergo a change due to first, processes of standardisation. In the case of South Korea, for example, young people are defined by their biological age for purposes of legal rights, criminal responsibility, or they were summarised in statistics about (un-) employment or school attendance.[33] Second, social age categories have undergone transformations due to changing (economic, political, or social) conditions which influence social markers. Marriage, for example, presented a South Korean social marker that (publicly) showed the transformation from a young person to an adult one (Kendall 1996). Yet, as current public and academic discussions about young South Koreans illustrate, and I will show in chapter 6, marriage is a contested social matter which is not only difficult to achieve for young people but is also no longer a desirable model. Vorhölter stresses that "[i]n any case, the discrepancy between ideal type and reality poses an analytical challenge" (Vorhölter 2014:31) to anthropological research. Anthropologists have found diverse concepts for an analysis of young people such as 'adolescence' (Mead 1928), 'cultural agents' (Bucholtz 2002), 'social shifter' (Durham 2004) or 'generation' (Mannheim 1952). Each of the concepts poses difficulties and is criticised in one way or the other. As the terms '880,000 Won Generation,' 'Spec Generation' or '*N-Po* Generation' indicate, the concept of generation is dominant in public and, partly, in academic South Korean discourses. Yet, the concept is not only applied to young people. One research participant, for example, emphasised that it is useful to categorise diverse age groups as generation due to

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[33] See for example Youth Policy Labs (24 October 2014): South Korea (http://www.youthpolicy.org/factsheets/country/south-korea/, accessed 19 January 2021).

South Korea's rapid industrialisation and the related social changes. She explained that the parents' generation is summarised as '386 Generation'[34].

On the one hand, presenting young people as *"generation as an actuality"* (Mannheim 1952:303, original emphasis) neglects the heterogeneity of young people in regard to their socio-economic or ethnic background (see Mannheim 1952, Toivonen and Imoto 2013). On the other hand, it is a concept, much like 'social shifter,' to illustrate how young people are represented in their respective society, which then is analysed by anthropologists (see also Ortner 1999). Yet, the question remains how anthropologists themselves conceptualise young people and if they construct a youth social world that contrasts with an adult social world (see also Gordon 2010). As with all forms of categories anthropologists built, the issue at stake is "'where do the categories come from?' and [...] 'what we do with them?'" (Crang 2003:131–132).

While pondering these questions, I decided to represent my interlocutors as actors who think and reflect about the circumstances they live in and give meaning to their practices. They are "context-renewing and context-creating" (Bucholtz 2002:528); they simultaneously reproduce their social matrix and oppose it (Bucholtz 2002, Durham 2004). Following anthropological and sociological examples such as Furuichi (2017), I took young people and their narratives in their own right (cf. Wulff 1995) and formed an analytical framework that embraces how young people gave meaning to the world they live in. Furuichi (2017) analysed his accounts of young people in Japan based on happiness, which caused "a huge war of words" (Furuichi 2017:vii) in the sense that Japanese young people could not be happy in the social and economic circumstances under which they lived: un- or underemployed young people working in precarious jobs while the country itself was described as 'desperate'. The reader grasps the similarities between these discourses and the discourses about young people in South Korea. Using happiness as analytical concept in general is difficult in the discipline (see for example Walker and Kavedžija 2015), but interpreting the life trajectories of Japanese young people with this analytical framework offered what Harry Walker and Iza Kavedžija (2015) stress as "a unique window onto the ways in which people diversely situated in time and space grapple with fundamental questions about how to live, the ends of life, and what it means to be human" (Walker and Kavedžija 2015:1). In writing about the life trajectories of young South Koreans with a similar intention, I am complementing academic and public notions of and narratives about young South Koreans. Yet, I think that my subjective historical position as a young, female researcher enabled one interpretation, but I do not claim a totalizing account. My ethnographic accounts present a snapshot of certain young Seoulites, and I am analysing what they share in their heterogeneity and diversity.

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[34] The term was coined in the 1990s when the Intel 386 processor come out and refers to their age (then in their thirties), the time of university education (1980s) and the time they were born (1960s) (Lankov 2008).

To end this chapter with a statement by Crang (2003:141): "Our work may stop but there are always gaps and deficiencies. Not because we have failed to do things properly, but because the structure of interpretation is made up of gaps." I wrote with respect and care, and in the decision about how to represent the voices of these young people, I was inspired by Nancy Abelmann (2003). But my interpretation is just an interpretation, not an answer.

In the next chapter, I attend to how anthropologists and other scientists represented South Korea's economic history and the middle-class standards that developed during this period.

4 The Field – a Historico-Political, Economic, and Socio-Cultural Contextualisation

In this chapter, I attend to the historico-political, economic and socio-cultural framework through which I understand the narratives of the young people who participated in my research. This framework is well known and self-evident to South Korean readers. However, I follow Nigel Thrift (1996) and emphasise that context is neither a motionless background nor is it invariably experienced and shared in the same way. The context I will describe plays an active role in my research participants' life trajectories and forms an essential element of interaction.

During both the fieldwork and writing-up stages of this dissertation, my research participants, anthropological literature and media highlighted two important historical processes as source for the circumstances young people felt themselves situated in. First, my research participants continuously emphasised South Korea's rapid economic transformation following the Korean War (1950–1953) to explain how the dominant middle-class standards had developed. Following the war, it took South Korea only 40 years to expand from a developing nation to a member of the OECD-countries – a process often referred to as the 'miracle on the Han-River'. The miracle, however, ended with the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997/98 – the second historical process my interlocutors identified as origin of the difficulties faced by young South Koreans. The Asian Financial Crisis, which led the country into an economic downturn and had severe consequences for its labouring population, is presented as a transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist and neoliberal economic system. Precarious

working conditions, financialisation, and the decline of the middle classes are said to define the world young South Koreans live in today.

In this chapter, I concentrate on the period before and during the financial crisis, the period anthropologists describe as South Korea 'becoming modern' (Kendall 2002). Here, I want to draw attention especially to the diverse actors important in these modernisation processes and events; processes that constituted the point of reference for my research participants. Following Ji-Whan Yun (2010), I consider the special characteristics of South Korea's corporate landscape to be the main reason for young people's contemporary economic difficulties. In the first part of this chapter on 'national economy,' I discuss the development of this landscape. In the second section, 'everyday economy,' I turn the discussion to South Korea's middle classes and their core values. I emphasise how the themes of education, marriage, consumption and work became so central, simultaneously followed and contested by young people. In the final section of the chapter, I focus again on Seoul and attend briefly to some aspirations different actors have for the Seoul Capital Region. These aspirations exemplify the diverse and changing field young Seoulites lived in.

In short, I focus on the construction of certain social phenomena, how they relate both to each other and to the world economy, but I do not address others. Here, I follow Roger Janelli and Dawnhee Yim (1999), who encourage researchers to bring together social and cultural notions with economic concerns. Thus, I consider the actors involved in South Korea's industrialisation process to be connected with each other while they seek to confront political, economic and social problems (cf. Wagner 2008). In this discussion, I address the concept of 'Confucian capitalism,' which has been widely used to explain why South Korea developed in only 40 years. Confucianism is simultaneously a highly contested cultural theme and a concept employed by anthropologists to analyse ritual practices, moral systems, elite status systems or gender differences (Cumings 2006, Yun 2010, Cho 1998). Yet, anthropologists, sociologists and economists utilise Confucianism and capitalism to "highlight some features while adumbrating others" (Janelli and Yim 1999:109). I will depict the various ways Confucianism and capitalism are represented in the academic literature as a construction, and I emphasise the importance of other (cultural) themes. South Korea's geopolitical setting, urbanisation, institutions such as the school system and the military, as well as narratives of victimisation, suffering but also hard work are all significant for how South Koreans made and remade the corporate landscape and middle-class values (cf. Janelli 1993).

4.1 National Economy

Public and academic discourses present precarious employment conditions as one main problem young people in South Korea face. In *The Myth of Confucian Capitalism,* Ji-Whan Yun (2010) points to the structural imbalance between large enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises that characterises South Korea's economic

landscape. I argue that this imbalance is an important reason for young people's difficulties. In describing how the problematic corporate landscape developed, I concentrate on specific phases of South Korea's industrialisation process – a process that cannot be discussed in isolation but must be understood with its regional and global context (Cumings 2006). The hegemonic power relations in the region were an important "constitutive element" (Thrift 1996:3) in the approach South Korean government actors took to economically advance the country after the Korean War. I begin this section with a short chronicle of South Korea's geopolitical setting to illustrate the hegemonic power structures in the region and the importance of Japan's economic expansion for South Korea. Next, I portray the complex relationship between conglomerates and respective governments in the industrialisation process. Following Yun (2010), I focus especially on two interconnected characteristics of South Korea's economic approach that I view as two main causes of the problematic economic situation in which young South Koreans find themselves: 'crony capitalism' and 'growth absolutism'.

The concept of crony capitalism is usually employed in analyses of corruption in political contexts. In South Korea, the term describes the major structural importance and influence of family-owned conglomerates – the *jaebeols*[35] (Wade 1998:1540). Growth absolutism refers to the focus of political actors on advancing South Korea's economy. Related to experiences in and perceptions of the country's position within hegemonic power structures, political actors emphasised economic development as most important means for the country to compete in a global arena. Seung-Cheol Lee (2018:9–10) emphasises that this development approach aimed to "produce and channel the aspirations and actions" of South Koreans and centred primarily on the family and labour. Feelings and narratives of victimisation, suffering and crisis are closely connected with this understanding of the world. I will attend to those narratives in the last part of this section, when I elaborate on the Asian Financial Crisis.

4.1.1   South Korea's Geopolitical Setting

The feeling of being a pawn in a geopolitical game haunts the country until today. Economic growth to achieve international competitiveness became the dominant target and narrative the South Korean state used to mobilise its citizens. Attending to South Korea's geopolitical setting, especially its relation to Japan, is one approach to contextualise its political economy.[36] Here, I address the period of Japanese colonisation and its influence on South Korea's political economy as well as the effects the

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[35] *Jaebeol* is the South Korean term for large, family-owned conglomerates such as Samsung or LG and thus differs from the term *daegieob,* which means big business.

[36] Roger Janelli critically discusses the diverse approaches towards South Korea's political economy and reflects that "any account of the South Korean political economy, like any account of South Korean culture, is incomplete" (Janelli 1993:53).

United States' interference in the East Asian region after World War II had for the regional economic landscape.[37]

At the beginning of the 20th century, the empire of the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910) came under severe attack from both inside and outside forces, leading to the decline of the 'hermit kingdom'. Inside forces such as "young progressives" (Kendall 1996:64) questioned the ritual emptiness of Confucianism, and the elite-class *(yangban)* contested the ruling family's influence and power (Koo 2007). Meanwhile, unresolved geopolitical conflicts between Japan, China and Russia for hegemonic dominance in the region, complicated by British and American interventions, put outside pressure on the kingdom. While the Korean peninsula experienced a slow collapse of its influence and dominance, Japan's regional power grew over the course of the Meiji-Restauration; its global position changed and it could rise and manoeuvre under British–American (1900–1922) and later American–British (1922–1941) hegemony[38] (Cumings 2006:79).

In 1910 Japan annexed Korea, forced the king to abdicate and took the country as a colony. Korea became the hinterland of Japan, provider of resources and a key market for products of its light manufacturing industries. Since the 1930s, one of the strategic objectives of Japanese colonial policy was to develop industries in Korea and it moved its light-manufacturing sector to the country which "necessitated building factories [and] installing machinery" (Janelli 1993:69). Individual private firms who followed the Japanese industrial plans were nurtured with financial support during this period, and Japanese conglomerates active in Korea influenced business practices and structures of the emerging *jaebeols* leading to similarities in, for example, management and organisation.[39] Roger Janelli (1993:70) sums up that a "strong state control over the economy, state-financed industry, a military-style government, close trading links with Japan" – features that characterised the South Korean political economy in the postwar period – developed under Japanese colonial rule.

Japan became the dominant hegemon in the North-East Asian region until its defeat in 1945. This ended its 35-year colonial dominance over Korea. Although American planners quickly considered the democratic industrial rebuilding of Japan as necessary to balance the world economic situation after World War II (Cumings 2006), a regional economy did not develop and Japan could not establish markets until the 1960s with the United States exerting pressure on the South Korean government to "normalize" its relationship with Japan (Janelli 1993:72). However, the

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[37] Bruce Cumings (1981) gives a (critical) overview of the origin of the Korean War and the diverse actors involved.

[38] Bruce Cumings (2006:78) defines hegemony as "the demarcation of outer limits in economics, politics, and international security relationships, the transgression of which carries grave risks for any nonhegemonic nation."

[39] Chung, Lee and Jung (1997) point also to differences between Japanese and South Korean conglomerates today. They emphasise for example the individualistic management style of South Korean managers. That is, "they are loyal to their group but do not hesitate to disagree with other members" (Chung, Lee and Jung 1997:14).

Japanese colonisation is a historical period which deeply intensified tensions and conflicts between the countries until the present days (see also Janelli 1993). [40]

The intervention of the United States in the East Asian region after World War II had severe consequences for the Korean peninsula and the political economy of South Korea. As Janelli (1993:71) notes:

> The political and economic consequences of American military rule went beyond merely reproducing or strengthening features of the Japanese colonial state. It also divided the nation at the 38th parallel into two hostile domains, one aligned with communism and the other with the United States. This division not only disrupted whatever industrial linkages the southern portion had with the northern, but also resulted in a war (1950–53) that destroyed many of the industrial facilities left behind by the Japanese.

After the Korean War ended in 1953, North Korea developed rapidly while South Korea depended highly on U.S. aid. Emerging from a small industrial sector structurally supported under Japanese colonial rule, companies like Samsung managed not only to survive both World War II and the Korean War but also were able to evolve into leading conglomerates today (Chung, Lee and Jung 1997:38). In the years after the Korean War, they were envisioned to secure South Korea's competitiveness in the global economy and they became the backbone of South Korea's industrial sector. Nurtured by the government, their legitimacy was at the same time questioned in public discourses (Chung, Lee and Jung 1997; Janelli 1993). Let me explain how the relationship between the different South Korean governments and the *jaebeols* was shaped.

4.1.2 The Rise of the *Jaebeols*

The first South Korean president, Rhee Syng-man (1948–1960), followed a free-market approach, and although private businesses benefited from government aid during his time in office, economic policy focused primarily on restructuring the infrastructure and industry because adequate supply of the population with food was badly needed. The first enterprises, however, prospered in the years after the Korean War, and their rapid capital accumulation was soon met with growing criticism (Chung, Lee and Jung 1997).

Economic Take-off Phase (1962–1971)

When General Park Chung-hee (1961–1979) launched his military coup and took over government in 1961, expanding business groups became the target of an inter-

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[40] In the beginning of 2019, a serious trade conflict emerged between Japan and South Korea having its roots in unsolved questions about compensation claims.

ventionist economic policy. Whereas Rhee Syng-man had been primarily concerned with the reconstruction of South Korea's economy, General Park's government envisioned economic development as a top priority for the country to become both self-reliant and a competitive exporter (Chung, Lee and Jung 1997:29). After arresting leading industrial figures to clean up corruption (Chung, Lee and Jung 1997:40), Park's regime forced entrepreneurs into a relationship with the government to work for national growth (Kong 2000:28). The government nationalised South Korea's commercial banks and controlled foreign loans to force businesses into dependency with the state. Furthermore, it established the Economic Planning Board (EPB) to devise long-term economic development plans. Industry had to follow the targets formulated by the EPB to receive an official credit from state-led banks (Kong 2000:29). In economic reality, however, government could not bring large business groups under control through impositions of sanctions and coercive measures alone. By granting financial and administrative support in the form of favourable credits and foreign exchange rates (Chung, Lee and Jung 1997:35) and including business leaders in economic planning processes (Kong 2000:29), the government ensured business support for its economic plans. The government's economic plans sought to mobilise resources and set economic goals, while its industrial plans selected certain industries for financial support (Chung, Lee and Jung 1997:29).

Heavy Industry Phase (1972–1981)

Because labour-intensive light manufacturing industries characterised the beginning of South Korea's economic development the government ushered the Heavy and Chemical Industry Declaration in 1973 (Chung, Lee and Jung 1997:30). Import substitution as well as export stimulation were used to continuously upgrade industry in order to achieve the economic goals of self-sufficiency and export success (Kong 2000:32). The government directed its financial support to established large companies to develop them into export-winners while withdrawing from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as well as the light manufacturing sector. Some "national champions" of the 1960s were pushed aside as well when the government changed its economic direction and focused its subsidies on entrepreneurs meeting the specified export target (Kong 2000:34). Thus, the government's action concentrated economic power in the hands of a few big businesses. These selected conglomerates benefited from tax advantages, further low-interest loans and favourable exchange rates to emerge as the top performers of South Korea's national economy. By 1987, the top 46 *jaebeols* accounted for 43% of Korea's GDP (Chung, Lee and Jung 1997:41–42). The rapid growth of the *jaebeols* became again the focus of concerns and although government nurtured the *jaebeols* on a large scale, it developed restructuring and supervising measures. However, these measures conflicted with the government's dependence on *jaebeols* for carrying out its economic projects. Thus, those *jaebeols* in line with government's objectives could grow and invest in a quite unregulated fashion, which resulted in what is termed "octopus-like diversification" –

expansion into businesses mostly unrelated to the actual core competence (Chung, Lee and Jung 1997:43).

South Korea had found its place in an international economic arena with an export-oriented economic approach (Kim 2006:118).

The intense state–*jaebeols* relationship was one crucial aspect that allowed for South Korea's rapid economic growth. The geopolitical situation in the region was another. South Korea was not only the so-called hinterland for Japanese industry and a key market for Japanese products, but it profited also from Japan's industrial development (Kim 2006:121). As Japan upgraded to heavy, and later high-tech, industries, South Korea was able to move into the markets Japan had previously dominated and it could establish an economic leading position in the Asian region. Furthermore, the "patron–client" relationship with the USA (Kim 2006:120) enabled South Korea to gain access to the "largest single marketplace for export during the period of rapid economic growth" (Kim 2006:120). At the same time, the South Korean government was able to protect its domestic market by restricting entry of foreign companies and imports, thus avoiding "dependency traps" (Kong 2000:38) with foreign capital.

Structural Adjustment Phase (1982–1986)

At the end of the 1970s, the South Korean economy started to experience economic difficulties. In particular, the second oil crisis in 1979 led to an international economic recession and thus lower demand for South Korea's exports (Chung, Lee and Jung 1997:43). In 1981, the South Korean government was forced to borrow from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), a condition of which was restructuring its economic policy according to the newly emerging conceptions of international economics that followed the Washington Consensus[41]. The new US-government under Ronald Reagan turned the patron–client relationship into a business relationship; South Korea was now a trading partner with all the requisite obligations (Kong 2000:75). The assassination of President Park in the same year intensified economic destabilisation. Chun Doo-hwan (1980–1988) responded to these problems by implementing structural adjustment measures oriented towards economic liberalisation (Chung, Lee and Jung 1997:31).

Domestic economists had already addressed the need for economic liberalisation and President Park announced the Comprehensive Stabilisation Plan in April 1979. But due to the second oil shock, the government did not put the plan into action (Kong 2000:74). When President Chun took over government following a military coup, the Korea Development Institute and the associated economists pushed again

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[41] John Williamson coined the term to describe a set of economic policy measures to enhance the economic stability of Latin America in the 1980s. The World Bank and IMF proposed these measures for countries beyond Latin America. More recently, the term has become an ideology-laden shorthand for neoliberalism, which Williamson (2000) criticises.

for market-oriented reforms. Social unrest against the new government, which culminated in the Gwangju Uprising[42], put the military regime under particular pressure to revive the economy (Kong 2000:74). Thus, the turn to a market-oriented economic policy was the result of both external and internal factors. The South Korean government, however, pursued a "selective liberalisation" (Kong 2000:83), slowly and carefully implemented. One such measure was gradual financial liberalisation.

Beginning with the Park regime, the government had used its ownership of commercial banks to exercise strict control over the finance market, limiting credit allocation and modulating interest rates. The only alternative to state-owned banks was the kerb market. In 1981–82, the government loosened its grip, privatising the city banks, reforming interest rates, developing a secondary financial sector, and partially opening the domestic market to foreign investments. Some of these measures were undertaken to balance credit allocation among conglomerates and SMEs (Kong 2000:77–79); financial liberalisation, however, had quite the opposite effect. As the government de-nationalised the city banks, the *jaebeols* stepped in as shareholders. "[E]ven by keeping within the legally permissible 8 per cent limit on ownership […], the *chaebŏl* could influence banks' lending and other decisions" (Kong 2000:83). The *jaebeols* found further ways to gain financial control by using the now deregulated stock and bond market for capital accumulation. Once the international market recovered from the oil shock, the falling US-Dollar together with low interest rates led to an export boom in South Korea. In turn, increasing profits and opportunities to raise foreign capital through derivative activities due to financial liberalisation lessened the *jaebeols* dependency on the state (Chung, Lee and Jung 1997:44–45).

The balance of power between state and business thus changed. President Roh Tae-woo, who took over government in 1988 (–1993), announced further political reforms but, like his predecessors, he depended on the *jaebeols* and thus practical realisation of the reforms remained challenging (Chung, Lee and Jung 1997:45). The situation changed with the election of the first civilian president, Kim Young-sam (1993–1998), who announced his globalisation project: *segyehwa*.

Globalisation Project (1993–1998)

Under the Kim government, the South Korean state regulated economic liberalisation by both scheduling the speed and scope of the national economy's opening as well as intervening indirectly in the internationalisation strategies of domestic firms. The government and the *jaebeols*, however, differed in their conception of structural reforms, which led to a changing state–business relation. When the Kim government launched its New Economic Plan in 1993, one of its goals was to disrupt the intensive relationship that had developed between the authoritarian regime and the *jaebeols*, which was considered as corrupt and ineffective (Kong 2000:173). To this

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[42] In May 1980, the government under General Chun violently repressed a civil demonstration against the military regime in Gwanju (Yea 2002:1551).

end, the Fair Trade Commission, which supervised competition, was upgraded and made independent of the Economic Planning Board in 1994. It was tasked with reducing intra-group subsidisation and resultant monopolisation and concentration of economic power in the hands of a few conglomerates. Furthermore, the government strengthened the position of SMEs by implementing the Fair Subcontract Transactions Act and giving the Office of SMEs an independent status (Kong 2000:175).

However, the government's power to control the *jaebeols* was rather limited because it had to rely on the conglomerates' economic success to maintain a high economic growth rate. The *jaebeols* pushed for rapid deregulation whereas the government followed a gradualist pattern. In 1991, a four-stage plan was implemented to deregulate interest rates, and in 1993 the government announced a five-year plan to push financial liberalisation in the key areas of "interest rates, deposits, policy loans, external capital account" (Kong 2000:161). The gradual pattern of liberalisation exemplifies the Kim government's concerns that financial opening could disrupt the domestic financial sector, which lacked experience with foreign competition. Yet the conglomerates pushed for further liberalisation and internationalisation to create a 'level playing field' on which they could expand overseas and compete with strong US, European and Japanese producers. They also sought to use this chance to expand their activity into the newly consolidating financial sector (Kong 2000:164). The structural weakness of the 'high cost, low efficiency'[43] South Korean economy made it unattractive for the *jaebeols* to invest locally. Instead, they turned to direct foreign investment to "[acquire] the advanced technology that would assure their survival [as well as enable] the *chaebŏl* to enhance their brand-name recognition and gain access to the home markets of their collaborators" (Kong 2000:168). Thus, the Kim government had to improve economic infrastructure and promote and invest in research and development (R&D), transportation and land availability to ensure that domestic businesses could operate in a favourable environment. Paradoxically, however, the *jaebeols*' financial malpractices and octopus-like diversification caused infrastructural problems and SME's in particular responded to the 'high cost, low efficiency' situation by relocating their production sites outside of South Korea (Kong 2000:171). While the government sought to remedy the problems of high interest rates, high land prices and high transportation costs, the question of the high cost of labour remained. "[The Korea Employer's Federation] produced statistics showing that at the GNP per capita level of $10,000, South Korean monthly wages were higher than those of the US, Japan, UK, Singapore and Taiwan in the corresponding phase of development" (Kong 2000:182). The federation emphasised that productivity was too low in relation to high labour wages, and some even argued that lifetime employment would become difficult to realise since economic growth was slowing down. Liberalisation of the labour market to enhance flexibility and competitiveness,

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[43] The industrial policies of the previous authoritarian regimes scheduled and controlled economic development by direct intervention, which led to the structure of "high interest rate, high land price, high transport cost and high labour cost" (Kong 2000:168).

which businesses demanded, meant social disruption in the form of growing inequality and unemployment. Thus, in its attempts to realise cooperative industrial relations the government had to balance its approach of "catching up" with maintaining social cohesion, especially regarding the middle classes (Kong 2000:185, 206). In public discourses, concerns about the modernisation and the drive to globalisation evolved, and the Kim government carefully enacted their programmes to sustain its legitimacy and power. It could draw on the experiences of liberalised countries such as Continental Europe, the UK or Japan to develop appropriate measures to satisfy the labour unions as well as the conglomerates. At the same time, the social development measures implemented by the Kim government were based on the country's past experiences of poverty and its mitigation. Although a social safety net was developed to secure basic subsidies for the poor, the government focused on company welfare schemes and training programmes, which targeted individuals. Furthermore, the government relied on family support for needy individuals (Kong 2000:190; Lee 2018). In the end, however, the government profited in two ways: first, it could blame difficult political decisions that affected social and economic conditions on outside pressure, and second, it finally succeeded in developing South Korea into an industrialised nation (Kong 2000:152–153).

4.1.3 "Make like the World"

I emphasised above, following Janelli and Yim (1999), that capitalism has different actualities, and so far, I have discussed the development of South Korea's corporate landscape, characterised by what Yun (2010) referred to as crony capitalism. I now want to elaborate another of Yun's (2010) terms – growth absolutism – that is closely linked to discourses about crisis, victimisation and struggle that sought to legitimise the economic course the country was taking.

Discourses of Crisis and Struggle

> When I turned on the TV this morning, the news began with headlines about the splits within political parties, announcing that 'this week is most critical'. I/we live in a society where every week is critical, a society where crisis is chronic, a society that makes crisis chronic.
> (Cho 2000:67)

Between 1970 – 1980, the authoritarian regime started every new year by delivering a message of crises, where the conflict with North Korea or social cuts taken to overcome economic difficulties were made an issue. The state invoked a "crisis mentality" to prevent worker or student movements, which were labelled unpatriotic in the context of South Korea's growth absolutism (Shin 2000:429). However, the government's continuous emotional communication of an existing or upcoming crisis had the effect of desensitising people to the rhetoric. When President Kim Young-sam

(1993–1998) was elected and introduced his 'New Korea' project, "the positive and offensive (i.e. aggressive) meaning of 'internationalization' […] replaced the negative and defensive meaning of 'crisis'" (Shin 2000:430). The term was soon substituted with the term globalisation *(segyehwa)* to communicate South Korea's entry into the global world.

The country's aspiration for international recognition and even dominance becomes apparent in the ambiguous meanings of the term *segyehwa.* Often translated as globalisation, *segyehwa* literally means "make like the world" and implies that the Kim government aspired for South Korea to expand like the rest of the world while also differentiating his government from past military regimes (Lim 2009:144). Although the word's meaning remained vague, further economic liberalisation and democratisation processes instituted by the Kim government were both summed up under the term (Kong 2000:144). Internationalisation (*gukjehwa,* literally "make like the nations") and globalisation *(segyehwa)* "drew on Koreans' deep-rooted desire for international recognition of their economic achievement and to be thought of as 'advanced' society, second in Asia only to Japan" (Kong 2000:153) while at the same time seeking to satisfy international observers who were putting pressure on South Korea to open its market. This approach to globalisation resembled 'Social Darwinism': the international market was seen as an arena in which only the fittest could survive, and a neo-mercantilist policy promoting South Korean exports was needed to achieve a dominant position in that arena (Shin and Choi 2009:36; Gray 2008). Thus, the state remained a powerful actor in the internationalisation of production, consumption, and finance (Kong 2000:206). Diverse political and economic actors sought to restructure South Korea in accordance with the Washington Consensus, while a mentality of struggle for survival characterised the ambition to become competitive on the international market arena (Shin and Choi 2009:257). Globalisation discourses, however, did not remain confined to economic circles but rather expanded into academic and public realms. For example, travelling abroad became popular among university students, and even elementary students used the possibility for "English learning study tours" to gain experience in speaking the language (Shin 2000:430–431). Academic discourse, by contrast, remained nationalistic. When South Korea joined the OECD in 1996, such nationalistic discourses ended since the final goal seemed to be achieved. As Shin (2000:431) notes, it was ironic that the real economic crisis occurred when nobody was talking about it anymore.

The Crisis

The Asian Financial Crisis 1997/98 began in Thailand, where a real-estate bubble caused by over-speculation at the housing market burst, quickly spreading its effects throughout East and Southeast Asia.

On the eve of the crisis, the South Korean economy was growing at around 8% and inflation and unemployment rates were both low; the country was doing well indeed. Thus, different theories about why South Korea was affected so seriously

circulated, and still circulate, with changing accusation whom to blame. An analysis of the economic conditions before and during the crisis show that the most likely reason was "Investor Pullout/ Debt Deflation in a sound but underregulated system" (Wade 1998:1535). The preconditions for the crisis in East and Southeast Asia were as follows: First, high gross domestic savings to GDP. On the one hand, Asian households preferred to deposit their savings in banks, leading to what Wade (1998:1540) calls a "'deep' banking system" where banks have to "intermediate a huge inflow of savings." Businesses, on the other hand, were the main borrowers, resulting in a high debt-to-equity ratio of the corporate sector, that is, high domestic debts. Second, fixed exchange rates, suggesting a low exchange-rate risk for investors. Third, domestic financial liberalisation in which the state had withdrawn from monitoring the financial sector, and finally, high foreign debt due to the inflow of international assets at cheap interest rates (Wade 1998:1540–1541).[44]

Initially, the Asian Financial Crisis hit South Korea because of its lack of foreign currency reserves to repay its foreign short-term debts, which had risen dramatically because the government had stopped monitoring banks' and business' borrowing practices. In short: "The internal logic behind of [sic] the economic crisis was a simple one: the shortage of US dollars in Korea" (Shin 2000:431). Because South Korean firms and banks had primarily borrowed short-term funds, foreign investors closely monitored South Korea's foreign debts, calculating them at $110 billion in short-term debts, only a third of which were covered by foreign exchange reserves. As investors "scrambled for the exit" (Wade 1998:1543), the South Korean Won quickly depreciated. The IMF intervened in December 1997, lending South Korea $57 billion to repay its short-term debts. The bailout package dictated a complete overhaul of its economic structure "beginning with the financial system and continuing into corporate governance, labor markets, and the trade regime; as well as a contradictory macroeconomic policy of higher taxes, cuts in government spending, and much higher real interest rate" (Wade 1998:1543). These demands significantly exceeded what was needed to bring South Korea's economy back on the capital market (Wade 1998:1544). The bailout package, however, indicated that the South Korean economy was fundamentally unsound and thus, the IMF's goal to attract capital inflow rather had the opposite effect of further capital outflow (Gray 2008:41; Wade 1998:1544). [45] Even though South Korean conglomerates were internationally respected, international banks refused even trade credits after the IMF's intervention.

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[44] Wade (1998) further discusses the regional and international actors involved in intensifying the crisis, which I cannot address here for reasons of space.
[45] Robert Wade (1998:1543) emphasises this aspect with the analogy of "screaming fire in the theatre."

"The Crisis of Discourse"

There are several possible answers to the question of why the IMF forced South Korea to further liberalise its economy, even though this was the obvious reason for the crisis in the first place. Here, the line between conspiracy theory and explanatory models is very thin, as Wade (1998) stresses. The consequences and effects of the crisis did not, however, remain confined to South Korea's economy but extended into what Shin (2000:433) called "the crisis of discourse."

South Korean society was shaken when around 1.5 million workers lost their jobs in 1998. Even the middle classes, who had prospered during the years of economic growth, were affected. "People were haunted by a feeling of helplessness when they found that the state was no longer a capable and reliable actor. It seemed that nobody knew why it happened or how it could be resolved" (Shin 2000:432). Various social groups debated the causes and consequences of the crisis. On the political level, the causes were attributed to mistakes and lack of knowledge about national and international economic processes of key ministers in President Kim Young-sam's government. Critics accused President Kim himself of having manipulated the level of foreign exchange reserves and concealed the real level of debts (Shin 2000:433; Wade 1998:1543). In academic circles, diverse theories regarding the crisis's causes were proposed.

The conservative community identified failures in economic policy as causing the crisis rather than structural weaknesses of the South Korean economy itself. The *jaebeols* and conservative government employees dominated this discourse. However, this interpretation did not offer any solutions to the crisis (Shin 2000).

Liberalists focused their critique first on the *jaebeols'* excessive and uncontrolled financial activities, and second on economic policy, which had failed to institutionalise global economic standards successfully. This discourse "developed among mainstream economists and rapidly spread among ordinary people" (Shin 2000:434) as the mass media took up this argument. Liberalists viewed the IMF's restructuring demands as reasonable solution to make the *jaebeols'* activities transparent and thus assessable. This discourse was directed against the crony capitalism that had emerged under the past regimes (Shin 2000:435).

By contrast, nationalist discourses crossed Wade's (1998) fine line, arguing that foreign financial institutions and countries, especially the US, were behind the crisis. *The Korea Times* for example suggested that the intervention of the IMF was designed to prevent any harm to investors rather than help South Korea (Shin 2000:435). Leaders of the new Labour Unions and leftist intellectuals shared Marxist-influenced discourses; for example, the Korean Federation of Trade Unions followed the discourse that the Asian Financial Crisis was only one part of a global economic crisis and thus, a general crisis of capitalism. This discourse, however, did not provide any practical measures to address the economic and social difficulties the crisis produced. It thus remained an issue only in a small circle of radical intellectuals rather than

spreading among the public (Shin 2000:435–436). Cho Haejoang (2000:49) summarises these discourses as follows:

> Thinking in terms of dichotomies and obsessed by a sense of victimization. Enjoying a mood of tragedy. Drawn somehow to conspiracy theories. Distrusting local discussion and believing that macro-theories will explain all. These are the obstacles that the intellectuals of this land have to overcome.

In my view, the discourse of crisis is ongoing in South Korea; only the focus has changed. Currently, the decline of the middle classes is a new a crisis that gives special focus to the suffering of young, middle-class adults. In the next section, I turn to South Korea's middle classes and how the values my research participants sought to balance, developed.

4.2 Everyday Economy

My research participants were very concerned with what I termed 'the others' – their family members, friends, teachers, university professors – or, more generally, 'they' – the majority. The opinion and beliefs of these others occupied the thoughts of these young Seoulites in diverse ways: decisions about which university to apply for, which major or minor to take, what kind of company to work for, which partner to marry, and what kind of appearance to have. As the rapid economic transformation of South Korea created a political economy based on principles of liberalism, it simultaneously changed the internal structure of the society, which attracted the attention of anthropologists and sociologists as Janelli and Yim (2002) point out. I want to emphasise in this section that South Korea's middle classes were "made and marked" (Gladney 1998:1) during the period of industrialisation.

The term class is contested, and its boundaries are difficult to perceive (Ehrenreich 1989:13). Although terms like capitalist class, upper middle class, professional middle class, *nouveaux riches* or lower middle class try to capture the variety of characteristics attributed to the middle class, I will use the plural form middle classes to address the diversity of people who are attributed to and portray themselves as belonging to this stratum – whose most important characteristic is its position in the middle between the elite and working classes (Ehrenreich 1989:13). This position is anything but solid and fixed, and although the middle classes possess a higher status than the working classes, their only capital in Bourdieu's sense (1987) is "skill and knowledge, or at least the credentials imputing skill and knowledge" (Ehrenreich 1989:14–15). Unlike economic capital, social and cultural capital cannot be saved up for hard times; the middle-class status must be renewed in every new generation (cf. Ortner 1999, 2006). "In this class, no one escapes the requirements of self-discipline and self-directed labor; they are visited, in each generation, upon the young as they were upon the parents" (Ehrenreich 1989:14–15). The circumstances to do

so, however, have changed, and the discovery that young middle-class South Koreans might not reproduce the status reflects this difficult process. In this chapter, I aim to illustrate the parents' situation. By highlighting that "majorities are made, not born" (Gladney 1998:1), I illustrate how South Korea's middle classes and their status-distinguishing qualities and values emerged during the time of rapid industrialisation.

4.2.1 The Rise of South Korea's Middle Classes

> The upper middle class has strict ideas about how to live;
> they want to maintain their position. For them I am too much.
> I have an open mind and that makes them feel uncomfortable.
> (Ahri, interview 19.06.2013)

Before the financial crisis in 1997/98, surveys found that the majority of South Koreans, 60–70%, identified themselves as belonging to the middle classes; after the financial downturn, only 40% did so. Measuring median income, *The Korea Herald* reports a rise in numbers to 67.4 % in 2015, declining to 65.7% in 2017 (Jackson 2017:1). Although these percentages illustrate that the majority of South Koreans identify as belonging to one or the other end of the middle-class stratum, my focus in this dissertation is on the values and standards that people consider to be characteristic of the middle classes, and in order to understand these values in the present, I need to turn again to South Korea's history.

The period of colonisation, the division into North and South Korea, and the Korean War destroyed the ruling *yangban* class of the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910) and had far-reaching consequences for the social stratification system. This system had four ranks: the nobility *(yangban),* a middle stratum divided between privileged *(jungin)* and lower commoners *(sangmin or yangmin),* and the lower common people called *cheonmin* (Koo 2007:37). The elite status of *yangban* was obtained through inheritance and legitimated through Confucianism. The *yangban* class assembled landlords, scholars and government officials. However, only those male members of the elite class who passed the state-run civil service entrance examination received titles and land. Thus, "often scholar-officials and landlords were one and the same persons" (Koo 2007:36). Besides its characteristic as "landed class," the *yangban* elite presented itself as a "cultured class" (Koo 2007:38), following a morally correct living pattern and the right performance of Confucian rituals at important life stages such as childbirth, marriage or death. In sum, status in Joseon-dynasty Korea was inherited through birth and stabilised through moral and social practices while mobility through the strata was nearly impossible.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the status of the *yangban* began to erode. While the Joseon dynasty was already showing symptoms of decline before Japan occupied the Korean peninsula, the colonial period brought industrial and agricultural changes which led to a re-organisation of the stratification system; the landlord system, however, was maintained by the colonial government. It was not before Korea's

liberation that land reforms led to the complete collapse of the landlord system (Koo 2007:40).

The Korean War, which followed only five years after liberation, destroyed industrial complexes, the existent infrastructure, and led to extreme food shortage. Hagen Koo (2007) points out that this period, "painful as it was to those affected" (Koo 2007:41), nevertheless allowed for social mobility in both Koreas due to the absence of the hereditary upper class. The opportunities for social mobility declined in the post-War era; stories about those opportunities, however, have remained in public and academic narratives, even to today (Abelmann 2003, Koo 2007).

The acquisition and display of specific status symbols is one required element to show the belonging to South Korea's middle classes (Koo 2007:53). In its developing state, the South Korean middle classes identified with the American middle classes; yet, as soon as living standards improved and the majority of South Koreans were able to acquire what was understood as middle-class symbols, especially the "upper strata" (Koo 2007:54) aspired new forms and symbols of differentiation. Although some anthropologists and sociologists (Koo 2007, Lett 1998) describe the identification patterns of South Korea's middle classes as the reappearance and adaption of *yangban* status symbols, this view is contested (Watson 1998, Hong 1999). Rather, I stress that it was especially the performance of rituals in accordance with Confucian manuals that sociologists and anthropologists describe as distinguishing element of *yangban* culture (Watson 1998, Koo 2007, Kendall 1996, Ebrey 1991). Anthropologist Nancy Abelmann (2003) uses Raymond Williams' notion of a "backward reference [with] its own logic" (Williams 1973:35) to describe how South Korean's felt and reacted towards the changes of the industrialisation period; changes which they initiated at the same time. This backward reference allows anthropologists to understand what the appropriate means and manners of a South Korean middle-class lifestyle are and how they developed. It is also important to consider the development of, and experiences in, institutions like the army and school as well as the rise of an urban culture, especially in the Seoul Capital Region where most of the research cited above has been done. Thus, the backward reference, the feeling of change as well as different experiences in rural and urban contexts, characterise what Janelli (1993:20) calls a "multivocality of […] experiences" that shape the middle classes in South Korea.

4.2.2 The Valuation of Education

> In the past, enrolling in SKYE[46] meant you could study whatever you
> wanted – history or poem – you definitely got a job after graduation.
> (Chul, interview 27.11.2012)

Chul's statement points to the promise of higher education in the past, quite different from the time of my research, when young people like Chul struggled to secure a well-paid job after graduation. Higher education became an empty promise, and while my research participants questioned its value for reasons I will elaborate in chapter 5, most of their parents hold to it.

Anthropologists and sociologists working in South Korea have written about and analysed in detail the value of education. Nancy Abelmann (2003), for example, exemplifies the importance of education with the following comparison: "Perhaps the most sensitive social registers in South Korea, education is shorthand, a Rorschach for, dare I say, almost everything else" (Abelmann 2003:100). Denise Potrzeba Lett states that "the Korean people's pursuit for education was more than anything else a pursuit of status" (1998:159), while Hwang Kyung Moon (Hwang 2004:350) argues that "school background constitutes arguably the most important factor in attaining the highest status." Education thus functions as marker of position in the social hierarchy, which presumes a social consensus about the value of education.

The connection between education and status is problematic because it must be renewed with each generation (Ehrenreich 1989). The reproduction of the *yangban* status in the Joseon dynasty depended on the landlords' sons successfully undertaking the civil servant entrance examination (Koo 2007); nowadays, middle-class status depends on the successful reproduction of its social and cultural capital (Ehrenreich 1989). Michael Seth (2002, 2012) shows that education in South Korea developed, and continues to develop, in a complex matrix of political, economical and social interests and power struggles. In South Korea, compulsory education starts with six years of elementary school. Although kindergarten and pre-primary education are optional, the OECD Education Report 2016 states an enrolment of 89% of two-year-old children and 90% of three-year-old children in their respective programmes (2016:6). Three years of middle school are compulsory as well, while upper-secondary education is divided among general high schools, special high schools, and those offering vocational training. In 2014, 82% of students enrolled in three-year programmes of general high schools while only 18% of students pursued vocational training (44% in the OECD average). In 2015, 78.9 % of students from general high schools pursued a degree from college or university. Social scientists (for example Cho 2015) emphasise that South Korea's education system aims first and foremost to develop young people into productive workers for a changing labour

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[46] This acronym refers to Seoul National University, Korea University, Yonsei University and Ewha Womans University – the top-tier universities in Seoul.

market. In contrast, Seth (2002:5) notes that although a "well-educated and disciplined workforce" considerably enabled South Korea's rapid economic development, "public demand for schooling and degrees rather than the practical requirements of industrialists and technocrats" characterised the development of education.[47]

I found contrasting views in anthropological analyses about the construction of social consensus on the value of education; yet, most analyses centre on the family and the role of women therein. One theory addresses the changing role of middle-class women in the period of rapid industrialisation, another one considers the anxieties and fears of these women about their children's future in times of change. Let me introduce you to both.

Within the middle-class family, anthropologists have highlighted the responsibility of mothers for their children's education. Cho Haejoang illustrates this with a popular Korean saying: good education requires "the 'grandfather's financial power, the mother's informational power, and the child's physical strength'." The father is characterised as "unprofessional" and thus playing a minor role, while the siblings sacrifice their own educational paths or even dream of higher education (Cho 2015:454). My research participants spoke of their "guiding moms," seldom forcing them but influencing their decisions in regard to their education. Cho (2002) and Youna Kim (2005) critically reflect on middle-class mothers' influence over their children's education and illustrate how changing conception of woman- and motherhood have contributed to education as centre of attention.

The period of rapid economic industrialisation caused a change of how women identified within their families, which has been characterised as a "housewifization" (Cho 2002:167). Underlining the Confucian conception of the family, Cho emphasises the power and strength of character women could develop as mothers-in-law. During the Japanese colonial era, and even more so during the Korean War, women born in the 1920s were responsible for the survival of the family because men were absent as labourers or soldiers. The poverty and social ruptures they experienced led to the belief that educating their children would bring them a better future (Cho 2002:171). Their daughters, born in the 1940s, grew up in the era of rapid economic growth. They experienced urbanisation, a shrinking of family size to the model of nuclear family, and the "housewifization"; that is, women began to identify as wives responsible for the well-being of the nuclear family (Cho 2002:173). Investing their time and money – primarily earnings from investments and speculation in the informal sector (see Song 2014) – almost solely in family matters, they became status

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[47] Thus, vocational training, for example, is still not considered worth pursuing. The OECD Education Report emphasises the mismatch between the supply of people with vocational training and labour market demand. The South Korean government responded with the establishment of Meister Schools, offering scholarships and further resources to students following the vocational career track. Nevertheless, in 2015, only 17,502 students were enrolled in these vocational schools although they found employment rather easily. In 2014, 92.3% of these graduates were employed immediately (OECD 2016:9) while 37% of tertiary-educated graduates aged between 25–64 "including almost half of all women, had no earnings in 2014" (OECD 2016:8).

conscious, leading to the competitive atmosphere so often described in public and academic narratives (Cho 2002:175). These women put all their effort into their children, raising a new generation of well-educated professional women[48] who aspired to self-realisation through work. However, after marriage, their daughters adopted conservative assumptions about family life in which women were housewives and husbands were breadwinners (Cho 2002:181).

This third generation of women, born in 1965, identified themselves less as mothers and more as wives desiring their feelings to be satisfied by their partner (Cho 2002:181). Because their husbands' long working hours and after-work activities conflicted with their ambitions for domestic life, these mothers were "likely to turn their affection to their children to fulfil emotional desires unmet by their husbands" (Kim 2005:153). The education of their children became so central to these "professional young mothers" that their children's activities assemble their daily structure (Kim 2005:153).

Abelmann (2003) and Nelson (2000) approach the lives of (middle-class) women during the time of rapid economic industrialisation differently, drawing attention to the ethical dilemmas and narratives these mothers faced when contemplating their children's educational pathways. Their ethnographies also illustrate that university or college education is valued throughout the classes and while not all university students belong to South Korea's middle classes, the majority does, and my research participants did.

Rather than dividing women into generations like Cho and Kim, Abelmann (2003) illustrates the respective biographies of her informants and how their biographies influenced perceptions of education. She pictures two mothers – she names them the Education Mother and the Janitor – and their sons, who did and did not make it into college, respectively. The value each mother ascribed to education was based on her own life trajectory. The Education Mother's efforts to ensure that her son passed the university entrance examination must be seen against her family background of a mother who was indifferent to her daughter's education, a father who left for North Korea, and only one sibling, a younger brother, who achieved middle-class status. The narratives of the Janitor reflect considerations about the worth and value of education in changing economic conditions. Using these examples, Abelmann describes mothers who with "Herculean efforts" (2003:8) try to help their children, especially their sons, enter college or university. She shows the complex thoughts and feelings of these mothers, the anxiety, worries but also hope they express in the interviews about the education of their children. These concerns reflected the life circumstances of the women, which rendered calculations about education and its outcomes difficult. Unsecure and unequal access to education intensified in the era after the Asian Financial Crisis, and people questioned the social consensus that certain markers of prestige promised a prosperous future. The "education gamble" became more intense, as Abelmann (2003:26) stresses. The narratives about the 'Spec Gen-

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[48] I focus again on women here.

eration' show that twenty years after the Asian Financial Crisis, concerns regarding the educational path of the young are still debated in public, among families, and in everyday life. However, the "questions of social justice" (Abelmann 2003:116) that worried mothers in the late 1990s in regard to social mobility now concern young adults in regard to social obligations and their position in society.

While in these examples the value of education was reproduced in the "social space" of the family (Abelmann 2003:135), I now want to briefly attend to yet other social relations critical for the reproduction of education as status symbol.

The young Seoulites I spoke with emphasised the role teachers played in their considerations and decisions about their future lives, and I sensed the influence of university professors' teaching on these young people's opinions and belief systems. Janelli (1993) stresses that the education system is structured by dominance and hierarchical relationships which reinforces attitudes such as "respect and ethical obligations" towards teachers (Janelli 1993:46). At the same time, especially universities are places were these mechanisms are undermined (see also Cho 2015). The liberalisation of South Korea's education system considerably multiplied the voices and discourses about the value of education and about the 'right' relationship between teachers and students (see for example Lim 2012).

In my research context, I have found that teachers were both persons of "moral character" (Janelli 1993:46) who guided young people in their orientation process, and instructors who used their status and power – and the dependence this created – to decide what was right and wrong for their students to do. Teachers, too, reproduced both the value of (higher) education and the prominence of specific educational institutions such as Seoul's top-tier universities. Chul, whom I cited at the beginning, made special experiences with this dependence when he had to decide about his higher educational pathway.

Yet, the education system led to the establishment of another social relation important in my research participants' decisions about their educational path: the peer group. The year of entry ordered students into an institutionalised hierarchy of elders and youngsters (*sonbae* and *hubae*) not related by kin (Janelli 1993:46). This system provided students with an alumni network for a lifetime, while at the same time it could hinder opportunities for outsiders, such as being promoted at work (Janelli 1993, Abelmann 2003). The peer group functioned as important framework for my research participants' considerations about educational needs and achievements. On the one hand, it provided a source for orientation and support. On the other hand, it introduced my research participants to value schemes which they opposed.

4.2.3 Display of Status in Ritual: Marriage

A proper wedding ceremony was another middle-class standard young Seoulites were supposed to perform, but they also questioned its importance and sometimes even chose not to marry due to its expense. In chapter 6, I will turn to the narratives of my research participants about getting married, planning their weddings, their married

lives, and I will describe the wedding of Yun, which I attended. Her wedding was composed of two, very different parts: I call the first part 'white wedding'[49] because Yun wore a glamourous white wedding dress and her husband wore white gloves.[50] The second part was called *pyebaek* and is "the most conservative element" (Kendall 1996:44) of a wedding, derived from the Confucian wedding ritual of the Joseon dynasty to honour the parents-in-law (Kendall 1996:44). In what follows, I describe the development of this two-part wedding ceremony and illustrate the importance and changes of this ritual.

The Confucian wedding of the Joseon dynasty was for the main part a custom of the court and *yangban* elite based on the format described in Chu Hsi's (1130–1200) book *Family Rituals*.[51] Living in Song-dynasty China (960–1276), Chu Hsi aimed to reform the rituals and performances of Confucian ceremonies to end practices which he understood as inauthentic, or even ill-mannered (Ebrey 1991:ix). His book of revised and purified versions of family rituals was not only hugely influential in China but also spread to Japan, Vietnam, and the Korean peninsula (Ebrey 1991:xiii), where Korean Confucian scholars interpreted and commented on his version and spread his code of rituals (Kendall 1996:61).[52] The hereditary *yangban* class adopted and, over time, modified these family rites to confirm their elite status, especially through the establishment of public marriages that legitimised the married couple's children as *yangban*.[53]

With the turn of the 20th century, the Confucian wedding style was challenged. Christian missionaries emphasised the bond and obligation between husband and wife rather than between two families, and they brought the "prototype" of the "modern" or "Western" wedding with its white wedding dress and veil in contrast to the colourful *hanbook* and brushed appearance of brides married under Confucian rituals (Kendall 1996:63–4). However, members of Korean society also critiqued the Confucian wedding. Early nationalists attacked rituals as mere stage performances and, thus, as responsible for the grip of foreign powers on the peninsula. During the colonial period, the emergent urban middle class sought to reinterpret family life and, inspired by a "Japanese-derived Western culture" (Kendall 1996:64–5), wedding ceremonies began to become general public events. The emerging urban middle class adopted (invented) elements of the Christian ceremony and combined them with parts of a Japanese wedding style to create the 'modern' Korean wedding.

After liberation from colonial Japan, old-style wedding ceremonies were increasingly associated with patriarchal, family-oriented Confucian practices, while new-style weddings were actively promoted as conjugal rituals. Distinct characteristics of

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[49] Laurel Kendall (1994:165–166) describes that this part was named "new style" or "Western-style" wedding during her research in the 1970s/1980s/1990s.

[50] His wedding suit was made-to-measure with a necktie.

[51] The Family Rites in China were initiation, wedding, funeral, and ancestor worship (Ebrey 1991:ix).

[52] Scholars refer to the reformed doctrine as Neo-Confucianism (Kendall 1996).

[53] Kendall (1996:58) stresses that the setting and broader frame of a wedding ceremony, patrilocality after marriage, or the favouring of first-born sons were not established before the eighteenth century.

ceremonies today – the wedding hall, the master of ceremony, or the aisle – developed during this time (Kendall 1996:65). The South Korean government under President Park created its own interpretation of 'modern' and 'traditional' wedding ceremonies. The Family Ritual Code, publicly announced in 1969 and implemented in 1973, requested South Koreans to practice parsimony in important rituals of weddings, funerals, ancestor worship, and the sixty-first birthday. "As economies of both time and money, procedures were to be simplified, guests limited, and costs curtailed" (Kendall 1996:69). The regulation of 'modern' wedding ceremonies was practically implemented through the commercial wedding halls, which, as enterprises, depended on government's licences and acted as executing forces of its directives. The Family Ritual Code must be understood in the context of President Park's Five-Year Plan and modernisation drive. Narratives of "progress," "enlightenment," and "development" were employed to reform older customs perceived as harmful and rediscover the "true meaning of our ancestors" (Kendall 1996:70). Gradually, old-style Confucian wedding rituals vanished while at the same time their status as authentically Korean was enhanced (Kendall 1996:62). It proceeded as phenomenon of nostalgia and nationalist sentiment, preserved as an "ahistorical reconstruction" (Kendall 1996:72) of a national heritage. In the 1980s, however, the atmosphere changed, and people increasingly criticised the pace of modernisation; as old-style weddings disappeared from the countryside, they were re-invented in the cities. Diverse governmental actors such as the Society of the Preservation of National Treasures or the Ministry of the Interior started programmes and provided places for couples to marry in a 'traditional' way (Kendall 1996:73). The same rhetoric of parsimony used to encourage couples to marry 'modern' was then used to promote 'traditional' weddings.

Kendall (1996) notes that by following the structure and instructions of ritual textbooks, these wedding ceremonies differed considerably from old-style weddings of the past. For example, *pyebaek* – the ritual to honour the parents-in-law, which is practised today in 'traditional' clothes at a specific room in the wedding hall – "is this most problematic element of the older reform […] consequently removed from the once significant spatial context of the groom's family home" (Kendall 1996:61).

Rather than interpreting the development of the wedding ceremony as a *rite de passage* towards modernisation, Kendall (1996) accentuates the continuous national dialogue about which elements, and in which combination, constitute a proper South Korean wedding ceremony. And my research participants kept up this dialogue. Many of them voiced anxieties about getting married because of the enormous expense involved – while also emphasising that it was mainly because of their parents that the ceremony would be expensive in the first place. However, a 'right' marriage not only encompassed the performance of the ritual but included a prior exchange of goods and money between the respective families.

Aside from the ceremony itself, one of the most expensive elements of a wedding is *yedan* – the exchange of goods and money between the bride's and groom's family. Gi explained that a proper ceremony included an adequate amount of dowry, and Yun told me that many couples revoke their marriage plans because they could not

agree on the amount of money to be given as *yedan,* the *yedanbi.* Further ceremonious goods can include clothes and jewellery, cash gifts, or meals and drinks and, although not regarded as a ceremonious good, the provision of new dwellings (Kendall 1996:166). Expanding the ritual exchange of goods to the extended family members makes it even more expensive.

Kendall (1996) describes that in 1986, the Ministry of the Interior enacted a directive to regulate the consumption practices connected to wedding ceremonies, and in contemporary South Korea, government officials have again started to advise young people to simplify their weddings in accordance with their ideas and not those of their parents, a point I will address further in chapter 6. [54]

Kendall (1996:167) emphasises that the ritual goods exchanged were not only a display of the family's wealth, but also signified the family's support for the bride and groom. Those of my research participants who were seriously thinking about getting married or were, like Yun, about to marry, were all working women – web designers (Yun), lawyers (Jin-kyong), or marketing experts (Sora). Yun and Sora even lived alone in Seoul far from their family home in Daegu and the countryside. These young women had the capacity to save towards financing the ritual goods and the wedding ceremony, at least in part. Nevertheless, families were required to look after the marriage of a daughter. Kendall illustrates that those of her research participants who could save their own marriage money and, at the same time, were supported by their families in their wedding decisions and preparations, were those who could act independently. She questions the dichotomous divide into "'dutiful daughter'" versus "'autonomous woman'" and stresses processes of balancing family obligations with "personal entitlement" (Kendall 1996:163). I will show in chapter 6 how my research participants understood and negotiated between their work, finances, and obligations as filial daughters.

Just as the dichotomy of excessiveness versus parsimony characterises wedding narratives in South Korea, so do they present a topic in the consumption practices in the everyday life of South Koreans.

4.2.4 Narratives of Conspicuous Consumption and Parsimony

Anthropologists have critically engaged with South Korea's consumer society that developed in the 1960s and 1970s and became increasingly visible in the 1980s and 1990s as material prosperity increased and consumer choices grew (Nelson 2000). In

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[54] In her analysis of dynastic wedding ceremonies, Martina Deuchler (1992) shows how conspicuous consumption of wedding ceremonies was criticised by Confucian purists. In the early years of the Joseon dynasty, the rite of wedding ceremonies did not only had to follow Chu Hsi's Family Rituals, but "Confucian purists also demanded stringent austerity laws that would strip weddings of luxury items and put an end to the mindless display of wealth" (Deuchler 1992:245). However, she also illustrates that "marriage does not seem to have been a major breaking point in a household's life cycle. A sister did not receive her share in the form of dowry, but delayed her claim until after the parents' death" (Deuchler 1992:56).

this context, especially women were the focus not only of anthropologists' analyses but also of marketing strategies and critics of conspicuous consumption (see Cho 2002, Lee 2002).

In her ethnography *Measured Excess,* Laura Nelson (2000) analyses the new consumer choices available to South Koreans in the 1980s and 1990s and illustrates the diverse and contradictory narratives about consumption – narratives of parsimony and consumption beyond the appropriate limit *(gwasobi).* She focuses on "consumer nationalism"; beyond merely giving priority to products made in South Korea, this refers to consumer choices South Koreans deem to be "most 'Korean'" (Nelson 2000:25).

I have outlined above how the government directed South Korea's industrial development. On the level of the everyday economy, individual consumption decisions were made accountable for the success of the national economy. General Park's New Year speech of 1968 illustrates this idea:

> If each of our 30 million people wastes 10 *wŏn* a day, the daily loss will amount to 300 million *wŏn,* and if the daily waste continues year round, a huge sum of 100 billion *wŏn* will be lost. The latter figure corresponds to half of the national budget … When a frugal spirit permeates homes, schools, and offices, making all citizens watchful against waste and loss, no matter how trivial it may be, this will display formidable power in economic construction: as the proverb says, "Little and often make a heap in time." (Shin 1970:134–135)

Frugality was (in theory at least) a guiding Confucian value of the *yanban* elite in the Joseon dynasty (Nelson 2000:108). Christianity supported the idea of moderation in the pursuit of material goods. Early industrialists thus had to negotiate their activities between the poles of profit-orientation and parsimony. "[M]oderation as a social responsibility of the rich was from early on part of the picture of capitalism Korean entrepreneurs presented to the wider public" (Nelson 2000:109). As the South Korean economy prospered in the 1980s, however, consumption opportunities expanded and offered South Koreans new consumer choices such as cars, furniture, or beauty products (Nelson 2000:114). At the same time, these consumption practices made visible the gap between those who could afford to purchase goods and those who could not. Discourses about maintaining household frugality and avoiding excessive consumption *(gwasobi),* formerly circulating in the early stages of South Korea's economic development, emerged. In particular, middle-class women were faced with a dilemma of "choosing to honor the family or national interests" (Nelson 2000:153), most notably in the matter of educating their children. Household spending on children was now criticised for spoiling the South Korean youth, who were characterised as selfish and, as Cho Haejoang (2002) wrote, narcissistic. At the same time, they became central in discourses and anxieties about the future of the nation (Nelson 2000:152). Middle-class mothers, who were considered to be responsible for their children's education and thus, in a broader sense, for securing the nation's future

prosperity by fostering the next generation of 'spirited' and 'successful' citizens, were caught between *gwasobi* criticism on the one hand and expensive after school programmes and tutoring called *gwaoe* (extra lessons) on the other. Nelson carefully portrays her interlocutors' diverse reflections on *gwaoe*. One mother questioned the stress and pressure her children might encounter, arguing that childhood should be the time to play. Other mothers criticised tutoring because it could undermine the ability of children to develop and discover things on their own. Furthermore, "many saw the need to spend money on private instruction as a result of public-school failing" (Nelson 2000:157). These narratives about education and parsimony amount to the narratives of the Janitor and Education Mother; just as they pondered the "question of social justice" (Abelmann 2003:116), these middle-class women raised explicit ethical questions when balancing their duties towards their children and the nation (Nelson 2000:158).

In the following, I discuss the consumer practice of plastic surgery to further illustrate the complexity of consumption decisions. Bodily appearance, I will show in chapter 7, was an important issue for my interlocutors. Although they were mostly female, they emphasised that the pressure to "look good, look normal" affected men as much as women. In Seoul, I could hardly miss the areas where one plastic surgeon followed the next, not to mention the before and after pictures of women and men in buses and subways. Because I spoke especially with young female Seoulites about bodily appearance, I will limit my discussion to constructions of femininity.[55]

The consumer industry constructed a new femininity – the so-called Missy. First used in a department store advertisement in 1994 (Lee 2002:150), the term was soon used to describe young married women who refused to embrace the title of an *ajumma*[56], associated with "ageing and dowdiness" (Kim 2011:1). Rather, they sought self-realisation in their job and marriage while maintaining an attractive appearance. Feminist scholars like Cho Haejoang and So-Hee Lee (2002) are very critical of this new female image. Cho writes that "in the 1980s, the dominant female image was of a patriotic and intellectual woman. By the mid-1990s, campuses had filled with fashionable girls who imitated the styles of *Vogue* models […] This is the advent of narcissism" (Cho 2002:183, italics as in original). She emphasises that young women found their subjectivity in beauty and plastic surgery. Lee (2002) focuses on a new sexual morality, where young women (married or unmarried) experiment with love affairs. A new self-image made possible by the consumer industry, characterised by a focus on one's individual character and wish for self-realisation, distinguished daughters from their mothers.

Yet, Ruth Holliday and Joanna Elfving-Hwang (2012:59) challenge postcolonial ("western cultural influence") and feminist ("women's continued subjection to patri-

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[55] Jung Sun (2011) attends for example to the relationship between consumption and the construction of masculinity.
[56] The term *Ajumma* was once associated with a strong and powerful married woman, but the meaning transformed completely (Cho 2002).

archy") explanations of South Koreans 'obsession' with beauty and cosmetic surgery. Cosmetic surgery, I got to know the term simply as surgery *(susul),* refers first and foremost to invasive practices such as eye (blepharoplasties) and nose (rhinoplasties) procedures. I was told that a double-eyelid appearance was the most common reason people underwent the surgery; further reasons included widening the eye or lifting the eyelid (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012:60). Rhinoplasty refers to the augmentation of the nose tap with silicon or other materials such as cartilage or bone taken from the patient's body (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012:60), depending, Cho-hee told me, on the permanency of the rhinoplasty. Further cosmetic surgery were breast, buttock or biceps augmentation or – which I personally found to be the most invasive – reshaping of the jaw (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012:60).

These surgeries follow specifically South Korean but constantly changing understandings of desirable appearance. After liberation from Japanese colonisation and during the period of rapid industrialisation, the body became a site of negotiating South Korean identity (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012:69), and while anti-colonial discourses informed beauty standards after liberalisation, physiognomic beliefs were revitalised during industrialisation. People believe that facial characteristics can reveal the character or future of a person, exemplified by Eun-ji, who stated that features of the eyeball indicate a person's character or qualities (a dark eyeball indicates an evil character; a red line signifies trouble around the person). Although physiognomy is only one facet of why people undergo cosmetic surgery, having the 'right' face can be of practical importance, most notably for marriage, or to succeed in the competitive employment market (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012:73). Thus, cosmetic clinic surgeons must also know some aspects about physiognomy (Kim 2005). Nevertheless, while a certain bodily or facial appearance has a gendered connotation, women and men also challenge or reject such notions by styling their bodies oppositionally (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012). However, those who undergo plastic surgery seek to enhance their bodies in accordance with a South Korean beauty ideal, and while plastic surgery was popular and publicly accepted among South Koreans, a 'natural' body or face is valued over this invasive practice.

My research participants critically reflected on the limited beauty ideals that were promoted through celebrities, the limited ways of having an appropriate South Korean body. Deuchler (1992) illustrates that the *yangban* elite could preserve its noble status for a long period because of their social and economic uniformity, and Holliday and Elfving-Hwang (2012:75) view this virtue of conformity and the desire to resemble the elite-class as a possible explanation for the limited beauty standards existing in contemporary South Korea. All these authors emphasise, however, that aesthetic surgery in South Korea is a complex theme, illustrating different levels of negotiating processes, such as global and national beauty ideals, discourses and practices about identity, as well as "symbolic practices of coming of age, caring for the self, marking social status and seeking success" (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012:76).

Success had different connotations in the narratives of young Seoulites; one, however, was related to the job, and in this context, gender played an important role.

4.2.5 Gendered Aspects of Work

In the 1960s, the gender roles of "provider-husband and dependent housewife" (Moon 2002:84–5) were established as normative, with the effect that while women became more central in the household, men became more estranged from it (Cho 1989:200). In the period of industrialisation, women became household managers while men became the so-called breadwinners of the nuclear family, working as white-collar workers in conglomerates.

Moon Seungsook (Moon 2002:82) critically reflects that "[a]ccounts of contemporary gender hierarchy in south Korea, by both feminists and nonfeminists, tend to attribute gender inequality to the persistence of Korea's Confucian tradition." This explanation fails to acknowledge how 'tradition' continues and is reinvented. At the same time, the process of industrialisation involved a restructuring of gender hierarchy with new gender roles ascribed to people on a global scale. During Japanese domination, Korea began to urbanise, and a capitalist class slowly emerged (Kendall 1996:102). As businesses looked for models of management and business administration, they "continued to […] lend a measure of legitimacy to gendered inequality by contributing to the naturalization of such practices in contemporary commercial organizations" (Janelli and Yim 2002:117–8). Janelli (1993) and Janelli and Yim (2002) describe the construction of gender in a South Korean conglomerate, and I would like to discuss the construction in some detail because it was important in the narratives of my female research participants about their work.

Janelli and Yim (2002:116–117) use the terms "male bourgeoisie," "male new middle class," and "female new middle class" to refer to and distinguish the actors in this conglomerate and to illustrate the interaction between them based on different political-economic interests.

The male bourgeoisie, that is, "the principal owners and highest managers" (Janelli and Yim 2002:119), used diverse strategies to produce uneven and gendered opportunities for careers at their companies that legitimated unequal pay and, thus, generated profit. While male workers were hired through a nationwide campaign, women workers were recruited on basis of their high school recommendation. Male candidates were required to demonstrate a four-year college education and completion of the military service, and they could apply up to the age of 27. "For most male applicants, a written test and an interview were aimed at judging the prospective employee's intelligence, general knowledge, personality, and perhaps language abilities, but not his specific job skills" (Janelli and Yim 2002:120). Female applicants had to take a test to prove their personalities and skills as secretaries, and almost no women with college education were hired. These different recruiting processes allowed the company to legitimise the differentiation between the high entrance level of male (level 4) and the low one of female workers (level 5), and the refusal of any further promotions to female workers. Further actions included a different dress code for men and women (women were expected to wear the company's uniform whereas men could select and buy their own clothing) and the requirement for women to

resign after marriage (Janelli and Yim 2002:122). An indirect measure to construct gender differences was through the construction of social relations in the company. Janelli and Yim (2002:124) describe "after-hours recreation," or after-work social drinking, as a way to enhance the prospect of a harmonious, team-oriented, even family-like company. According to their research participants and research materials, these events "offered opportunities to relieve stress, to build a sense of camaraderie, and to repair any social relationship that may have been injured […] during the hectic workday" (Janelli and Yim 2002:123). Women, however, were often excluded from such events for several reasons: e.g. they finished work at different times, or events were held in saunas or baths, where women could not or would not participate (Janelli and Yim 2002:124).[57]

While the female workers were fully aware of their marginalised positions in the company and actively thought to reshape them, they rarely voiced their feelings and thoughts about the existing gender pay gap or the near impossibility for promotion to the anthropologists (Janelli and Yim 2002:128–9). In contrast, my female research participants talked recurrently about the invisible class ceiling in their companies and strongly emphasised the inequality of treatment between men and women.

The period of rapid economic industrialisation is conceptualised as paradise lost (Toshio 1998:198) in which the prior economic situation – life-long employment and stable contracts – and current economic situation young people face – temporary employment, low pay and uncertainty of job security – are contrasted. However, this period is also negatively viewed by anthropologists as a period where status consciousness was implemented.

The narratives and opinions about South Korea's rapid industrialisation period that I have presented in this chapter are selective and designed to illustrate the context of my research participants' lives. I have shown how South Korea's corporate landscape and the standards of the middle classes emerged over time by addressing diverse actors and how they pondered the nature of a good life. Before I turn to the

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[57] The specific corporate culture in a conglomerate not only encompassed gender but also "habits of subordination" (Janelli 1993:19); the characteristics developed due to the military service. Mandatory military service is compensated by economic and political benefits, which Moon Seungsook (2002:91) describes as constituting elements for "hegemonic masculinity."

The symposium "Reflection of 'University Students' through the Eyes of University Students" I visited included a small research project conducted by anthropology students on the interdependency of military culture *(gundae munwha)* and university culture *(daehak munwha)*. Military service, which every male South Korean citizen aged 20 or over is obligated to do for at least twenty-one months, illustrates most evidently the conflict between North and South Korea. To discover whether or not the military service influenced the social relations in everyday interactions at university, the students asked six male fellow students about their experiences and opinions about the military service. The interviewees foregrounded the similar hierarchical structures of the military and society and emphasised that they had become accustomed to the hierarchical structure and patriarchal atmosphere in society; they also considered these circumstances to be necessary. Based on their interviews, the students concluded that military culture and everyday culture influence each other.

narratives of my research participants in more detail, I want to discuss another important context: Seoul.

4.3 Imagining Seoul

Seoul was the place where my research participants studied, worked, lived. I have already described Seoul in my methodological reflections. Here, I address Seoul as the economic and educational centre of South Korea because current developments of the city are an equally important background of interaction for my research participants.

Developing into a "world city, a cultural city, an eco city, a welfare city, and the capital city in a united Korea in the future" (Kim and Han 2012:151) were goals of the 2020 Seoul Urban Plan. At a broader level, the Seoul Capital Region Plan (revised 2009) aspires to develop the region into a "globally competitive mega-region" (Kim and Han 2012:151). On the major tourism website visitseoul.net, Seoul represents itself as distinct city offering manifold attractions and possibilities for tourists, emphasising its historical and cultural legacy, cosmopolitan character, centre of design and art, but also nature.[58] Seoul is envisioned as a "first-class city" (Kim and Han 2012:151). In this final section, I concentrate on two conceptualisations of Seoul: Seoul as 'Global City' and Seoul as 'City of Design'[59] to illustrate the dynamics and diversity of urban (economic) processes.[60]

Seoul as 'Global City'

I illustrated in the chapter 2 how neoliberalism is conceptualised as a global economic force based on hyper-mobile finance capital, and how it is said to have changed the working environment to adapt to this hyper-mobility and flexibility. Yet, financial centres are fixed glass and cement buildings – a sharp contrast to the hyper-mobility of globalisation. They are embedded in places and produced through design and planning processes (Sassen 2000), while at the same time they are places were "the work of globalization gets done" (Sassen 2000:81, see also Tsing 2000).

Developing in competition with global cities such as Tokyo, Hong Kong, or Singapore, Seoul is imagined to take over a leading economic function as "gateway city to East Asia and beyond" (Kim and Han 2012:152). While South Korea as a whole

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[58] The website offers a variety of guidebooks for download, see "Guidebooks & Maps" at http://english.visitseoul.net/map-guide-book?WT.ac=MAIN_ (accessed 19 January 2021).

[59] Setha Low (1996) brought together further metaphors used by social scientists to describe cities.

[60] James Holston and Arjun Appadurai (2003) challenge the dominant academic discourses that cities have to find new economic growth engines in a post-Fordist era. In their discussion about changing perceptions and renegotiations of citizenship, they emphasise that cities differ in the "relationship between production, finance, labor, and service" (2003:304) and caution anthropologists to attend to the diversity of this relation.

developed rapidly after the Korean War, investments went mainly to Seoul, creating many job opportunities and leading to a high influx of rural migrants. During the period of rapid economic transformation, Seoul's population grew until it stabilised at its present number of almost 10 million residents while other regions experienced a population decline (Kim and Han 2012:146). The uneven development led the government to implement the Capital Region Readjustment Act (CRRA) in 1982 to control the growth of the Seoul Capital Region. The CRRA aimed at decentralisation on both national and urban levels. The government addressed the uneven industrial growth of the regions, prohibited further establishments of faculties and educational facilities in the capital and sought to decentralise Seoul's command-and-control function by developing sub-centres. Besides the core centre of the Central Business District, Yeouido (1968) and Gangnam (1970) were developed. Yeouido became an important financial district, hosting the Korean Stock Exchange, (investment) banks and the 63 Building. The district of Gangnam developed into one of the most expensive suburban areas with a well-known educational and commercial infrastructure (Kim and Han 2012:147). In 2015, the building of another sub-centre was finished: the Sangam Digital Media City (DMC). Focusing on information technology and media, this sub-centre promotes itself with the slogan: "The Future is Here!"[61]

In 2009, the Capital Region Plan was revised and now aimed to strengthen these financial centres by relaxing the strict greenbelt policy and developing and connecting these centres as "international nodes" to advance "a globally competitive megaregion" (Kim and Han 2012:151). Although the primary focus of Seoul's economic development is the service sector, further aspirations concern the development of research and development (R&D) and nanotechnology and biotechnology (Bowen 2016, Phan and Jeong 2013). These aspirations depend on material conditions such as a fully developed infrastructure, facilities, hardware, "brain talent," but also "non-expert jobs" (Sassen 2000:81).[62] However, Seoul not only provides employment opportunities in the above-mentioned areas, entry into desired companies such as the *jaebeols* requires candidates to be educated in Seoul as well. Thus, Seoul is a "strategic place" and a "production site" (Sassen 2000:80) to advance South Korea's economy.

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[61] For further information see Seoul Metropolitan Government: Attract investment (http://english. seoul.go.kr/policy/economy/attract-investment/4-digital-city-urban-center-dmc/, accessed 19 January 2021) and Seoul Tourism Organization (5 August 2000): Sangam DMC (Digital Media City): The Future is Here! (http://english.visitseoul.net/tours/Sangam-DMC-Digital-Media-City-The-Future-is-Here_/10699, accessed 19 January 2021).

[62] Conglomerates, but also the universities perform an important part in these sectors. However, small and medium-sized enterprises are also important to understand the city's economy (Taylor and Csomós 2012).

Seoul as 'City of Design'

> A city's creative output is based on its identity.
> Seoul's greatest strength is its ability to celebrate diversity.[63]

Seoul is described as place where diverse elements come together, building its identity and establishing its strength. The stress on and celebration of diversity, however, sharply contrasts with the narratives of my research participants, who felt the standards and unifying aspects of social obligations hovering above their life designs.

Whereas the development of its global city functions became one target of city policies, the distinct focus on culture to enhance the development of urban areas points to yet another effort to make Seoul a leading city in Asia and to stay competitive globally. In 2004, UNESCO initiated its project of 'Creative Cities Network' to promote creativity as a central aspect of development, especially of economic development. Goals are, among others, to strengthen cities' identity and competitiveness in the current global environment.[64] Creative cities are defined as cities that combine three elements: a meaningful cultural heritage, a diverse and vivid creative scene, and the aspirations to develop its economic and social conditions by using this cultural environment. Design is conceptualised as key branch and Seoul became UNESCO Creative City of Design in 2010. The Government of Seoul stresses the importance of its design industry and it is envisioned to have the potential to enhance the comfort and quality of everyday lives, and, in a broader sense, of the whole environment.[65]

The announcement of Seoul as a UNESCO Creative City of Design in 2010 made official the effort to develop 'cultural creativity' as new way to advance the metropolis, raising the question of which culture is promoted, who is part and who is excluded from the policies (Oakes and Wang 2016). As UNESCO includes not only design but also crafts and folk arts, gastronomy, film, literature, media arts, and music[66] into their definition of creative cities, the use of culture as development strategy suggests an instrumentalisation of certain cultural threads employed as resources and represented as essential (Oakes and Wang 2016:3). The anticipated goal for Seoul is as follows: "Rearing creative talents, expanding ways for people to participate in

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[63] UNESCO Creative Cities Network: Seoul (https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/seoul, accessed January 2021).
[64] UNESCO Creative Cities Network: About us (https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/content/about-us, accessed 19 January 2021).
[65] UNESCO Creative Cities Network: Seoul (https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/seoul, accessed 19 January 2021).
[66] UNESCO Creative Cities Network: About us (https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/content/about-us, accessed 19 January 2021).

cultural creativity building activities, enforcing the design creativity city, diversifying cultural variety, and finding other businesses for collaboration"[67].

In 2014, the 2020 Urban Plan was revised into the 2030 Seoul Urban Master Plan. In a bottom-up approach and participatory process, expert groups, citizen representatives and city administrators discussed contemporary shortcomings and defined future targets of urban planning. They set the focus on an improvement of living conditions for Seoul's residents and social targets such as welfare and safety were emphasised alongside economic ones, thus departing from a past, economic-centred top-down approach of city planning. The long-term vision became the development into a 'City of Happy Citizens Where Communication and Consideration Are Paramount' (Kim 2017).

These aspirations illustrate the aim of South Korea to advance itself on a world arena, made real and currently undertaken through planning and design processes in the Seoul Capital Region. This is where my research participants' life trajectories and daily practices, and where their educational, work-based and social lives manifested. I will now turn to their narratives.

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[67] Seoul Metropolitan Government (1 October 2010): Collaboration between UNESCO and Seoul (http://english.seoul.go.kr/collaboration-between-unesco-and-seoul-city/, 19 January 2021).

5 Imagine Education

> Me: Why did you want to study at a university?
>
> Dae-hyun: The reason originally, there must be a reason to do something. […] You need a reason why you want to become a university student. However, it is not like that in South Korea. It is not a decision to be made [...] It is not compulsory education but, again, they say you have to go. It is not written in any law, and it is not that they will support you with money […] It is like compulsory education and that is the point. When they make it like compulsory education then they have to make it free, you know. That is not the case, and all go as if it is compulsory education. However, when it comes to money you have to pay on your own.
> (Interview 29.11.2012)

Among OECD countries, South Korea has one the highest rates of college and university enrolment. Yet, the educational path towards tertiary education was, as Dae-hyun emphasised, mandatory, socially required, not a matter of choice for young people. By using the analogies of compulsion and law, he invoked a picture of forceful structures of power which determine young people's trajectories after they graduate from high school. At the same time, these structures did not support university students financially. Dae-hyun put forward the responsibility of this structure when transforming higher education in an obligation to pursue, but he also criticised young people in general for following this obligation.

Enrolling in university is the final step in young people's educational path (see sub-chapter 4.2.2.) but before achieving the goal, young people have to 'survive' the hardship of preparing for the examination (see Seth 2002). In public discourses, the term 'Hell-*Chosun*' refers to young people experiencing this hardship (see Cho et al. 2017). They either prepare for the entrance examination *(suneung)* or collect enough 'Spec' for entering university through early admission *(susi)*. *Suneung,* short for College Scholastic Ability Test *(daehak suhak neungnyeok siheom),* is a standardised test outlined and managed by the Korea Institute of Curriculum and Evaluation (KICE). Nari summarised the period of preparation for this test as follows. A typical day in a high school student's life, she explained, would circulate around a pattern: Going to school in the morning at 8 a.m., taking classes over the day followed by yet other classes in a cram school *(hagwon)* until midnight, going home and falling asleep immediately. This pattern, she stressed, would repeat again and again until young people succeed in enrolling in university.

  Susi[68], on the other hand, refers to a university admission that is "based primarily on high school grades and the recommendation of principles" (Seth 2002:169). Chul described it as an irregular way to enter the university. "The school report, TOEFL score, awards you have received in maths or physics all count for *susi,*" he described and added, "it is like a vicious cycle. Students go to cram schools to collect their 'Spec' for *susi,* but as everybody is doing it, it is total over-competition."

  Both admission forms put students under extreme pressure.[69] But it is not just any university that high school students are preparing so hard for. SKYE, Seoul National University, Korea University, Yonsei University and Ewha Womans University present the top-tier universities in South Korea. They are all located in Seoul. It is especially a graduation from one of these prestige universities that promises the degree holder the next successful step in life: working in a conglomerate.

  The concept of success in South Korea is closely tied with a specific and determined educational path (see Abelmann 2003) and in this chapter, I want to attend to how young Seoulites imagined education and success to be. I suggest that young Seoulites reworked the meaning of having success using publicly known values, illustrating not only a discontinuity but also a continuity with past notions of how education should be. Ethics made explicit and the use of money as means of payment shows the importance of these values. To begin with, I attend to their educational path and how they experienced and negotiated the value of education in their respective social relations. In the next part of this chapter, I elaborate on the criticism they voiced about higher education and how they defined success themselves.

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[68] *Susi* was introduced in 1998 as one measure to reform the university entrance examination system. However, Seth (2002:169) notes that "many felt the new reform would not liberate students from examination hell […]. It would mean, in practice, […] that examination hell would change form, not disappear." Chul's account illustrates the merely change.
[69] In my article "Politicizing Youth in South Korea – The Role of Seoul's Educational Institutions" (Landgraf 2020a), I discuss different claims to alter the South Korean education system.

5.1 'They Say' – Negotiating the Value of Education

During our interview, Dae-hyun talked about 'they' when distinguishing between university students and the wider society. 'They say' was a statement I heard very often, and when I asked "Who are they?" the answers referred to almost everybody: family, friends, teachers, and companies.

My dialogue partners often referred to South Korea's rapid industrialisation, during which the social meaning of success was circumscribed, and higher education became (again) an important means to achieve success: Gi described how in their parents' generation, the '386 Generation,' only a small percentage of South Koreans studied at a university and thus their career after graduation was guaranteed. When Ji-u reflected about young people's life trajectories, she emphasised that it is a "pity" to see them chasing only money and success, but she clarified that "in the past, people managed to achieve a certain degree of success through intensive training, and parents assign this mentality to their children." In contrast, Eun-ji explained that young people were following their parents' wishes because "youngsters feel the social pressure to fit in. South Koreans are used to obedience." She explained, "South Koreans are sensitive to what people judge is right or wrong, and they believe that the judgement of the majority matters a lot."

While Gi and Ji-u's explanations exemplify the valuation of education I discussed in sub-chapter 4.2.2, Eun-ji's statement illustrates the ethical dimension of education. Whether doing the 'right' or 'wrong' thing, young Seoulites had to negotiate with their wider social surroundings which educational path to pursue. In the following, I attend to these processes of negotiation about the diverse values education encompassed for their parents, teachers and friends, and young Seoulites themselves.

5.1.1 The Parents

First and foremost, education is the family's business. In sub-chapter 4.2, I illustrated how middle-class mothers aspired for their children to become successful and highly educated while at the same time experiencing fewer possibilities for social mobility and greater inequality of access to good education. The relationships young Seoulites had with their parents were complex. In actively living this relationship, they reflected and judged about values, about what was right and wrong to do, in the broader context of education.

Eun-ji was a young woman who was deeply "into Emo" during her high school years. Emo, short for emotional, developed as music genre from hardcore in the 1980s (emotional hardcore) and is currently used in public discourses to describe a youth culture. Unlike previous youth cultures, Emo developed solely in the internet and thus has no fixed place of origin (Büsser, Engelmann and Rüdiger 2009:8). Emo culture is diverse, as every youth culture is; however, it is characterised by a fashion style that combines black clothing with colourful accessories – e.g. skulls

or cherries – and an attitude towards life that emphasises its downsides (Wächter and Triebswetter 2009:18). Emos are thus stereotypically characterised as depressed, self-destructive young people who even physically harm themselves. Eun-ji had such experiences herself. She stated that she was not the most depressed of her friends; nevertheless, she had had self-destructive thoughts. She emphasised that "nothing really made me want to die except my parents' high standards towards my academic career." The pressure created by her parents' expectations threw her into thoughts about suicide, a sensitive problem in South Korea.[70]

In Eun-ji's case, her dream for the future conflicted with her parents' aspirations for her. In our first interview, she told me that she actually wanted to open her own small clothing business after finishing high school rather than study at a university. She could, however, not speak with her parents about her dream. She had talked with some teachers, who couldn't understand either, asking her "so you want to study management?" She gave up on her dream and explained that "I studied hard to go to university; I studied because I did not want to make my parents shameful."

Even though neither Eun-ji nor I were native speakers of English, I understood that the South Korean concept of shame encompasses feelings of embarrassment, but also sadness, disappointment and disgrace when having done something wrong. If she had not studied, Eun-ji would have disappointed her parents; however, she would have herself felt embarrassed about her actions. Eun-ji did not want her parents to be affected by her 'wrong' decision of refusing university education, so she decided to follow her parents' wishes. But she did not blindly do so, nor did she simply act as a dutiful child (see Cho 2015); she thoughtfully considered how her actions would affect other people, a situation that made ethics explicit. She contemplated how she should live and decided to follow her parents' values because she could not have lived with the consequences of another decision. However, she experienced distress due to her parents' expectations. For her, becoming an Emo helped her to acknowledge and accept the emotions their behaviour invoked in her. She emphasised that "unlike many other teenagers, I had a lot of chance to talk about feelings and depression," which exemplifies the importance of the group in Emo youth culture (Büsser, Engelmann and Rüdiger 2009:7).

Eun-ji herself cared deeply about the people around her. She told me about her friend's brother, who was depressed as well. She thought she could help him through Emo. "I believed that the idea of having depressed friends around him would help him at least a little, because he needed finding someone to share similar feelings," she explained. She told me that she had read that teenage depression was caused by hormonal reasons due to the body's biological development and that talking about depression could ease the feeling. "I had been Emo for 2 years at that time, and I could have introduced to him the kind of music and drawing that could have helped

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[70] South Korea has one of the highest suicide rates among OECD countries. *The Korea Herald* reported that "according to 2014 data by Statistics Korea, suicide was the No. 1 cause of death among people aged 10 to 39" (Yoon 2015), citing academic stress as a primary cause.

him overcome or embrace depression." His mother, however, disagreed, and so she left him be.

Eun-ji also wrote poems, created artwork, and listened to Emo music to deal with her depression, while talking to Emo friends helped her to relativise her feelings and thoughts. In retrospect, she explained that "watching other emo friends complain made me laugh – they unintentionally taught me that worrying and crying over metaphysical things didn't help me with anything and only bothers my other friends."

In public discourses, Emo culture is said to be silent and thus, apolitical. Ethnographic studies, however, emphasise that the movement rejects the requirements of a highly competitive society through emotions rather than argumentation (Wächter and Triebswetter 2009:19). Eun-ji decided to become Emo, which enabled her to balance different duties and values and gave her the freedom to develop the question of how she should live further, and finally even to emancipate herself from Emo.

Sora's narratives similarly illustrate the impact of parents. Her hometown was, as she described it, in the province *(jibang)*, and her parents, she told me, thought it was better to study at a university in Seoul than at one near her home. "My parents thought that I should go to study and live in a big city," she explained, adding that "they thought a lot about it and thus, studying became their top priority." Unlike Eun-ji's parents, who lived in Seoul, Sora's parents were very concerned about their daughter's education and future prospects if she remained in the province. As I will show below, this was not unreasonable.

Sora did not negotiate with her parents; rather, she revised her views about studying and tried her best to fulfil her parents' wishes. However, she found studying at a university in Seoul quite stressful. Because she had spent her school days studying for the university, she had not developed any other goals. "When I could manage to achieve this longed-for goal and entered a university in Seoul, I really wondered what I should do now. You know, when the grades match, you have to go to university, but I was not that good at studying," she explained. "I felt a dilemma and it gave me a lot of stress." Thus, although her *suneung* grades were sufficient to enter university, she doubted her ability to study at a university.

The move to Seoul presented another difficulty as she had to adapt to a new life on her own in the capital city. "When I moved to Seoul, I felt that I lacked any spirit of independence. I was blocked," she explained. During high school, her daily life was organised around the schedule of her school and administered by her parents. At university, she had to sort out the courses and schedule by herself. "Actually, the first year is when everybody is enjoying oneself, a time of full amusement. However, I had to adapt to my new surroundings and was not able to have fun," she emphasised. But she added, "it was a process to learn and develop a sense of independence [*jaribsim*], the spirit of independence [*dongnipsim*], but then I enjoyed university very much."

Unlike Eun-ji, Sora retrospectively acknowledged that she had completely followed her parents' wishes during high school. But when she moved to Seoul and entered university, she needed to rethink her situation, and she started to reflect on her future life – on what she wanted to do and the person she wanted to become. She de-

veloped the confidence to rely on herself and she imagined a new goal her education would lead her to: book marketing.[71] I will finish Sora's story in sub-chapter 8.2.

Eun-ji's and Sora's narratives illustrate the processes of reflection young Seoulites engage in when evaluating their parents' expectations regarding higher education. Although their narratives are somewhat different, they demonstrate explicitly ethical considerations and judgements with regard to questions of shame and filial piety. Eun-ji embraced her emotions and could thus balance the contradicting values she and her parents held. Sora, in her retrospective evaluation, judged her parents' values regarding education in the context of a regional imbalance between Seoul and the provinces. Based on ethical evaluations, her parents foregrounded the need to study in the capital city so that Sora would have the same opportunities as other students, and Sora adjusted to this (evaluated) necessity. It was only later that she embraced her independence and thought anew about how she should live.

Parents not only worry that their children will enter university; they are also concerned about the subjects their children study. During my research, I quickly learned that humanities were considered to be problematic. Comparative literature, philosophy, history – all these subjects are "not affected by popularity," as Eun-ji pointed out. And "[p]hilosophy," she said, "is not considered as practical." Practical for what, I mused while reviewing our interview. Tertiary education is but one step in a successful life, and thus the subject studied is just a means to achieve the next step: the job. In these terms, humanities' subjects were not considered to be the best choice. Nevertheless, once their children managed to enter a university, parents were somewhat less demanding regarding the subject studied. Nari, for example, told me that her mother was not satisfied with her studying humanities. "My mum wants me to change my major, I can change my major one time," she stated, adding, "but my mum respects what I am doing. She always respected my choice, she never forced me to do something. She wants me to change to IS [International Studies] but it is not like she is forcing me."

At this point in their educational path, my research participants were granted a certain freedom from their parents to reflect and judge for themselves about their futures. In this context, other members of their social matrices started to influence their decisions – friends, fellow students, teachers, the media – and they had to negotiate the value of education anew. As Eun-ji, Nari and Sora told me about their parents' impact and guidance, and their reflection about it, Bora made me aware that some parents do not interfere in their children's decisions. Bora emphasised that "they just want me to do whatever I want to. They don't care whether I will get a job or not or make a lot of money or not, or succeed or not. They don't care." Instead, Bora had to negotiate other people's opinions. In the following, I discuss processes of negotiation and balancing with non-familial 'others'.

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[71] I discuss both Sora's and Jin-kyong's journey also in my previous contribution to the Berghahn volume *Aspirations of Young Adults in Urban Asia,* edited by Mariske Westendorp, Désirée Remmert and Kenneth Finis (Landgraf 2020b).

5.1.2 Friends and Teachers

I met Bora for our first interview in a coffee shop near Daehangno station. The weather was warm and sunny, so we sat outside. Because she had written in her response to my announcement (see sub-chapter 3.4.1) that she felt lost and thus thought she could help me understand university students in South Korea, I did not begin the interview with a question but rather just let her talk about her thoughts and feelings.

"I don't know what to say, I really don't know, but it is really hard for me to find a job," she began. "At first, I don't know what I want to do, and I think there are so many university students in South Korea who think in that way. They don't know what to do and even if they know, they can't do because they can't make a lot of money or the job is unstable," she continued. "What would a stable job be?" I asked her. "Well, normally South Korean students want a stable job such as government official [*gongmuwon*] or teacher, but I don't want that kind of job. Actually, I have something that I want to do but to be frank with you I want to make a lot of money," she told me and laughed. "What do you study?" I wanted to know. "Well, I always loved to learn foreign languages and I was interested in interpretation and translations since middle school, but not English, it was Japanese that I first translated," she explained. "However, I didn't want to go to the Japanese department because of its potentials, because you know Japan is now not very strong developing," she said and mused, "although it is a developed country many people say that Japan is sinking [*jineun hada*]. Thus, I thought that it doesn't have much possibilities to get rich."

Different from the narratives of Nari, Eun-ji and Sora, Bora's parents did not interfere with her university education. She was, nevertheless, influenced by others when deciding what to study. "Actually, I am interested in learning German too," she emphasised her curiosity for languages. "People, however, say 'don't start to learn German, it is too difficult to learn,' and thus I gave up on starting to learn it." She lost her confidence in her ability to judge the right path to follow. "They say that I should better use the time to deepen my studies of English," she explained further. "People tend to see just the possibilities. For example, China is an economically promising country and thus, Chinese is a promising language. English, on the other hand, is an international language, so it leads people to expect future success when studying it." German, however, was considered to be a language only for literature or philosophy and not expected to be useful in finding good employment. "The same is true for Japanese and many other languages," she added. "They say it is useless to study because these countries are economically weak and not developing," she clarified the narratives she encountered. "Who are they?" I asked her curiously. "Exactly everybody: friends – not parents because they don't care, they say just do what you want to do – teachers, professors, comments I saw in the internet, newspapers and TV-shows," she specified. "They say China is a very promising country, so you should learn Chinese. However, the trend is that students don't have anything they really want to do," she emphasised again, her position resembling Dae-hyun's criti-

cal stance. "Students usually major in management or economics. I don't know if it is true, but they think it enables them to easily enter good companies like Samsung or LG […] Another way is to major in English, but I think there are not many people who really want to major in English." In the end, she had decided to major in English rather than Japanese. "I chose to enter the EIT department [English Interpretation and Translation] because majoring in Japanese alone would not be enough to sustain my future. Your future will be very dark; thus, I chose both English and Japanese. I major in English interpretation and translation and my minor is Japanese," she finished.

Bora's interest in languages conflicted with her aspirations to earn a lot of money. To earn money, she needed to study a language that would be in demand in the job market; thus, she considered the wider economic situation of the respective country in which each language was spoken. Japan, the country she had the most interest in, had experienced a long recession and was only starting to recover after the financial crisis of 2007. English, as an international language, remained equally important, in contrast to German. Thus, after analysing the narratives of 'the others' and reflecting on and calculating her chances on the labour market, Bora reached a compromise: she decided to stay with Japanese, but as minor.

Her narrative affirms what Eun-ji and Nari told me about 'practical' subjects for students to study at a university. Yet, Bora's engagement with her future was saturated with considerations that made ethical questions explicit. Her calculations show how she pondered how she should live to sustain her future life as a social actor who needs to possess a certain amount of money to pay for needs and wants. The issue of finding a job with an appropriate salary to sustain a future conflicted with her interests, but she made choices where she found a compromise between her love of learning languages and her chances of earning a lot of money.

Besides friends and fellow students, teachers had a great influence on young adults (see sub-chapter 4.2.2), as Eun-ji's narrative has already indicated. Chul explained that there exists an unofficial ranking of the best high schools (identical to that of universities). Amongst other things, high schools were evaluated based on how many of their students went to one of the top-tier universities. Chul was accepted through early admission (susi) into the agricultural economics programme of Seoul National University. However, he actually wanted to study economics and sought a recommendation to change the programme from one of his teachers. This teacher, however, became very upset and refused to write a letter of recommendation, telling Chul he should just study agricultural economics at Seoul National University. Nevertheless, Chul managed to study economics at yet another top-tier university.

Bora and Chul's accounts illustrate how people other than their parents influenced young Seoulites' decision-making processes regarding education and career path. The relationship with these 'others,' however, differed from those Sora, Nari and Eun-ji had with their parents. On the one hand, the 'others' presented Bora with statistics and future prognoses, helping her to calculate her future occupational success. Chul's narrative, on the other hand, illustrates how the teacher attempted

to exert control by refusing to provide important documents. Both Bora and Chul, however, wanted to engage in studies that were meaningful to them and chose programmes that would balance their interests with the demands of their wider social settings.

Thus far, I have concentrated on narratives that illustrate how my research participants negotiated values with their social surroundings. In these accounts, it also became apparent that they evaluated not only themselves but also their peers.

5.1.3 I Say

Upon learning that Eun-ji was an Emo, I asked her about other forms of differentiation among young people. "Even though there exist some categorisations among teenage students, there are not many words to refer to them such as Emo, Goth, Punk, Prep in Western culture. I can think of *noneunaedeul,* and *mobeomsaengnyu,* for now," she explained. "Can you describe them in more detail," I asked. "So, yes, about *noneunaedeul*. As you may notice from the word, the term refers to a group of students who love to hang out and spend pleasurable time," she said. "From what I observe, students in this category tend to be more passionate in social peer relationships and less in academic career. Many of them are interested in mainstream pop culture." She characterised those young people as open to new experiences or material things and, thus, more mature than their peers. "Lastly, they are interested in mainstream fashion, which is why many of the students in this group are prone to get part-time jobs," she said, clarifying that "to buy popular outfits, to hang out with the peer group, pay for their date and gain independence from parents. I believe this is the only group where there is a sense of belonging among participants."

She also identified the *mobeomsaengnyu* – model students. "Nice GPA's [grade point average], politeness and parents' support, that is how I would characterise them. They take academic activity seriously and spend most of the evening studying. Some may lack social sensitivity, some may not." Anime-fans were another group: "I had a lot of friends who are in this category. Local comic book rental stores are popular among them. They watch Japanese animation series, or sometimes just mainstream Japanese soap operas. Many of them are eager to learn Japanese language and culture," she described and added, "students in this group are not very geeky, in my words. They also love to draw cartoons. Many of them have gifts in drawing and painting." Although she described these diverse qualities of university students, in the end, she emphasised that the majority of them were undistinguishable. "I believe they never draw much attention, with nothing that is noticeable to me. Additionally, there are loners. Some teenage students develop depression from social isolation. And there could be family issues in their homes."

Eun-ji differentiated her fellow students accordingly to their activities and interests and positively emphasised their respective talents and capacities. At the same time, she was very attentive to those students which she characterised as loners and

drew my attention to their family backgrounds as possible explanation for their loneliness.

However, Eun-ji was also very critical about her fellow students. "People are not really trying, but want to be successful," she explained, referring both to students as well as working people. "What I see in my university is that they are chatting with the mobile phone in class and during lectures, and they are constantly forced to finish work, because they haven't yet. They don't work hard." Eun-ji connected success with hard work and judged her fellow students' behaviour as artificial. The experiences she made in class led to a reflection about her fellow students' behaviour, and she drew on a concept held public to critically comment on their performance and illustrated yet another dimension of being successful: Success meant to work diligently, implying sincere engagement with subjects studied. Similarly, Bora criticised fellow students who enrolled in subjects that they considered 'practical' for the job market rather out of sincere interest. Despite her emphasis on her studying what combines her interest with good future prospects, she contrasted her decision and engagement in languages strongly with the phony attempt of her fellow students. Additionally, Dae-hyun opined that students did not have a goal when enrolling in university but simply followed the social obligation to do so. Eun-ji, Bora and Dae-hyun critically evaluated the practices of their fellow students based on criteria they viewed as good and right and, accordingly, wrong. Although some academic literature emphasises otherwise (see for example Abelmann, Park and Kim 2013), these young Seoulites stressed that an authentic way to study meant to work hard and to have a genuine interest in the subject.

Eun-ji argued that South Koreans have very concrete ideas about what is right and wrong and judge others accordingly. That tertiary education was both a goal for success and a necessary means for further success was such a social consensus, and Eun-ji elaborated on why students conform to it. "People usually choose to fit in for survival," she emphasised. It was not the first time that I heard such strong expressions to describe the South Korean society for young people. Eun-ji clarified what survival meant for students in South Korea, explaining that they "try to keep the desirable model lifestyle, that is, waking up in the morning, going to school on time, studying at school, hanging out with friends some time and being polite to elder people such as parents and teachers." She paused for some time and then added, "it is all about fitting in, to stand out means getting ahead of others, be successful without being different." In the context of education, the meaning of success without being different is graduating with a higher GPA than fellow students.

Nari explained to me that the meaning of success is rather narrow in South Korea, and she criticised how all students are raised to achieve the same goals, to obtain the same markers of success. She contrasted education as a pathway to success with concepts of happiness and satisfaction, which can also indicate a successful life.

Eun-ji herself felt that the criteria for success were insufficient. Yet, although Eun-ji felt the restrictions her circumstances imposed on her, she decided to enjoy her life. She passionately engaged in practices such as caring for others, pursuing her

interests, and working towards an occupation that would provide her with attractive benefits. "There is no way I can get out, so what I do is to study and love the people around me. […] I enjoy my life right now, but I can feel the pressure to decide what kind of job I want to do later." I asked: "And what do you want to do in the future?" Eun-ji thought about my question and said, "I don't want to study all my life like my father. My parents want me to, they think it is a stable job," she answered. Rather, she imagined a 9-to-5 job that would allow her to enjoy her evenings and weekends. She was thinking about becoming a translator or working in an international company with benefits such as medical insurance, retirement insurance and more holidays than South Korean companies granted.

While Eun-ji was not able to open her small shop after graduating from high school due to the obligation to continue her studies at a university, once she attended university, she could aspire to diverse employment possibilities based on how she wanted to live after graduation.

The social conceptions of being successful, closely linked to the value of education, was on the one hand the background young Seoulites had to negotiate and balance with their personal values. On the other hand, it was the source through which they evaluated and judged about the form and content of good education.

I put forward in sub-chapter 3.1.2 that I view education as liminal period in young Seoulites' lives in which they are taught societal values. In this stage, however, they could also imagine new value configurations. They had experienced the social value of education – concentrated and reduced – in the hardship and difficulties of preparing for university. In what follows, I elaborate on how young Seoulites pictured to themselves concepts of education that they thought of important to be.

5.2 The Development of a Whole Person

In November 2012, I attended a symposium organised by Yonsei University social science students called "Reflection of 'University Students' through the Eyes of University Students." When I entered the room in the basement of the social science department, it was already full of interested students and some professors while the chair and presenters were busy preparing the data projector, laptop, microphone and the screen.

The student president of the social science faculty welcomed the around 50 students attending and began to speak about the meaning of this symposium. He stressed the interconnection between students, the university, and the training they would receive, arguing that they were all important for maintaining the well-being of society. He emphasised the role of students in this relationship; that is, that students can and should use the academic tool of research to reflect about their lives and studies.[72]

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[72] See Landgraf (2020a) for a detailed description of the aim of the symposium.

In sub-chapter 4.2.5, I briefly introduced Session Two of the symposium, where anthropology students presented their research on the relationship between military culture and university culture. In Session One, political science students engaged with the problematic of money in students' lives and identified four interconnected issues: First, since 1990, the number of students who enrolled in college and university doubled while the number of universities, especially private ones, simultaneously grew. Second, tuition fees at both private and public universities multiplied between 2001–2010. By 2010, tuition fees at a public university averaged 4,440,000 Won (3,330 Euro) per year compared to 2,430,000 Won (1875 Euro) in 2001. Tuition fees of private universities averaged 4,800,000 Won (3700 Euro) in 2001 and increased to 7,540,000 Won (5,654 Euro) per year in 2010 (Students of Social Science 2012). Furthermore, fees differed based on subject. Third, education expenses also include living costs, and these had risen exponentially in Seoul since 1990. Fourth, the high expenses parents and students faced led to what Gi termed "education poor."[73] Michael Seth (2012) describes that the financial obligation to educate children is mostly passed to the parents, and according to the OECD, the private spending on tertiary education was 1,54 % of GDP in 2013[74] (GDP 2013: $1,305.61 Billion).

A glance at the mottos of South Korea's top-tier universities show that all have ambitious goals concerning the education of their students. Seoul National University, Korea University, Yonsei University and Ewha Womans University campaign with attractive slogans for the best students. "A Tradition of Excellence, Honouring Public Service, Pioneering Knowledge"[75] (SNU); "Opening the Future, Leading the Future, Creating the Future"[76] (KU); "Toward Truth and Freedom"[77] (Yonsei); "Empowerment, Engagement, Exploration – EWHA 3E"[78] (Ewha). All draw on known moral concepts to promise their students a successful education and future. But how do the universities address the issues raised by the political science students, and how did my research participants handle the financial aspect of their university lives? How did they experience their lives in and outside of university? In this section, I look closer at how these young Seoulites evaluated education, courses, and locations of their respective institutions.

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[73] See Landgraf (2020a) for a discussion on solutions these students offered to these problems.

[74] OECD:Private spending on education, Tertiary, % of GDP, 2013 (https://data.oecd.org/chart/6mnK, accessed 29 April 2021).

[75] Seoul National University's Office of International Affairs uses this slogan to describe SNU at a glance, see https://oia.snu.ac.kr/page/about_snu.php (accessed 19 January 2021).

[76] This vision statement is complemented by three core values: 'Pride,' 'Paragon,' 'Practice,' see: https://www.korea.ac.kr/mbshome/mbs/en/subview.do?id=en_010602000000 (accessed 19 January 2021).

[77] A vision declaration, a mission statement and a teaching philosophy complement these core values, see https://www.yonsei.ac.kr/en_sc/intro/vision-declaration.jsp (accessed 24 March 2021).

[78] The vision statement "Women Intellectuals, Pioneering the Future" complements these core strategies, see: https://www.ewha.ac.kr/ewhaen/intro/vision.do (accessed 24 March 2021).

5.2.1 The Necessities of Life

Dae-hyun proved his skills through early admission *(susi)* as well as the entrance examination *(suneung)* and his latter grade allowed him to enter a top-tier university in Seoul. He had almost finished his Bachelor in social science when we met for our interview. "What is the biggest problem you face in your life?" I asked him frankly at the beginning of our interview. "My biggest problem is money," he immediately answered. "It is not like money is giving me hard times every day, but in important moments it becomes the biggest problem. I am going to university. I have to pay the tuition fee. Then, the rent is due." He also expressed a rather gloomy outlook when I asked him about his plans after his Bachelor. "In the long run, when I see the bigger picture, I am not sure if I can go to graduate school," he said. "If I can go to graduate school, the influence of money is like crazy and it decides whether I can go to law school or just go to an ordinary graduate school." The tuition fees for law schools are among the highest at about 10,000,000 to 20,000,000 Won (7,711 and 15,423 Euro respectively).

Dae-hyun repeatedly emphasised the difficulties today's students face, and he felt it was important to continuously relate my questions about his personal situation with conditions for students in general. In relating his situation to other students on the one hand and the broader social context on the other, he illustrated the complexity I had to be aware of when analysing students' lives at university. Thus, he viewed his own financial difficulties as part of a broader issue. "Students face hard times because of money. They cannot properly eat. The fact is [...] do you know the saying 'the necessities of life' [*uisikju*]?" he asked me. "No, I don't know," I answered. "Well, cloth, food as well as a house – these things are the ones most important in life. That is how the saying goes in the East. [...] The housing problem, I just said it but, that is where very much money goes and in South Korea it is the same with clothing." Some of his friends, he said, had less money to spend than he had had during his student years and could only afford a few clothes. "They wear the same clothes all the time," he emphasised and added, "when they get one of the shirts with the logo of the university, they wear it all the time. I have many such friends. It is not like they want to wear it everywhere. I feel that they want to wear much more beautiful clothes, but they have no money to buy some."

In my interview with Eun-ji, she described other situations where money became a problem for young people. "College students live with their parents. So, they have no space, no room to feel comfortable, to date, make love. Thus, they date at DVD-rooms, motels and restaurants, which costs money," she explained. "Students see the problem with the economy. For example, a Coffee Latte costs as much as the minimum hourly wage is. However, they don't have the time to think about it."

Eating properly was a similar problem for Dae-hyun's friends. "Food is the most important necessity, but students who can eat three times a day are quite few. However, the problem is not only money, but also time," he clarified. "Students can eat quite good at the university canteen, but it is very expensive to eat outside, so they

will just go for some triangle gimbab [*samgak gimbab*] or something similar just to fill the stomach with." Yet, the relation between time and money became most visible in the part-time jobs many students took to partially finance their lives. "They have to give private lessons, they have to do part time jobs, they have to study and there is the relation. There is no time to eat and no money, and in the evening, they can eat one time which is very unhealthy for the body as you know." Dae-hyun was not sure this situation would change after they graduated from university.

The necessities of life cannot be secured for many students which he critically exemplified while we talked. In his statement at the beginning of this chapter, Dae-hyun argued that society has a certain responsibility towards the young, first and foremost to provide financial security while they study, because it was a social obligation to enrol in university. It was a question of ethics, because students' needs encompassed the basic necessities of food, clothing, and accommodation. Money as means of payment, that is, payment for daily necessities, and payment in form of investment in education, elucidates the responsibility of society towards its students.

He further explained the importance of the social obligation to financially support students. "Young people need to learn to become [mature] adult [citizens], to become whole adults [*onjeonhan seongin*]," he said. "In the situation I described you, students cannot do as they wish and thus, they lack experiences. The consequence is that they become lacking adults and the society will become deficient," he paused and added, "the members [of society] cannot properly develop, they will become not properly educated humans and consequently, society cannot advance. That is why I think that young people are very important."

When I talked with my research assistant about Dae-hyun's statement, she explained that the phrase 'whole adult' *(onjeonhan seongin)* refers both to someone who is practically educated, who possesses the social skills to behave appropriately as a member of a community, and to the theoretical knowledge and skills he or she acquires through such training. At first glance, the importance of education in giving young people the skills and means to develop into responsible adults resembles South Korea's education policy. For example, higher education is defined as enabling young people to "form a balanced character supported by a sound mind and body and to have a mature sense of self; […] acquire the ability to think and attitudes that are logical, critical, and creative to be prepared for the world of learning and living" (Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development, Republic of Korea:48).

However, Dae-hyun emphasised the lack of choice young people face regarding an educational path and the social consequences that this lack of choice produces:

> It is a society where especially young people have to study something. This young self, this time when they have to study something is the time they grow into a man or woman, it is the time when they become an intact adult. In this process, they cannot do as they wish, they are lacking experiences and, to say it again, they can become incomplete adults. So, the society itself will be incomplete. When the members of a society do not develop properly, when they

cannot receive the proper education then it is difficult for society to advance. (Interview 29.11.2012)

Dae-hyun drew attention to young people entering the adult world. He stressed the interconnection between becoming an adult and becoming a citizen, and pictured the time of education as an important period where young people needed not only to study, but to make all sorts of experiences, as a time of trial and error in which students should be able to develop into citizens capable of building a society. However, financial difficulties prevented this development.

Dae-hyun drew on his knowledge of European countries and their welfare system to emphasise the importance of financial investment into young people's education.

> I think that the investment must really increase [in South Korea]. I would like to go in the direction of Europe. I don't want to study about welfare in US America. That [welfare] is something our country [South Korea] is lacking in. I would like to go to England or Northern Europe but money, the living costs are very high. Regarding the tuition fee, there are places where it is high and places where it is low but the living costs are really expensive and so I cannot think about it. (Interview 29.11.2012)

Again, he emphasised money's role as means of payment when reflecting about his abilities to act and educate himself and how the lack of financial means restricted him in his ambitions to study and learn. "The reality in South Korea is that it is not an easy task to take responsibility for one's own life," he explained. "They say that the South Korean society has lost its sense of responsibility. It doesn't matter anymore how much money one earns, one cannot live comfortably, and it is normal to live uncomfortably, so some people say," he paused and added, "but I see it differently. It does not matter if you earn a lot of money or not, you have to try hard every time. That is what I think."

Like Eun-ji's statement above, Dae-hyun stressed the importance of one's own effort and hard work for a good life. Thus, maturity in Dae-hyun's account meant at the same time the will to take care of one's life (in respecting other people's life) *and* having the opportunities to do so.

Presidential elections took place in 2012. I interviewed Dae-hyun shortly before election day and asked him what he expected from the candidates Park Geun-hye and Moon Jae-in.[79] "I don't have any wishes or hopes for one person," he answered.

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[79] Park Geun-hye won the election. After my fieldwork, however, several events led to her impeachment in March 2017: The Sewol Ferry Tragedy of April 2014 and the failure of adequately managing, resolving and calling into account persons responsible marked the beginning of her "political demise" (Kim 2017:7). In the public eye, she came to be seen as "incompetent" (Kim 2017:7). Public protests against her presidential leadership reached a climax in 2016 in a new 'candlelight vigil' or 'candlelight movement' (Kim 2017), when her relationship with and the involvement of political outsider Choi Soon-sil in political processes and ruling became known. Park faced an impeachment which was

"The wish I have for Moon Jae-in is basically that he seems to know the hardship students are going through. However, it is not he alone who can do everything," he emphasised. "Citizens have to voice their opinions and the budget, too, has to be adjusted to make ideas possible. Further, the members of the congress, too, have to convey that the aim of the citizens is important," he clarified. "However, when the citizens do not help too, do not wish for that the tuition fee of the universities has to be cheaper or that the government has to take over the responsibility; when they [citizens] do not think that way then it will not happen." Dae-hyun considered Moon Jae-in to be a promising candidate with strong will and engagement, but citizens must also take an active role. "Citizens will support him, criticise him, even after he is elected as president. […] This process seems to be necessary."

And he stressed again that young people were only able to develop into citizens that engage in a critical dialogue with the president when they would have the possibility for experimentation, for making diverse and manifold experiences, and thus can develop themselves further.

Whereas Dae-hyun voiced his thoughts and reflections about education in regard to society's responsibilities and emphasised the importance of education to develop what he termed a mature adult, the narratives of my research participants Duri and Bora illustrate in particular what they understood as practical as against theoretical knowledge.

5.2.2 Practical Versus Theoretical Knowledge

Duri studied business administration but did some courses in anthropology because she was interested in the relationship between culture and nature. "In fact, I had a great interest in geography when I was younger. You know there is something that gives nature its prominence, the extreme functionalism that exists there. I had a great interest in that," she explained. "Thus, I came to do cultural anthropology courses. I had the basic idea about an inherent nature of society – society influenced by the natural environment. However, I learned that this is only one viewpoint in cultural anthropology." She became very much interested in the field of international development and found the diverse theoretical and analytical approaches to culture offered in anthropology inspiring. When she returned to the department of business studies, however, she became frustrated. "I thought that this kind of ideas were widespread, but I quickly learned that it is absent. Even in marketing I learn only theoretical things […] so I took more courses in cultural anthropology."

In addition to her own dissatisfaction with her major's focus on theoretical knowledge, she regarded the theoretical character of university education in general as a problem for young people entering the job market. "I have no experiences in working in a company, so I don't really know, but I think that university education

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unanimously validated by the Constitutional Court. After snap elections in May 2017, Moon Jae-in became her successor (Kim 2017).

does not prepare you for entering a company. They don't teach you practical things. Thus, there is a huge gap between the things we learn in university and the things I would do in an enterprise," she argued. She critically reflected that the university was not preparing for the job market and compared her university with that of her sister. "You have to take a double major or an interdisciplinary programme or […] you need certain points in English or a certain comprehension of Chinese characters and then you can graduate," she exemplified. "In our university, you can graduate if just the grades are satisfying. I think it is disinterest in students," she stated. "Other universities help students to get employed. They require students to get several certificates like TOEIC, TOEFL or Chinese character, because those certificates are helpful for finding employment." Double major or minor presented an equally problem. "Other universities allow students to double-major /minor easily, often they require students to do it. However, we have to take picky procedures to add one major or minor."

As Duri criticised her university education as too theoretical, she embraced and demanded 'Spec,' which she characterised as practical knowledge helpful for finding employment. At the same time, she criticised companies and employers. In her opinion, employers only regarded grades and scores without recognising the practical experience students acquired beside their studies; this focus on numerical expressions of students' performances prevented employers from appreciating students' ability to do practical work. "It is guessing and that is the greatest problem I think."

Duri had already done various activities during her years at university: diverse projects with high school students and taking part in an UN-conference simulation. Furthermore, she planned to study in the USA for one or two semesters. This would not be her first leave of absence though. "Last year I took a leave of absence because my friends are very good. When I see my friends ... it is not only that they study well, they also embrace social relations and undertake many activities [*nolda*], have a great sense of humour and are really great with other people," she said, recalling Eun-ji's description of *noneunaedeul* – students who like to socialise. "They are really nice and so I wanted to hang out with them. Even though they have many interests, they are very good at studying. I really envy that. They do their best in any field and I wanted to learn that too." She paused and emphasised, "the university itself – the university does not have any interest in its students."

Duri felt that the theoretical knowledge she learnt at university would be insufficient for her future, especially when applying for a job. At the same time, she questioned the requirements she demanded from her university. She saw that these qualifications could not properly tell the employer anything relevant about a future employee's practical abilities and capabilities, a point I will elaborate in chapter 7. In her frustration, she turned to her friends and took time to socialise and learn from them as an opportunity to further form her self. She utilised what was at hand and jumped in the activities they undertook.

Her feeling that her university did not have any interest in its students intensified when she noticed how the tuition fee was spent. "My university has an innumerable amount of money – our school has hospitals. The university foundation continu-

ously invests money on something not related to students," she said and exemplified that students were very annoyed about the construction of a new underground parking lot. "The university only needs a parking lot for their faculty members and staff, not for its students. We don't have cars. Furthermore, the university shortened the class period from 16 weeks to 15 without cutting the tuition fee."

Her annoyance about university's spending practices was reinforced by her own critical financial situation. Although she voiced a negative opinion about her major towards me, Duri really liked to study. She even wanted to expand her studies to further courses in geography, while she found English very interesting too. The problem, however, was money. She was preparing for a semester abroad at the time of our interview and told me that she envied her friends whose parents could pay for a plane ticket without difficulties. Like Dae-hyun, Duri emphasised responsibility as a central value expressed through money as means of payment, while at the same time she found it difficult to pay for her needs and wants in specific situations.

Although Bora and Duri were both unsatisfied with their training at university, Bora expressed exactly the opposite position from Duri. "Actually, I was very disappointed after I entered this university. I thought that the university is an organisation that gives students some academic knowledge, but it is not. Students don't study, and the university doesn't offer good, high quality classes," she said. "Students seek just practical things, but I wanted to have some academic discussions in university. In fact, I have no chance to talk about that kind of things." She related this problem not only to the organisation of her courses. "If I would say to my friends 'let's have some academic discussions about politics, history or philosophy,' they would laugh at me. I don't want to ruin the atmosphere although I am not interested in gossip." She felt limited in her possibilities to have academic discussions.

"It is really difficult for me, they would think about me as strange [*isanghada*]. Of course, there are some students who lead such academic discussions, but the greater part is just talking about love or drama," she stated and critically continued, "the university is a place where they just have to go to find a good job. It is so different from what I imagined when I was in high school. I thought I would have a lot of academic discussions and learn about history, politics and science."

Bora felt the need for academic discussions because of her training at high school. She explained that during their high school years, students had to choose between liberal arts *(mungwa)* and natural sciences *(igwa),* and she took this separation as responsible for her feeling that she needed academic discussions. "I just think that we lack basic knowledge. I know little about science. I think many students from liberal arts are the same as me, both know nothing from each other, that is a big problem."

Bora was very critical of her fellow students but acknowledged the reality that tertiary education was an obligation that students followed. She emphasised the erosion of academia and its education goal when students would not study and felt that holistic education was necessary for university students to accomplish a certain character.

Both Duri and Bora described how they imagined the content and form of theoretical and practical education and made ethics explicit as they illustrated how the self-formation of students could be accomplished, although each of them emphasised a different form. While Duri pointed to practical knowledge, that is, skills that enable good social relations as well as skills that enable to do the job properly, Bora stressed the importance of theoretical knowledge to bridge the imbalance of high-school education and enable students to develop a holistic understanding.

The young Seoulites whose narratives I discussed so far where all able to attend either a top-tier or second-tier university in Seoul, but what about those young people who were not able to enrol in a campus in Seoul or did not want to follow the tertiary educational path at all?

5.2.3 If You Cannot Study in Seoul, or If You Do Not Study at All

Students' prospects did not only depend on entering just *a* university, but also the *right* one. I emphasised that SKYE (Seoul National University, Korea University, Yonsei University, Ewha Womans University) were the most prestigious and that students aimed to enrol in one of these. Although values of uniformity and equality in access to education and standards of education are foregrounded by the government, the stratification of tertiary education expands from the elite universities to second- and third-tier universities in Seoul and beyond (Seth 2002, 2012). Additionally, the strict urban policies for Seoul I outlined in sub-chapter 4.3 caused stratification in a university itself leading to inequality of chances among its students.

Gyeong was attending a university which had a campus in Seoul and a campus outside, in Anseong. The difference between these two locations was crucial to her employment prospects. "My university is a good one, but the campus is located in the province [*jibang*] and thus, my case is considered as unfavourable," she explained. "Yonsei University has a Seoul campus and a province campus. It is the same university – the name is the same. However, there go the students with the excellent grades and here go the students with the less good grades." As I wrote above, Sora's parents worried about her prospects if she attended a university in the province. Gyeong's example illustrates the thoughts, experiences and expectations of students who attend a campus in the province: they would rather prepare for taking the civil service entrance examination, shortened to *gosi,* examination.

"In South Korea, companies check on your university and they know that when the university is not good a lot of people gather there. The senior students [*sonbae*] and the junior students [*hubae*] know that," she stated. "So those students attending a university campus outside Seoul go to a bank or take the civil service entrance examination before even try to apply at a conglomerate." She explained the connection between university name and location and a job at a conglomerate with yet another example. "Students are not sure about their success. […] There are many students these days who are very pragmatic. Students at Yonsei University or Seoul National University prepare diligently their employment, but we are the kind of 'Let's become

a government official' [*Gongmuwon haji, mwo*]," she emphasised. "We do not collect 'Spec' because our effort would not be enough [*neungryeok andwae*]."

Yet, Gyeong told me how much time and effort it takes for the civil service entrance examination. English is important – the examination for Certified Public Accountant requires 700 points in TOEIC – then she had to take examinations in her major, and there were examinations that would give her additional points, like Korean History or word processing. I did not understand the difference between her preparation for *gosi* and other students' collection of 'Spec'. Gyeong explained that she is only studying for tests and that to pass the exams does not automatically count as 'Spec'. "You need several points in the TOEIC-Test, you have to have done interviews, you need to do certain volunteer work or social activities. That is 'Spec,'" she said. "I study for tests – that is not 'Spec' [*seupegiragi bodaneun geunyang siheom-gongbu*]." I still did not understand the difference and asked my research assistant Seon-ae for further clarification. "Well I think because she is planning to do the CPA (exam to become a Certified Public Accountant), she really doesn't need 'Spec,' because if she will get that kind of certification, it is the key 'Spec' for the good company," Seon-ae explained. "Even though the examination is not considered to give additional points, these certificates are useful in other companies."

In order to understand better why preparing for *gosi* was different from collecting 'Spec,' I will look more closely at the civil service entrance examination.

Lim was majoring in law and he wanted to do something in this direction, so after he did his military service he started to prepare for the bar exam *(sabobgosi)* together with his class *(dongari)*. Law studies was the class's aim, he told me. Unfortunately, he did not pass the exam. Therefore, he took a one-year leave of absence from his university and began attending an academy at Sillimdong Gosichon. He wanted to study harder than before to succeed, but the amount of money, time and effort he put into the exam preparation exceeded his capacities, so he changed his goal from the bar exam to the 7th level examination.

Civil servants are organised in a level system that counts backwards from ten to one. The 10th level, Lim explained, was the lowest level, and from level five on the higher civil service entrance examination was required. Lim was preparing for level 7, which he said was regular government service but, in contrast to level 9, would qualify him for a better department, such as the Ministry of Public Administration and Security. Or, like Gyeong, he could aim to become a Certified Public Accountant. According to Lim, the main differences between a government official and a regular office worker were the annual salary, the welfare benefits, and the work itself. The position as civil servant was paid less than a position in the private sector. However, it offered continuous employment until retirement age, welfare benefits which included family members, and regular working hours. Lim pointed out that the stress and overtime that characterised the everyday work life in a private enterprise were almost absent for a government official. Furthermore, children of government workers received support when entering school, and the pension could be extended to the family in case of death, whereas regular office workers might receive only a

lump-sum payment. Lim acknowledged that work for the state did not require the worker's creativity and independent thinking. However, he strongly emphasised the advantage of steady employment and a secure pension.

Gyeong was afraid that the work as a Certified Public Accountant might not suit her character, and she pointed out that many people did not like the daily routine and repetitive work as government officials. Nevertheless, she enjoyed her studies at the Department of Economics. "It is not like I hate it," she emphasised. She enjoyed working with numbers and felt she was good at it. If she did not pass the civil service entrance examination, she would start to study Chinese and English and try to take up an occupation in a trading company. Nevertheless, that plan remained very vague. "I don't want to think about it in depth, because I do not quite know what I have to do [as job preparation]. My major is difficult, and I have to study hard to obtain a scholarship," she pointed out. "I know seniors who say you have to study and collect 'Spec' separately, but even they did not get a job right after graduation. Although they graduated from a good university, they remained idle [*baeksu*] before they got a job."

The difference between collecting 'Spec' and preparing for *gosi* became visible in the students' career goals. Activities that counted as 'Spec,' such as volunteer work or activities in an organisation, were important when applying for a conglomerate or another company in the private sector but were not considered necessary for work as a government official. At the same time, preparing for *gosi* only enabled to work as government official because exams in this context were not regarded as useful in the private sector. The decision to prepare for *gosi* limited the occupational future, while the work itself was considered as tedious. However, *gosi* offered the opportunity to get one of the most secure jobs in South Korea and young people had to work hard to pass the exam.

Gyeong experienced the difference which people ascribed to making 'Spec' and preparing for *gosi* almost every day. In contrasting herself with students who attended the Seoul campus of her university, she felt the stratification of universities and limitation of her own educational path and continuously voiced critique about this structure. Nevertheless, she had a talent for numbers and experienced success in engaging in the practice of preparing for *gosi*.

I also met two young people during my research who had not studied at a regular public secondary school but at an 'alternative school'.

During an informal talk with one of the students, she told me that everybody asked her and her friends what 'alternative' means, which eventually irritated these students very much. When they asked their teachers what 'alternative' means, the latter responded that it means to think differently. Haja-Center was such an alternative school, and I interviewed one of its secondary students, Ha-yun. The Center, described as 'Seoul Youth Factory for Alternative Culture,' was founded in 1999 by Cho Haejoang, Professor at Yonsei University. She explains that she founded the Center amid South Korea's turn to post-Fordist production, the emergence of information technology, and increasing questioning of the establishment by young people

(Cho 2015:438–439). Literally, Haja means 'Let's do'. Cho adds 'what you want to do' in describing its aim:

> The primary goal of the Haja Center was to promote the rights of youth as citizens by providing them with a space to express and realize their ideas. It was an unusual space for young people that allowed them to pursue activities that they enjoyed, as well as to produce their own cultural content.
>
> (Cho 2015:439)

The training at Haja-Center focused on the self-formation of its students and the chance to experience and test skills apart from writing, reading, and memorising. It emphasised that young people were more than solitary future productive workers but rather part of a social whole which they helped to sustain and develop through their ideas. Academic tools such as public and intergenerational discussion groups and workshops informed Haja-Center's education. Although education at Haja-Center centred on what is now termed creative industry – courses on film making, design or music – it offered its students that which Dae-hyun had described as the opportunity to experiment and develop maturity (see also Landgraf 2020a).

During her middle school years, Ha-yun had participated in student protests and activities concerned with liberalising the school's policy towards its students' appearance – e.g. schools only authorised certain student haircuts. "Why can I not decide by myself which hair I want. Whether I want to dye my hair or have a permanent wave, this freedom was not allowed and that was stuffy [*dabdabhada*]," she explained. Because of such rules, she did not want to go to a public high school and decided to enter Haja-Center instead.

"Is there a special education at the Center?" I asked her. "You know, school can be described as sluggish. There is a fixed curriculum with fixed teachers. In South Korea, there is the saying that education is a plan that spans a hundred years," she explained. "Haja-Center is different," she stated. "Actually, we cannot see forward the next ten years, we cannot take responsibility for the next ten years. Thus, education has to be made and experienced in the present; it has to alter with the students' situation." Ha-yun described two types of students attending the Center. "There are the kind of students that learned there before I did. They really hated to go to school and dropped out. Prof. Cho calls them '*So Taiji*[80]-Generation'. They thought of themselves as being different and thus, objected school," she explained. "My generation is next. We were guided through the hands of our parents." Ha-yun studied four years at the Haja-Center and then graduated. After that she participated in the making of a social enterprise and worked there as a foundation member and she explained to me the company's goal. "I started to play theatre when I was in middle school. But actually, I am more drawn to social enterprises," she emphasised, adding that "Most artists, especially South Korean artists, don't have that; they don't think about what

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[80] A musician in South Korea.

they have to offer or dedicate to their respective society," she said. "When they earn money as a famous artist, then they become a little showy or they go abroad or they receive an award abroad, that is what they are and do. Artists don't have a sense for curing the society or what to offer the society." She and her team, however, wanted to use art as means to change people and she told me about her recent project to support Bazaar workers in their demonstrations against the dominance of convenience stores.[81]

Ha-yun told me that her parents thought of her independence as a "piece of luck." They only wanted her to be happy and Ha-yun said that their attitude was comfortable for her. At the so-called alternative school, Ha-yun found the room to develop into the person she wanted to be: a person capable of founding a social company. Social companies were regarded as tough companies to work in, she told me. The government provides supports to establish the companies, but only for the first two years. Thus, if social companies do not become self-sufficient in a relatively short period, they have to shut down (see also Cho 2018, Lee 2018). Ha-yun accepted this venture; it was the room where she could combine her knowledge and experience as an artist with her wish to improve other people's living conditions.

For different reasons, Ha-yun and Gyeong did not study at one of the universities located in Seoul. Ha-yun judged the limitations she experienced during her school days to be incompatible with her understanding of personal freedom and chose to attend a school where she was able to develop in accordance with her understandings and aspirations. Gyeong was not able to attend a university, or the campus of a university, located in Seoul due to reasons beyond her control. She was very aware of the consequences this had for her future career and actively voiced her feeling that the structural differences between universities were not offering students equal opportunities. Both made ethical questions explicit when expressing their feelings that the criteria in their respective educational circumstances were unfair and inadequate. But they re-formulated the meaning of success and followed different paths that enabled them to use their skills in their respective fields of study. In striving for excellence in their specific studies and practices, they engaged in processes of self-formation and were both proud of what they had achieved so far.

5.3 Chapter Conclusion

The reproduction of a middle-class status is tied to an education that ensures that the skills and knowledge for acquiring the capital to maintain a middle-class status are passed on to the next generation. Seth (2002) stresses the high stratification of South Korea's education system, and anthropologists such as Abelmann, Park and Kim (2013:101) critically evaluate the practices of young people as self-conducting measures for individual development when "real return on educational capital" is not

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[81] See Landgraf (2020a) for a detailed description of Ha-yun's plans and visions.

guaranteed (see sub-chapter 2.2). In contrast to this anthropological perspective, I attended to the meaning young people gave their practices. I have followed the narratives of young Seoulites about how they experienced and negotiated the value of education and the dominant concept of success prescribed by tertiary education.

In each of their narratives, either in retrospect, in (then) present circumstances, or oriented towards the future, they told me about situations, experiences, or conditions that made ethics explicit. Negotiating the educational path, and deciding on the right thing to do, was a central theme throughout their narratives. In this context, however, these young Seoulites expressed not only notions of obligation and duty but also reflected on love, care and respect, and the meaning and importance of having good social relations. While Eun-ji expressed the difficulties she went through due to her parents' demand to attend university, she not only tried to balance her future aspirations with those of her parents, she also had to consider the outcome of her actions.

Bora, Eun-ji and Gyeong's narratives further exemplify the considerations of young Seoulites about the possible outcomes of their educational paths. While an enrolment in university reassured their parents that their children would have a secure professional future, all three considered in more depth their occupational opportunities. The top-tier universities no longer guaranteed an equally prosperous career and young Seoulites pondered how to find sustainable work that would enable them to live a good life. In this context, they emphasised the values of hard work, a genuine interest in the subject studied, as well as opportunities to prepare and qualify themselves further, and they critically evaluated the education they had received according to these values. These young Seoulites emphasised that their time at university was the time to learn, and education should prepare them theoretically as well as practically with the necessary training so they could form a mature self able to take over responsibilities. On the one hand, the social demand to enter university hindered them from doing so. Thus, Bora felt that she could not fully develop her self because she experienced the limitation to lead academic discussions due to the artificial and phony academic engagement of her fellow students. On the other hand, the training itself was felt to be lacking. Thus, Duri took a leave of absence to learn from her fellow students how to form her self because she was disappointed about the content of her courses and lack of emphasis on praxis. She searched for 'substance' outside tertiary education (see also Sum 2018). These young Seoulites made ethics explicit in their aspirations to achieve excellence in their specific practices.

Because social demands required my research participants to attend university, it led them to formulate concrete demands. Thus, Dae-hyun emphasised that if university education is a de facto social obligation, society should be financially responsible for the students. Money as means of payment became a problem when paying for the tuition fee, a semester abroad, the rent, lunch or dinner, or in consuming goods and services. Dae-hyun pointed me to the issue of fairness, as did Gyeong when she talked about her limited employment possibilities due to the stratification of universities in South Korea.

As my research participants narrated from a first-person perspective about these different values, they engaged from a critical third-person stance. They not only emphasised the publicly known values of education, the judgement and evaluation of the right educational path, and the consequences for those who decide to take a different path or even fail, they also pointed out publicly known values that were important to them. These were the values of hard work, fairness and responsibility, diligence and independence, pride and happiness, and having freedom of choice. They used these ethical vocabularies to address their situation in the context of education and emphasised that to study in accordance with these values meant to be successful. These young people imagined education to include diverse and different pathways and they changed the meaning of success towards an allowance for difference.

6   Designing and Planning Marriage

When I spoke with Sora about her plans to get married, she evoked the picture of a gate, symbolically separating her life alone from the life she would lead when she walked through that gate. "A wedding [*gyeolhon*] is an important gateway [*gwanmun*] in your life as you know and when I get married life itself will change very much."

I described in sub-chapter 4.2.3 that the wedding ceremony functions as an important ritual, as a *rite de passage,* in the life of South Koreans: first, as a status change to adulthood; second, as a possibility for social mobility; and third, as a change of character (Kendall 1996). In addition, the wedding ceremony *(gyeolhonsik)* is the socially acceptable way for young Seoulites to form a family; it is the public performance of the ritual that transforms both persons into a married couple in the eyes of their families, friends, and colleagues.[82]

In this chapter, I want to focus on how my research participants conceptualised the notion of the wedding as a (gate)way to forming a family and how they designed and planned the public ceremony to do so. I will focus on young working women who were in a relationship and seriously thinking about getting married, preparing

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[82] Under South Korean law, a couple is legally married when both submit the necessary documents at the registry office and, after their documents are checked, receive the approval of the state in form of a marriage certificate. However, a couple is socially married only when they have held a wedding ceremony (see also Kendall 1996:9).

to get married, or married while I was doing my fieldwork. Although my male re-
search participants also reflected on getting married in our interviews, these female
research participants elaborated especially on the topic because they were in relation-
ships and it occupied their thoughts.

In this chapter, I elaborate more on the connection between marriage and work
and look at the meanings of independence rather than to give an over-all descrip-
tion and analyses of South Korean weddings. I aim to show, first, how ethics became
explicit in processes of negotiation about the form and content of wedding ceremo-
nies and in processes of self-formation regarding a married life *(gyeolhon saenghwal)*
and second, how money as means of payment expressed a certain amount of free-
dom regarding marriage. I suggest that my female research participants designed
and planned their marriage in accordance with values that foregrounded equality in
sharing rights *and* duties. Thus, my focus differs from Laurel Kendall (1996), who
describes South Korean wedding ceremonies in detail. Kinship relations and eco-
nomic practices of households are one important part of her analysis. In this context,
she notes that working women who both possessed their own financial means and
were supported by their families in their wedding decisions could act rather inde-
pendently, and I elaborate further on this aspect.

Let me first take you to the wedding of my friend Yun. In describing her wedding
preparations and ceremony, I want to exemplify the freedom with which a working
woman could plan and design her wedding ceremony when she was financially in-
dependent from, yet supported by, her family. I aim to show what kind of wedding
Yun could independently realise with her money. Her wedding illustrates both the
joy but also the difficulties of holding a wedding ceremony when time is running
against a working woman.

Yun could marry rather smoothly, but other research participants experienced
difficulties. They stressed for example how their plans for a ceremony differed from
their parents' plans and they needed to balance their ideas with those of their fami-
lies. In the second part of the chapter, I relate different narratives about getting mar-
ried to illustrate the negotiation processes about the form and content of a wedding
ceremony, and these young women's plans for their lives to follow. Here, I show how
these young working women kept up the (national) dialogue about the elements that
constitute a proper wedding and the life after getting married.

However, some also told me that they feared the responsibilities they would have
after getting married, especially regarding family matters. While some young people
in South Korea struggled financially to undertake this important ritual due to social
expectations about the content and form of the ceremony, others decided not to
marry because of the duties and obligations they envisaged they would have vis-à-vis
their in-laws. Before I come to my chapter conclusion, I discuss some of my research
participants' decisions not to pass through the gateway of a wedding.

6.1 Yun's Wedding Ceremony

I was walking with my friend Yun from the subway station to our favourite coffee shop, off the beaten track in a quiet area of Hongdae. We had not seen each other for a while, and I asked her what she had been up to. I was prepared to hear a long story about her spending the New Year holidays at home. However, she simply replied, "I will marry." I stopped for a moment to look at her with surprise. "How, when and whom?" I asked full of curiosity and demanded details over coffee.

She told me that while she was home over the holidays, her university love Kwon had called her and they had started to meet again. The bond of love that once existed between them revived, and after several meetings they decided to get married. Because they had already been a couple during her first years at university, and because both families knew and approved of their respective son- and daughter-in-law, they were able to decide rather quickly to tie the knot. Unlike most of my other research participants, Yun had already been living and working in Seoul for some years after graduating from university. Kwon also lived and worked in Seoul but both of their families lived in Daegu. She and her fiancé had already been able to save enough money to pay for their wedding themselves, so the wedding could take place soon after Yun and my meeting. The couple had three months to design the wedding.

6.1.1 The Preparation

Yun was working as web designer at a medium-sized company in Seoul and was usually busy from 9 am to late afternoon. Sometimes she worked overtime and would not leave the company before 8 pm. Thus, she had to organise her wedding during her lunch breaks, in the evenings after work, and on weekends when she would travel to Daegu to meet her fiancé and both families. When we met again some weeks later, I asked her how the wedding was progressing.

The Wedding Gift and Residence

One of the most problematic issues of planning the wedding and a matter of tough negotiations between the bride and the groom was *yedan,* the gifts exchanged between the engaged couple and their families. Kendall (1996:166) explains that *yedan* refers to "gifts of cloth, clothing, and jewelry exchanged between the bride and groom" as well as to "gifts of cloth, clothing, quilts, or blankets given to the groom's significant kin." Yun explained to me that in the past, *yedan* was a wedding gift in form of silk that bride and groom exchanged [*yemulro bonaenun bidan*], but today, she emphasised, the most important good exchanged was money. Whereas Yun and Kwon would exchange also ceremonial goods, she made very clear that it was the *yedanbi,* the cash exchanged, that could lead to tough negotiations and even couples

separating due to conflicts over the proper amount (see also Lee 2005). Yun made the following sketch (figure 6) while explaining:

"The woman gives *yedan* to her husband-to-be, but indirectly, he hands over *yedan* too," she clarified. "Let me give you an example: Beforehand, the couple agreed about a *yedanbi* of 1,000,000 Won [768 Euro]. The woman would give 500,000 Won to the husband who would use it in his family to buy clothes for the wedding," she described. "The man, on the other hand, will give 500,000 Won to the woman who will pass the money to her family." Kendall contrasts the exchange of cash with the exchange of selected goods in that "one [cash gift] is a requisite marker in a ritual process, significant primarily because the mark is made; the other carries additional messages about the bearer and the bearer's perception of receiver […] by evidencing a more refined eye" (Kendall 1996:189). She is critical of the "autonomy" and "control" (Miller 2001:98) the receiver of a cash gift experiences to buy a commodity of his or her choice. Instead, she emphasises the "social and moral nuances" (Kendall 1996:187) that are expressed through the sophisticated selection of goods.

Following Miller (2001), I view gift exchange – both in form of cash and in form of commodity exchange – as a highly calculative activity that classifies relationships. In the context of Yun and Kwon's wedding preparations, however, I want to stress *which* money it was that was exchanged and not attend to the wider social relations the cash gift symbolised. It was Yun and Kwon's own money and its exchange expressed the value both assigned to their relationship. Because both Yun and Kwon were working in decent jobs, they could independently embed their money in their particular social relation as bride and groom and earmark it as *yedanbi* for the purpose of marking the wedding ritual. They designated their money to establish the
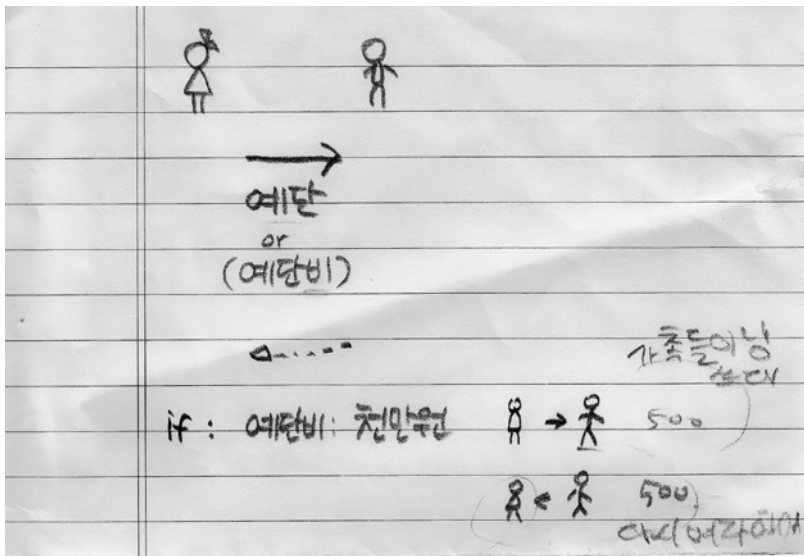

Figure 6: Drawing made by Yun to explain yedan exchange.

social tie with each other and realised with a significant amount of freedom that this social tie could develop without difficulties.

Yun continued to explain the next step in preparing the wedding: negotiations about where to live. Yun and Kwon decided on a new residence as their respective families were living in Daegu while both had their jobs in Seoul. Because both were living in small flats, they decided to buy a larger apartment in a complex located in the suburbs of Seoul. They could not afford an apartment near their workplaces, so they would have to commute almost two hours. Yet, the apartment still was expensive and they had to take out a loan from the bank. Providing the necessary appliances and contents for their apartment – the provisioning – aimed at deepening the value of their social relation. Yun and Kwon reused appliances and furniture they already possessed. However, some additional contents were necessary and through carefully selecting these consumer goods, they objectified their social relation and could establish their social life as married couple.

Designing the Wedding

Time was against Yun and Kwon to prepare the wedding because they were a working couple. The advanced wedding industry offers couples a wide range of consumer and service choices for their weddings and Yun and Kwon decided to hand some of the organisation to a wedding planner. [83] A wedding planner's responsibility is the organisation and smooth realisation of the wedding ceremony. "From invitations to wedding cakes, floral creations to memorable farewells"[84], Seoul's diverse wedding planners offer various packages for couples to choose from. The content of these packages differs greatly depending on the amount of money a couple is willing to spend. Yun and Kwon decided on a basic and affordable package that nevertheless expressed the value both assigned to the ritual. It included a pre-wedding photo shoot, the wedding stationery, booking and decorating the wedding hall, make-up for the bride and groom and their mothers, a photo shoot with family and friends after the ceremony, and a video of the ceremony.

A pre-wedding photo shoot was a standard part of getting married, and many couples used the photos as motifs for their invitation cards. The photos were generally taken in a professional studio or, depending on the amount of money a couple was willing to pay, even outside at specific locations. Yun later showed me the pictures. The couple had chosen to have the pictures taken in front of a wallpaper depicting the interior of an old house with huge wooden blinds. Both dressed up in a white

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[83] Yet, Youngmin Kim and Doyun Kim (2013) point to the contemporary difficulties of the wedding industry due to the saturated wedding market.

[84] Four Seasons Hotel Seoul: Wedding Planning (https://www.fourseasons.com/seoul/weddings/planning/, accessed 19 January 2021). This short extract from the advertisement of the Four Seasons Hotel Seoul illustrates the variety of services wedding planner can provide. The hotel, for example, offers not only a sophisticated planning service, but also diverse wedding venues to choose from. For further information see https://www.fourseasons.com/seoul/weddings/ (accessed 19 January 2021).

wedding dress and a suit, posed together in various ways, changed their clothes into 'traditional' Korean style wedding clothes, and posed again. Yun later told me how difficult it had been to find a suitable date since the photo shoot took almost a whole day.

Yun was responsible for organising the wedding rings, which became a hurried matter. She told me that she would go to Jongno, a neighbourhood famous for its jewellery, to buy the rings. Yun later told me, she had had a heated argument with the salesperson over the price and finishing the engraving in time because the wedding was to be held the following week. Organising the wedding dress was equally difficult. We found a website selling elaborated but low-priced wedding dresses shipped from the USA. She decided on a simple, full-length white dress, but she underestimated how long it would take to be shipped. When the dress finally arrived, she realised that the upper part was too big, but she had no time left to have it altered. Thus, in the end she had to borrow one of the dresses her wedding planner had on offer.

6.1.2 The Wedding Day

The wedding took place on a warm spring day in a wedding hall two hours by train from Seoul. I closely followed Yun's instruction to the hall which she had handed me over with the invitation card (figure 7).

Unfamiliar with the dressing etiquette, I relied on my knowledge about German weddings and decided not to wear a white dress, because it is the bride's colour, and no black dress, because it represents sorrow, but to wear the most colourful formal dress I could find since it was Yun's special day. The wedding hall itself was located on the first floor, which I entered through a glass door. The floor was already busy with people dressed formally in black suits and dresses. I made my way through the people to find my friend sitting on a red Recamier fully rouged and dressed in a white wedding dress with layers of tulle, taking photos with people attending the wedding. She greeted me warmly and searched for Kwon, whom I had not yet met. He wore a formal black suit and white gloves and we introduced ourselves before he left to greet new people coming. Yun asked me to take pictures with her and I was seated beside her on the sofa. After we laughed and took pictures, she handed me a voucher for the restaurant located right beside the small room with the Recamier to make sure I would receive lunch after the ceremony. I left her busily taking more pictures and made my way into the wedding hall.

A runway split the hall into two parts, each containing rows of transparent plastic chairs that shone like crystal. The runway ended in a stage with an altar in the middle, flower decorations and a three-storeyed wedding cake at the side. In the first row Yun and Kwon's fathers had taken their seats. Yun's father was seated on the left side, while Kwon's father had taken a chair on the right side. Elder family members, friends of family members and colleagues had already seated themselves on the re-

maining chairs while young friends and colleagues stood in the back of the hall. I positioned myself among them, where I had a good overview.

The ceremony started with music, and the two mothers of the couple, dressed in 'traditional' Korean dresses *(hanbook),* entered the wedding hall, each mother walking along the respective side of the runway. They walked straight ahead to the altar, took their position behind it and lit three oil lamps each, before they sat down beside their husbands in the first row. Then, Kwon entered the wedding hall, took his position in front of the altar, and waited for Yun. My friend slowly walked down the aisle, smiling brightly while holding her bouquet. The automated piano music stopped as Yun arrived at the groom's side. From behind a console on the left side of the altar, a mutual friend of the couple welcomed everybody and moderated the next steps of the ceremony. After a few introductory words, he asked the couple to speak their vows.

Yun and Kwon had prepared their own vows rather than asking someone else – usually, as Yun told me later, a superior in their respective company – to do it. They were handed a microphone, so everybody in the hall would understand the words they had prepared for each other. Both affirmed the love they felt for each other and emphasised the care, responsibility and protection they wanted to maintain in their marriage. They tied the knot and bowed to their parents and new parents-in-law.
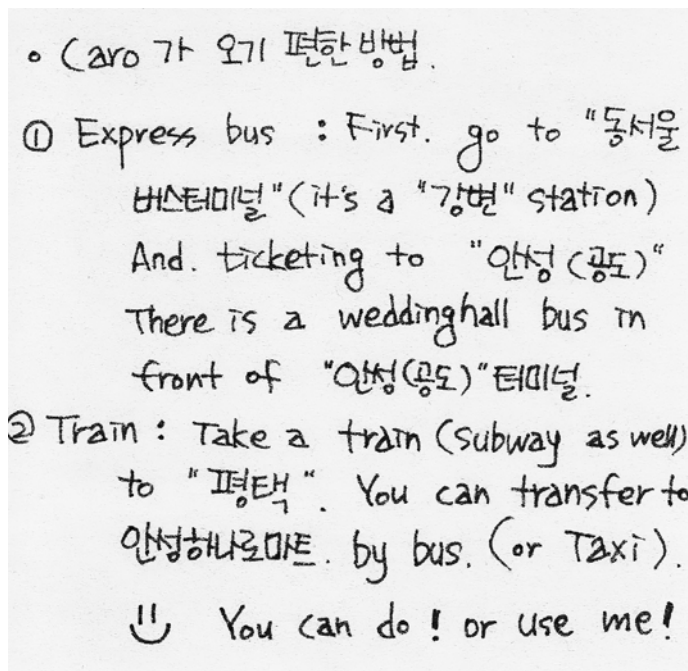
Figure 7: Memo written by Yun where she wrote down how I can
reach the wedding hall by public transportation.

Figure 8:
The paper lips Yun made for the women
to hold while taking wedding pictures.

Both moved to the three-storeyed wedding cake, which was actually made from plastic with one real piece of cake inserted. They cut the piece but did not eat it. A woman handed them glasses of champagne and Yun and Kwon clinked glasses. This woman was swirling around Yun throughout the ceremony. As part of the 'package,' she made sure that Yun and her dress were always perfectly positioned for the pictures taken during the ceremony.

After the formal elements, Kwon had a surprise for her. First, he handed her a blue designer handbag as a present and then he left the stage. The light was dimmed and suddenly, Psy's famous *Gangnam Style* sounded from the loudspeaker. Yun's younger colleagues, dressed in black and white clothes, entered the aisle to perform a dance interlude for Yun. Everybody in the hall laughed and applauded in the rhythm of the famous song, while Yun laughed and stood happily in the front of the altar to watch. The official part of the wedding had finished.

Now, it was time to take pictures. First, Yun and Kwon posed as newly-weds. Then, the parents entered the stage to take pictures with them, followed by the wider circle of acquaintances. Finally, it was time for the youngsters. We joined the couple in front of the altar. The photographer instructed Yun's friends to stand at her side, Kwon's on the other. Yun had thought about how to improve these pictures and had pulled an all-nighter to prepare paper moustaches (for the men) and paper lips (for the women, figure 8) for us to hold. After we took the standard pictures, we enjoyed

changing our roles and laughed while doing the small masquerade. After Yun threw her wedding bouquet, which a female friend of her caught, it was time for lunch.

The elderly guests had already rushed off to have lunch in the restaurant in the same building. They were now joined by younger friends and colleagues, their vouchers ready at hand to show the waiter at the entrance. I was invited to take part in the next step of the wedding ceremony: *pyebaek*.

Pyebaek, the ritual to honour the parents-in-law, took place in a specially designed room at the opposite of the wedding hall. The room was decorated to meet the expectations of a 'traditional' ritual, and both Yun and her husband had to change their clothes. The female relatives entered the room first to help Yun change from her white wedding dress into a pink-and-white *hanbook*. Her husband merely put on the blue costume of a Confucian government official over his suit. The two mothers remained wearing their *hanbooks,* the two fathers their suits.

We entered the room, which was covered with straw mats. The wall opposite the door concealed a moveable partition painted with cranes in calligraphy painting style. In front of the partition, a low table was placed with an arrangement of apples, two wooden ducks – one coloured red for the bride side and the other dark blue for the groom – dried fruits such as chestnuts *(taechu)* and jujube *(bam),* a flower bouquet, and a small bottle of alcohol. The bride's family sat down to the right of the wall, the groom's family to the left. The groom's parents took their place cross-legged on the floor behind the table. Yun and Kwon bowed twice, deeply, their foreheads touching the ground *(keun chol).* The groom's parents expressed their hopes and dreams for the couple's future and threw the dried fruits for Yun to catch in her *hanbook*. The more she caught, the more children and money they would have, so the saying goes. Then Yun's parents took their seat behind the table. Yun and her husband again bowed twice and the parents expressed their wishes and hopes for the newlyweds. Finally, Yun and Kwon sat behind the table. They poured each other a cup of wine and drank it with their right arms crossed and their left hand underneath the cup to signify respect. Both then shared a *taechu* fruit, biting from the same piece. Whoever got the fruit kernel would take on the leading role in the marriage – Yun got the kernel. To complete the ceremony, Yun's husband gave Yun a piggyback ride around the table. The ceremony was finished, and the couple quickly prepared to leave to the airport to go on honeymoon. I joined the rest of the wedding guests for lunch.

6.1.3 The Wedding Present

I had pondered for a while what to give the couple as a wedding present. I had asked Yun what she would like and she explained that it was usual to give money. Her answer did not satisfy my desire to give her something special since she was a good friend of mine. I wanted to give her something more personal, a present of suitable quality that expressed my close relationship with Yun. Nevertheless, I considered the amount of money to spend on such a quality gift and applied ideas about the 'going rate' from my experiences in Germany. To sum up, I found myself in a small

Figure 9:
Wrapping including the envel-
op with money as wedding gift.

dilemma about the question of what was appropriate to give as wedding present to express my relationship with Yun. I was concerned, to speak with Miller's (2001:99) words, how Yun would "read" my gift as a statement of our relationship. In the end, I decided to give Yun and Kwon a gift from Germany. Although I bought it "within [the] idea of a going rate" (Miller 2001:97), I felt it was especially appropriate for the couple and thus, represented the deep friendship Yun and I had.

Other wedding guests followed the usual practice of giving money. When I entered the wedding hall and passed the wedding picture of Yun and Kwon that they had taken at the photo studio and enlarged to a kind of wallpaper, I saw a small table behind where two young men, cousins of Kwon, were sitting, collecting plain envelopes with gift money from wedding guests. Her cousins checked the name of the guest on a list, opened the envelope, counted the money and wrote the exact amount beside the name. I also recognised that the designs of these envelops varied. When guests personally presented them to the couple, these envelopes were very elaborate, and the picture (figure 9) shows how beautiful such wrapping was made. Such wrapping presented a "strategy" (Miller 2001:99) to express the close relationship with

Yun. Although it was the appropriate amount – the 'going rate' – that was given, the giver wanted to distance her- or himself from other wedding guests and express the deep and valuable social relation with Yun.

When I met Yun again after her honeymoon, I asked her about the money turned into a wedding gift. She explained that in the past, wedding guests would bring food along for the ceremony, while in contemporary weddings money had become the appropriate present to hand to the bride and groom. However, the amount of money each guest would give depended on the guest's status and relationship to the bridal couple. Yun clarified that relatives were expected to give more than co-workers. However, the amount also differed between co-workers because different job positions had dissimilar salaries. In short, the relationship Yun had with the wedding guests was classified in the amount of money given as wedding present. Her husband's cousins recorded the sum of money presented accurately, so Yun knew how much each person had given. Reciprocity was the purpose of such careful recording. Later, when Yun would visit a wedding of a relative or co-worker, she would give the same amount as she had received. The calculation about the amount of money given and the strategy to access the appropriate 'going rate' were not a "secondary 'weakening'" (Miller 2001:101) of the reciprocity that built the relationship between Yun and her guests, but rather were the "primary mode" by which it was established (Miller 2001:101).

The design Yun and Kwon chose for their wedding ceremony was not only appropriate in form and content to fulfil wider expectations, it also expressed their affection for, and how much they valued, each other. They could realise these elements with a certain amount of freedom because it was their money they used. Other research participants had to negotiate about the value and worth of getting married with their social surrounding.

6.2 Narratives about Getting Married

> You marry because you want to live together with your partner,
> but you undertake a wedding ceremony for your parents.
> (Sook, Interview 06.11.2012)

Hyun-ae's friend, Sook, whom I will introduce further in the next sub-chapter, emphasised the different values a marriage had for young people and their parents. For young people, marriage meant living together with the partner in a socially accepted form. For their parents, the emphasis was on the public performance of a wedding ceremony. Ahri explained why parents requested a ceremony: "First, it is a habit *(seupkwan);* second, it is tradition *(jeontong);* third, parents feel the responsibility *(chaekimgam)* to marry their children off; and fourth, it is really important what other people think of you." An appropriate public performance of a wedding ceremony, however, was expensive.

In October 2013, Arirang TV[85] aired a report[86], based on a survey by the Korea Consumer Agency, about South Korean wedding ceremonies stressing that the contemporary cost of a wedding ceremony was almost twice the annual income of a South Korean worker. On average, the cost of a wedding was estimated at about $49,037 (41,387 Euro). The survey estimated that men payed $51,075 (43,064 Euro), because they invited more guests, and women payed $45,132 (38,053 Euro) on average. The wedding costs included the wedding location and decorations, the presents, and the honeymoon, but excluded the price of a house or apartment. The amount that was spent on a wedding greatly depended on the location. The survey showed that hotels were by far the most expensive location with $22,738 (19,172 Euro); prices for wedding halls, churches and public places ranged from $14,339 (12,090 Euro), $13,377 (11.279 Euro) to $13,603 (11,470 Euro).

Eighty-nine percent of newlyweds decided to buy or rent a house or apartment as a new place to live. If these costs were also counted, the expenses of a wedding could triple when the couple decided to rent (in 2013 the lump sum deposit [*jeonse*] averaged $145,238 [122,629 Euro]) and even quintuple if the couple bought an apartment (the average price of an apartment was $256,603 [216,658 Euro]). Eighty-five percent of survey participants emphasised that they found the ceremonies far too extravagant but decided to submit due to social pressure. At the end of the video, the head researcher commented on the findings of the survey. He emphasised that couples should design their wedding ceremonies in accordance with their own wishes "in a unique and original way with a smaller number of guests" (interview by Ji-won Park and translated into English while aired), rather than plan the wedding ceremony in accordance with their parents' wishes and wider social expectations. Kendall (1996) shows how narratives about parsimony and excessive consumption regarding wedding ceremony's expenses characterised the national dialogue during the period of rapid industrialisation. These narratives continued during my research and in this sub-chapter, I relate them to work.

In what follows, I elaborate first, the difficulties and strategies of working women who were not financially independent, second, the diverse values a wedding ceremony comprised for my research participants, and third, what they planned for a life after the wedding.

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[85] Arirang is a TV and Radio broadcaster named after a Korean folk song. Broadcasting worldwide and in English, it aims to inform about the social, cultural, political and economic life in South Korea.
[86] Arirang News (22 October 2013): Average Korean Wedding Costs nearly $50,000 per Person (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P3wCEbMyJzs, accessed 19 January 2021).

6.2.1 Marriage and Work

Hyun-ae introduced me to her friend Sook because she thought that I could learn from her narratives about the struggle of young people to finance a wedding. Hyun-ae and Sook had known each other since university. Both had studied business administration and they had remained in close contact after they graduated. Hyun-ae accompanied her friend to our interview. We met in a coffee shop near Hyewha Subway Station, and while we talked, they complemented each other in their narratives about their experiences.

Sook began by saying that she had recently quit her job and was searching desperately for a new one. Her search, however, turned out to be very difficult due to her plans to get married soon. The difficulties began in the job interview and Hyun-ae was the first who explained the problem to me.

"You know, Sook had graduated from a good university, already four years ago. She went to China [to do an internship] and she can speak Chinese and English. But they [employers] do not look at her experiences, it is more important for them to ask if she is married or not," Hyun-ae said. She further stressed her statement with her own experiences from her first job interview: "It was the very first job interview in my life and the very first question the interviewer asked me was about my marital status and if I had any plans to get married. I was 26 at that time. When I said, 'No, I don't have a boyfriend,' then they said, 'Ok, next question.'" Hyun-ae generalised her experiences: "They ask every woman if they have any plans to get married or if they have a boyfriend." Sook agreed and added "that is why everybody says, 'I have no boyfriend.' And when they get the job, they say the truth about their relationships." Both laughed and acknowledged the creativity of young women to solve the problem with the rather radical solution of a lie. "People don't like these kinds of questions, they are really private ones," Hyun-ae said. I told both women about a South Korean friend from Goettingen who had even lied about being married. I thought that telling a lie about one's boyfriend and lying about a husband were rather two different matters, but both disagreed and said it was common. Both women felt the violation of their privacy, which even increased if they answered questions about their relationship status in the negative. "When you say that you don't have a boyfriend, then they ask you 'why?' That is a really private question." They felt that such questions meant their relationship status was more important than their skills and abilities to perform the job. Sook emphasised that lying was very stressful.

I asked if employers would ask such questions to male candidates. "No, they wouldn't do that. They have no interest if a man gets married or not," Hyun-ae said. Sook added, "they rather think that he will work even harder." Both laughed as Hyun-ae amplified her friend's statement with an "Oh, fighting," an expression used to motivate and support somebody in his or her task. "You know, when you get married it means also that you will establish a family; a wedding and a baby go hand in hand in South Korean people's thinking," Hyun-ae emphasised and added, "when a man has founded a family [having a child] then employers think he will work more dili-

gently, but they think if a woman gets married than she will work less hard because her thoughts are with her family." Employers understood male and female workers to act unalike regarding their affinity to work while founding or already having a family with one or more children.

Hyun-ae and Sook emphasised that employers especially asked women in their late twenties about their marriage plans because it was more likely for these women to marry than younger women. However, they admitted that many women would actually leave the company after getting married, but they attributed this action to working conditions in general. Janelli (1993) and Janelli and Yim (2002) point to the strategies employers use to create an uneven working environment for men and women such as differences in the recruiting process, payment and allocation of tasks. Hyun-ae and Sook had similar experiences: "You know, they [employers] prefer young women because they can work longer in the company," Hyun-ae explained. "Young and beautiful and only college completion so that they don't have to pay much," Sook added. She described her experience in her first company: "My ex company was very conservative. All the supervisors were men and they changed the women working as subordinates every two to three years. So only the men could make a career in this company." The glass ceiling was the most problematic phenomenon women encountered in their companies as Hyun-ae and her friend Sook saw it. They explained to me that women were excluded from important meetings and reduced to making coffee or tea, reducing their access to important information. Reactions to this glass ceiling were contradictory which Hyun-ae and Sook, however, connected again with marriage. Hyun-ae told me that many women don't want to marry these days and instead focus on their career. Conversely, getting married presented a way to escape the workplace – the stress, the interrogation, the frustration about the invisible ceiling.

The working environment Hyun-ae and Sook described raised diverse ethical questions in relationship to getting married. They felt discriminated against at their workplaces. Both had personally experienced, and heard from their female friends, diverse situations in which women were subordinated to their male co-workers. Especially "women of a certain age" encountered discriminatory questions during job interviews due to company's evaluation of how long a female work force would be available. The notion that women are less productive when they have children, or even leave work to care for them, is not unique to South Korea. However, Sora, too, emphasised in our interview that women getting married is a sensitive issue in South Korea. "Usually, women will stay at home after marriage and leave it to their husbands to work. Thus, employers tend to ask about wedding plans in job interviews, I was asked as well," she explained. Investments in women are calculated as risk. However, the women's possibilities to be promoted and further develop their skills were limited from the start, as Hyun-ae and Sook's narratives illustrated. The glass ceiling women faced in their companies led them to quit their jobs and retreat into married lives. Marriage presented a strategy for them to escape inequity at the

workplace.[87] However, women who wanted to marry *and* to work found it difficult to balance their commitments. They had to lie about their material status, which put them under stress, or they had to decide between a marriage or a job.

Sook told me that she was the first in her circle of friends to marry, although almost all had a boyfriend. "They want to marry; they are tired of the discrimination they experience at work, but their boyfriends do not earn enough money for a wedding ceremony," she told me. "They envy me because I can marry and say, 'My boyfriend's work place is not good, I do not earn enough money and my parents too have no money so how can I marry?'" She paused and added, "Therefore, I am very fortunate; I can marry although I don't have much luck with finding a job."

Sook emphasised that she would not only like to work to be independent from her husband-to-be, but also that they would need a second salary to sustain a living. However, because she was unemployed during the wedding preparations, she had to turn to her parents for help, which she experienced as yet another ethical conflict.

"My parents too don't have much money and they spend it because of me," she said. She summarised the public discourse about taking money from parents to marry as *bulhyo,* short for *bulhyodo,* which means, lack of filial piety. "How can that be *bulhyo*? [*Geuge museun bulhyonya*]" Sook asked rhetorically. I further inquired about the conflict between being an undutiful child *(bulhyodo hada)* and being a dutiful one *(hyodo hada),* their own hopes and their parents' hopes, both closely related to money.

"What are the expensive objects you have to buy?" I asked Sook. "I really worry about the credit for our new apartment. I do not work, so we have to take more money from the bank. That is a huge problem […] then there is the gift for my boyfriend," she explained. "What kind of gift?" I asked. "The gift for her future parents-in-law," Hyun-ae answered. "I have to give money or buy jewellery. The purchase of jewellery is expensive, and I do not have much money, thus, I have to ask my parents for help. Although my parents can help me, it is finite." She added, "You know, our parents have their own lives. We cannot spend all their money." Hyun-ae then told me about her parents: "Sometimes my parents ask me when I plan to marry. If I would say I would like to marry now, they would say 'no.'" "'Why?' I asked. 'Be-

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[87] My research participants never used the term *chwijip* to describe these practices of young women. The term is a composition of the word *chwijik* – find employment – and *sijip* – another term for getting married (literally, "entering the home of one's husband"). I got to know the term later when writing up the dissertation and inquired about the meaning. Yun explained to me that the term was used to refer to women who would either marry right after their university graduation or used to indicate that a working woman retained into married life because she hated to work. However, she emphasised that the term has a very negative meaning and thus, was not widely used anymore. The term spread in the aftermath of the Asian Financial Crisis 1997/98 when it was especially (but not exclusively) women who were laid off or even encouraged to marry instead of working for economic stability. Nowadays, Yun emphasised, she would use it only if she wanted to seriously mock another woman because the term implies that a woman lacks skills and abilities to work and thus stays at home.

cause we have not yet prepared for your wedding,' they would answer. 'What kind of preparation?' I asked again. It means money." She concluded: "The situation is like a cycle. Every evening I watch the 9 o'clock news with my parents, and every time they talk about how much money people need for a wedding ceremony, which is really a lot." She continued by giving me the following example: "Three hundred people are invited, and you have to care for lunch or dinner and then there is the wedding dress. My parents really worry about the amount of money necessary for a wedding ceremony."

I asked Hyun-ae and her friend about the necessity and importance of a wedding ceremony. "Well, it is a show for your parents," Hyun-ae explained. At the same time, she made clear that it is not only the wish of the parents: "I want it too. I want to wear a wedding dress and have a beautiful make-up, hear the applause of my friends. However, you pay a lot of money for only ten or fifteen minutes [...] It is difficult, it is difficult, but it is a happy thing." Hyun-ae explained the two sides of a wedding to me.

During the interview with Hyun-ae and Sook, I asked Sook in regular intervals if she was happy to get married. She replied that she was. However, she focused her narratives on the difficulties, contradictions and problems she encountered while preparing for her wedding because she found herself in an ethical dilemma. She could not contribute to the costs of her wedding because she was not in employment as Yun was. Money as means of payment in form of a salary had allowed Yun the freedom to design her wedding and fulfil her obligations together with her husband. In contrast, Sook could not employ her own money in her wedding, but had to rely on her fiancé and turn to her parents for financial help. The women emphasised that the common wedding ceremony with expectations about the amount, form and content of pre-wedding gifts, arrangements and provisions was too expensive for them to pay on their own. The need to rely on their parents' financial help contradicted not only with public expectations of filial piety, but also with their understanding of *which* money was appropriate to use in a wedding. Sook found herself in the ethical dilemma of being simultaneously a dutiful child and an undutiful one. Being a dutiful child and fulfilling one's parents' wish to marry was simultaneously being an undutiful child because she had to turn to the parents for financial assistance.

Hyun-ae and Sook did not speak about a possible change of the socially expected consumption pattern regarding a wedding as the head researcher of the survey suggested. Although they recognised the excessive expenses for a wedding, they rather stressed the complex relation between work, payment and a wedding and how the form of this relation allowed young people to marry or not.

I came to understand that planning and designing a marriage could be both, a source for happiness and joy, *and* a source for difficulties and worries. In the next section, I will delve further into the values my female research participants negotiated and balanced in regard to getting married, work and family life.

6.2.2 My Partner, My Parents, and Me

Jin-kyong and Sora were both twenty-seven years old. Both were aspiring to become what I call in chapter 8 working professionals, who had a partner they wished to marry. In the previous chapter I introduced Sora as a young woman who came from the province to Seoul to study, as her parents wished. In contrast, Jin-kyong was born in Seoul, and she studied and worked there while living with her family. "My mother, my father and my younger sibling form my family … and I have a boyfriend," she said with a smile.

Jin-kyong had recently started working as a lawyer when I met her in a coffee shop in a shopping mall near her workplace. After we talked about her education path and her workplace, she told me about two worries that constantly distressed her in her daily life: the health problems she experienced from constant computer work, and the constant struggle with her parents because of her partner. "Although I am in a marriageable age, I am not yet married. You know, I have just started to work in the law firm and I want to call myself a real lawyer. Thus, I have to work for another two to three years," she explained. "My parents press me to marry, but I have just started to earn my own money!" Completing law school took its time, and although she was amongst the youngest graduating in her class, at twenty-seven years of age she was at prime marriageable age. Jin-kyong, however, did not yet think she was experienced enough to counsel and guide her clients appropriately. I will show in sub-chapter 8.2 how the behaviour of her co-workers and the experiences she had in the company formed the picture of an excellent counsellor she hoped to become. To meet this imagined ideal though, more work was necessary. A marriage would, as she implied and the examples of Hyun-ae and her friend Sook illustrated, put other constraints and demands on her, distracting her from her professional hopes and aspirations. Furthermore, it was the first time that she was earning her own salary and she was savouring this moment of independence.

However, her age was not the only reason her parents were pestering her. "My mother and my father say that I am already in a marriageable age, but they are unsatisfied with my partner." She paused and added, "He is still a student, so they suggest that I should meet another person like try to go on a blind date [*sogaeting*]. That is their way to put pressure on me." Her mind was occupied with this family issue. "I really have no intention to separate from my boyfriend," she told me. "Although I fight with my parents, they cannot object to the marriage in the end. It is my marriage and I chose the person I will live with."

Her parents put higher value on a man who was already employed. Jin-kyong, however, wanted a husband with whom she could spend the rest of her life, who would accept and understand that she aspired to become a professional lawyer, and who would support her ambitions. Her work as a lawyer demanded a great deal of her energy and involved particularly long working hours. "The work intensity of my job is higher than in other jobs that is why I am not sure if I will be able to do the housekeeping faithfully," she worried. "Maybe I will need the help of my and

my husband's parents or hire a household help when it comes to childrearing. Although we have to marry, for now, my boyfriend understands the speciality of my job as lawyer and he says that he will help me a lot with the housework when we are married." I have discussed in sub-chapter 4.2 how anthropologists represented the development of specific gender roles in middle-class families – the 'housewifization' of women and the concept of the 'bread-winning' husband. Conceptualisations of gender have changed to some degree. However, my female research participants continued to emphasise that they aspired to have both a professional career and a family illustrating that social conceptualisations of gender were still in debate during my research. Jin-kyong was optimistic and trusted her partner's word: "When both of us are working and earning money, then we have to distribute the housework fairly; that has to match I think. I think this way and my boyfriend thinks this way. That is why our married life will go well."

That her partner agreed and understood the specialities of her work was very important for her and played a major role in her resolute decision not to separate from him despite her parents' wishes. Ethics became explicit as she needed to negotiate and judge between these different values; yet, Jin-kyong stayed positive and designed a married life where both her job and her married life would harmonise. These values were so important for her that she opposed her parents and their values, which caused regular arguments between them. Beyond the narratives of Hyun-ae and her friend, which illustrated the difficulties a married woman could face at the workplace, Jin-kyong's narrative illustrates the particularities of working life after a wedding and shows the importance of equality between husband and wife concerning rights and duties in the household for the woman to balance family life and work.

Regarding the wedding ceremony itself, Jin-kyong balanced between her and her parents plans and was very attentive to their wishes. "In South Korea, they think that it is important to get married, but I doubt that a wedding ceremony is certainly necessary," she explained. "I think that it costs a lot of money and the only use is to show it to other people. However, parents say that the wedding is a banquet and my parents too wish that I would have a wedding ceremony, so I cannot not do it." Jin-kyong, too, thought of a wedding ceremony as show – not for her parents, but for other people. Although she wanted to fulfil her parents' plans, she thought to design her wedding a little bit differently. "I can make it simple. In fact, I do not have any fantasies about my wedding dress or my dream wedding. I would rather go on a long, long honeymoon from the cost of the wedding," she explained and smiled. She thought of using the money with which she would have to pay the wedding ceremony for something more valuable to her: spending time with her husband.

Sora also had a partner. She, however, wanted to get married quickly. "We are meeting for three years now so can't we just introduce each other to our parents and then give one's faith at the wedding and then just live together? That is what I am thinking. If it is too fast or too slow, if we could just live together that would be great."

Hyun-ae and Sook as well as Ahri all explained to me that living together with the respective partner or even founding a family without getting married was almost impossible. Sook clarified that other people would think of the couple as strange, and Hyun-ae added, "When you do not marry and live together then South Korean people think it is very odd [*aju isanghada*]. So it is a huge problem, you have to get married certainly." Again, the social environment my research participants moved in determined that they would follow an unwritten code of conduct. Sora and her partner observed the rule: they dated but did not live together. The moral obligation to form a family only after a wedding made Sora want to marry in the near future. "I hate it when we have to depart in the evening," she emphasised.

Sora was living alone, which added yet another dimension of getting married. "I can lead a stable life when we marry, more than I do now. When I come home, there is nobody," she paused and added, "if there would be somebody who would care about me and I could care about him. When we would marry, then we would be two and after coming home from work there is somebody." This is where Sora spoke of a wedding as a gateway, which for her primarily meant attention and care between her and her partner, which would increase when they lived together and formed a family.

Like Jin-kyong's parents, Sora's parents also voiced their concerns about her partner. "My partner is some years younger than me, thus, my parents tend to oppose a wedding." In contrast to Jin-kyong's parents, Sora's parents justified their opposition based on Sora's work experience. "My parents think that I should marry late. They wish that I work a little longer to secure my place there and then marry," she said. Whereas Jin-kyong considered her training as a lawyer to be incomplete and thus felt that she needed to gain more work experience before marrying, Sora perceived no contradiction between marriage and work.

Concerning the wedding ceremony, Sora confirmed the narratives of other interviewees. "You know, the focus of a wedding ceremony is not so much the couple, but the family, the parents. The wedding has to be adjusted to their wishes," she pointed out. She thought differently. "I want the wedding according to my partner's and my ideas. I want it simple, but memorable," she clarified. "Rather than a hectic wedding hall, I prefer a nice restaurant or a location outside, in the open air. Rather than a borrowed wedding dress, I would like to wear a vintage dress or something handmade." She added, "I don't want to purchase the standard house and household appliances for newlyweds, I want to reuse the things we already have."

She disliked the standard wedding ceremony and preferred her marriage to diverge concerning the location, clothing, and consumption pattern. While designing her wedding ceremony this way, she valued the special moment of getting married, which she felt to be lost in the standard procedure of a ceremony in a wedding hall.

Sora had concrete ideas for her married life, just as Jin-kyong had. "I want to lead a married life where both rely on each other [*uijihada*], understand [*ihaehada*] and respect [*jonjunghada*] each other. Even though you lead a married life, you have to

grow and secure politeness [*yeui*] and manners [*maeneo*]," she clarified. "When you marry, you unite each other's life into one, and that does not go without creaks. You constantly have to put effort in your married life." Sora emphasised that a certain attitude was necessary for her to lead a happy married life. Both partners would have to work on themselves as persons to make the relationship flourishing in its entirety. In both Sora's and Jin-kyong's cases, ordinary ethics became explicit as a manner through which they wanted to create the relationship with their partners.

6.2.3 About Not Getting Married

The survey I presented at the beginning of this sub-chapter must be viewed in a particular context. As Kendall notes, during South Korea's period of rapid economic transformation, the national dialogue of parsimony regarding wedding ceremonies was conducted "in the name of progress" (Kendall 1996:70). In contrast, current public debates about marriage are connected with discourses about low fertility rate and shrinking family size. The growing number of unmarried women (and men) became a topic of national concern (see for example Raymo et al. 2015). Thus, contemporary public discourses about parsimony are conducted in the name of population growth.

In contrast to narratives that emphasised the impossibility of marrying due to financial difficulties, other public discourses were concerned with women and their financial situation when not married. Jesook Song (2014:22) points out that "[i]n the context of marriage being regarded as the guarantee of subsistence and economic safety […], daughters who do not prioritize going into the marriage market […] are objects of concern."

Some of my research participants were indifferent to marriage, such as Min-hee, or even preferred not to marry, such as Ha-yun.[88] Song's (2014:21) research is on women who identify themselves as *bihon yeoseong* ("being unassociated with marriage"), which is different from *mihon yeoseong* ("not-yet-married"). In her analysis, Song (2014:21) concentrates on how the former had to enter into "the battle against social norms" because they were not only 'unassociated' with getting married but had also established a single household. In contrast, I met young women who did not need to 'battle' because their social environment accepted their decisions not to marry and who found another way to sustain their living alone.

Min-hee had studied design at a women's university. After her graduation, she had worked as media designer but soon resigned her job because she could not identify with the company's goals. Then, she found her current job where her main responsibilities were the organisation of workshops and other events. Min-hee was in her early thirties when we met and talked, but she did not have plans to marry

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[88] A South Korean feminist movement further challenges marriage as a normative idea and rejects it entirely. For further information see, for example, Izaakson and Kim (2020). I thank Prof. Dr. Mun Young Cho for the remark.

and was not concerned about it. She felt lucky that her parents did not push her in this direction. She told me that her younger sister was already married and that she looked forward to becoming an aunt. She herself, however, was indifferent to get married. She did not live alone but together with three friends who were working as visual artist, painter and in the field of film production. The money Min-hee earned was enough to sustain a living because she could share the costs of the flat, the food and other household and living contents with her friends.

Different from the young women Song (2014) portrays, Min-hee could maintain her living by using her own money because she shared her economic resources with her friends. She found a middle way: she was neither living with her parents, nor did she live alone. And she was supported by her family in her decision not to marry and living by herself. The independence working women such as Yun experienced in their decision to marry was also felt by Min-hee in her decision not to marry.

Ha-yun, by contrast, was explicit in her wish not to marry. "No," she said directly, "there are so many things you have to take responsibility for. In South Korea, they say that you do not only marry your partner, you marry a family."

In contemporary wedding ceremonies, the conjugal relation between the couple is stressed (see Kendall 1996). Although visible especially in the first part of Yun's wedding, the second part *pyebaek* also accentuates the conjugal bond. I described, for example, the deep bow *(keun chol)* Yun and Kwon performed in front of their in-laws during *pyebaek*. In the past, Kendall (1996:46) stresses, this bow was performed solely by the woman, implying the "acceptance of the bride into the husband's family and household." Nowadays, however, it is the "celebration of a new and almost invariably neolocal couple" (Kendall 1996:46) that the bow is expressing. Furthermore, Yun and Kwon quickly prepared and left the wedding to go on their honeymoon after *pyebaek* had finished. In the past, Kendall (1996:46) explains, the bride was initiated into the husband's household and had to remain for "three days sequestered in a nuptial chamber in her in-laws' house."

My research participants also stressed the conjugal bond in the married life. Jin-kyong and Sora, for example, emphasised especially how they designed their married life with their husbands. Yet, their narratives also showed and Ha-yun accentuated that a marriage is not only a conjugal relation, but also a relationship with the wider family – in-laws and the respective extended kin, and also children (cf. Lee 2005). Ha-yun doubted that she was prepared for either relationship. First, she pointed to the obligations and responsibilities towards the extended family members. "What are the things you are responsible for?" I asked her.

"Well, for example, there is the birthday of your sister-in-law. Then there is Father Day and Children's Day, or you have to take care of your husband's cousin's younger siblings." Such obligations were, as Ha-yun pointed out, not only large in quantity, but also largely asymmetrical regarding duties men and women had to perform.

Furthermore, Ha-yun doubted her mothering skills. "I lack the assurance for that [*Neomu jasini eopseoyo*]. […] In South Korea, you have no choice but to get a child after getting married. And when you don't get one, they ask why," she explained. "I

think that the social conditions in South Korea are not good at the moment to raise a child." She paused and clarified, "I like children, but I lack the assurance of so much responsibility. I want to raise up my children in a good way, but I lack the assurance that I can raise them in a good way."

As described in sub-chapter 5.2.3, Ha-yun had an 'alternative' education and worked in a social company. She was very sensitive to the social difficulties she had experienced or heard of. Although she wished to raise and care for her child as well as possible, she lacked the confidence to do so. Marriage and child-rearing demanded that Ha-yun assumes responsibility. In the first case, she found the pressure to perform intolerable, whereas in the second case, she was not self-assured that she could assume the responsibility in the best ways possible. She judged herself as lacking the skills to move between these different practices, of how to perform appropriate in these practices. Thus, not getting married at all was Ha-yun's preferred option. Ha-yun told me, as I described in sub-chapter 5.2.3, that her parents viewed her independence as a "piece of luck" and they supported her in her decision. Similar to Min-hee's account, Ha-yun could express her independence because she was supported by her parents in her decision not to marry and, at the same time, she could sustain a living through work.

6.3 Chapter Conclusion

A wedding ceremony is a habit, a tradition, a responsibility and it involves 'the others'. It encompasses joy and happiness, but also difficulties and moments of tough negotiations. In this chapter, I followed the narratives of young working women about getting married, and I focused especially on the wedding ceremony as an important (financial) part of getting married, and the particularity of marriage as a way of forming a family.

As a working couple supported by their parents, Yun and Kwon could afford and had the freedom to design their wedding in accordance with their wishes. Yun wanted to make her wedding ceremony special, and her husband planned the performance of her favourite song, *Gangnam Style.* Working women could, however, also face the challenge that marriage could be an obstacle to their career – for example Sook found it difficult to get a job because of her marriage plans. Getting married was also a strategy to end working life and escape the workplace discriminations that women had to endure. The relations between work and marriage made ethical questions explicit as young women like Hyun-ae and Sook experienced bias from employers during job interviews, and they felt the questions about their marital plans ignored their skills and abilities and invaded their privacy. Furthermore, in employment, they felt that they had to decide between career or marriage. They perceived the possibilities for promotion as limited, and they considered marriage as both cementing the glass ceiling and a way to avoid discrimination altogether.

In this context, they assigned their respective partner an important role and planned their married lives – after they passed the gateway – to be based on mutual care, support, and respect. Jin-kyong and Sora emphasised the respect, thoughtfulness and attention necessary for a happy married life. Ordinary ethics in their account encompassed the striving for happiness through the continuous enactment of technologies of the self (see also Landgraf 2020b). However, because a married life not only included the partner but his family as well, some of my research participants were uncertain whether they should marry at all. Ha-yun was not sure she could fulfil the duty to care for the extended family and a child. Not getting married allowed her to design her social life according to other values, such as the freedom to decide when to take on responsibilities.

The form and content of a wedding ceremony were the matters of negotiating processes of my research participants and their parents. In balancing between their parents' wishes and their own plans, ethics became explicit in the tension between my female interlocutors' understandings of being a dutiful daughter and their personal efforts and aspirations of a wedding ceremony.

Money was an important factor in considerations about how, where, and whom to marry. As means of payment, it brought a certain freedom, especially to working women such as Yun. Because she possessed the financial means to pay for her wedding herself, she could express the value for her partner Kwon through a considerable amount of *yedanbi* and decide about the location, form and content of her ceremony, which enabled valuable experiences such as a honeymoon. The independence Yun experienced in her decision *to* marry was also experienced by Min-hee and Ha-yun in their decision *not to* marry. The support of their families and financial stability through work enabled both to avoid ethical dilemmas.

The lack of these financial means meant that some of my research participants had to engage in practices that they evaluated as ethically wrong. Because the cost of a wedding exceeded their financial means, they were not only confronted with public discourse about (the lack of) filial piety, but they had to use money that was not their own; money which they ascribed to be rather indivisible because it was their parents' money and they should use it.

Kendall (1996) considers the commodification of gifts in general, and the exchange of cash in particular, as a problematic development of South Korean weddings and the ever more expensive requirements of content and form of a wedding ceremony strengthen the line between those who can afford to marry and those who cannot. However, the narratives of Hyun-ae and Sook show that it is also the problematic and, first and foremost, gendered correlation between work and marriage that prevents young people marrying.

As my research participants questioned the value of an extravagant wedding, critically referred to as 'show,' they stressed that they would design a wedding ceremony to be simple and undemanding. In contrast to their parents, they perceived a wedding ceremony as a necessary, but overvalued, (gate)way to living together and

forming a family. More important for these working women was that a marriage should be an emancipated partnership. Sharing household responsibilities and duties, or getting equal chances to advance their careers, were themes that dominated their narratives and illustrated that marriage *and* work have become ever more interconnected.

7   Anticipation and Consumption

The main characteristic of the 'Spec Generation' is the collection of qualifications and certificates, these young Seoulites' specifications, to achieve the standards appropriate for their social setting. 'Spec' includes not only a degree certificate but also evidence of having done internships and work experience as well as language test results, especially English-language accreditations such as TOEFL or TOEIC. Certificates characterise the lives of the young people I aim to portray, and the exchange of certificates resembles commerce. Another important area of consumption I encountered during my fieldwork was fashion. In the conversations I had with my interlocutors and the discussions I led with my thesis supervisors concerning certificates and fashion, two seemingly contradictory themes continuously emerged: uniformity and diversity. Thus, for example, one South Korean scholar told me that "young people are supposed to be both: diverse and uniform." But how are both diversity and uniformity experienced in the apparently "sheer variety of goods […] outrageously developed, beyond any sense of need" (Miller 2001:111)?

Both certificates and fashion restrict access and maintain status systems (Appadurai 1986); yet, their meaning is historically and socially prescribed, and their character is processual – that is, they generate actions, qualities, events and give rise to new signs (Keane 2005). Doing language courses, volunteer work, internships and part-time jobs, was a well-established part of South Korea's social landscape.

I suggest that my research participants gave meaning and attributed values to these important themes of qualification. On the one hand, these activities were a culturally prescribed and constructed period of, and opportunity for, trial and error for young people. On the other hand, an engagement in these activities allowed young people to take over responsibilities, trained them how to overcome difficult situations, and the contemplation about how these activities presented right or wrong practices illustrate the complexity of young people's thoughts and reflections. In this chapter, I elaborate on how my research participants anticipated how they should live through consumption and how they perceived and defined uniformity and diversity in their daily practices. Narratives about the development of the qualification system, the relevance and use of certificates, are the topic of the first chapter section. I then turn to fashion and the diverse ways my research participants acted on themselves and their bodies in the second part. In their narratives, ethics became explicit when they judged about different (consumption) practices and in processes of self-formation when engaging in these practices. Here, I understand money as means of payment and focus on the complex interpretations ascribed to goods acquired through money and the act of consumption itself. I take consumption to refer to the acquisition of goods and services as part of my research participants' anticipation of their futures, and I focus especially on certificates and fashion. The research participants I discuss in this chapter were young people in their twenties – studying and working – and the CEO Mr. Jung, who was in his late 50s. Their narratives deal not only with daily practices but also past events.

7.1 Certificates

In public and academic discourses, the aim of collecting diverse certificates is, first and foremost, to obtain one of the rare jobs at a conglomerate. Certificates are viewed as an investment *(tuja)*. Min-a Jang, a student at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies majoring in business administration, wrote in the 'Student Corner' of the *The Korea Times* that "aside from these [certificates as mentioned above], some companies require applicants to present their own story about unique and special experiences such as climbing a Himalayan mountain" (Jang 2013:2). She then criticised the amount of money some people are willing to pay for such unique and special experiences and wondered what became of those who could not. What could such experience possibly tell the employer about the future employee? Who decides which criteria count as 'Spec' and which do not? And how do my interlocutors think about their activities outside university described as 'making Spec'? In sorting out the diverse vectors 'making Spec' included, I show how my research participants evaluated this practice, how they balanced their personal interests with the requirements for getting a job and the passion that characterised 'making Spec'.

7.1.1 Climbing a Himalayan Mountain

Every Saturday morning, I took the blue bus line to Jong-no, one of the areas in Seoul where the language institutes are located. YBM, one of the biggest of such institutes, was my destination. After I got my coffee from a nearby coffee shop, I entered the seven-story building and waited with many other students for the lift to arrive. I was there for a four-hour Korean language course; most other students were there for English language courses of various levels. YBM offered diverse programmes with special discount opportunities and included courses to achieve specific levels of TOEIC, with goals ranging from 500 points to 800 and above. A '007 course,' for example, was designed especially for students preparing for *gosi,* job interviews, or working abroad. Other courses focused on spoken English, and YBM advertised its professional, native-speaker teachers – from Canada, England or Ireland – to enhance its reputation as language institute. Critiques of such educational institutes *(hagwon)* focus on the privatisation and marketisation of education and middle-class mothers who, through them investing in their children, support these activities (see Cho 2015, Kim 2005, Park 2012).

Dae-hyun and I talked in detail about English proficiency as 'Spec,' and he offered various possible explanations for why it had become such an important certificate. "English is very important [for getting a job]. I don't know why it is so important, but of course there are a lot of works where you need it." He paused and added, "And of course it is a global language. Although you do not need it while doing your job, at one point it is a tool to evaluate people." I asked him how it can be an evaluation tool and he answered, "We live in South Korea, so we don't speak it, you have to study it. So, if you want to speak it very well, then you need to put a lot of effort in it. […] 'This person can study for his or her own benefit' is what employers can conclude," he said. "So, it became an evaluation tool." English proficiency certificates function as signs for employers, whose goal is to find the most suitable person for a particular job.

One of the functions of certificates is to exclude or at least reduce competition by establishing a fixed order that ranks people in a relative social or professional position (Appadurai 1986). Thus, certificates and qualifications were established as *objective criteria* to evaluate job candidates. Nevertheless, as almost 80% of South Korea's high school students go to university or college to receive (at least) a bachelor degree, the criteria 'university graduation' has lost its potential for employers to evaluate students. New criteria had to be established to secure the white-collar workers' ranking system, and employers turned to other evaluable skills such as English-speaking abilities. The openness of certificates makes possible their use as criteria. Recalling the affordances of a chair that invites but does not determine us to sit down (Keane 2005, 2016), competences reified in certificates such as language proficiency 'invite' employers to take them as semiotic background to abstract skills and abilities of an employee.

My interlocutors, both employees and employers, however, questioned the practice of interpreting certificates as signs; they saw them as inadequate criteria to evaluate people. Some employers started to require unusual activities such as climbing a Himalayan mountain; others, such as the CEO Mr. Jung, tried to perceive the actual abilities of a job candidate beyond certificates.

Mr. Jung was the head of a small-size enterprise that imported microelectronic items from China. The company had four employees and because it was flourishing, he had searched for new job candidates. He had three conditions for new job candidates: a college or university degree, English skills, and a technical understanding of microelectronics. I met him through a colleague of mine who had done an internship in his company and knew him very well. I often discussed my dissertation topic with my colleague, and one day he suggested meeting Mr. Jung because the latter had had negative experiences with young job candidates. Knowing in advance that problems existed, I asked Mr. Jung how job candidates had changed over the course of time.

> I started my business in the 90s. Back then, only one or two young people would get a job, but they tried with their passion, they tried with their truth. They wanted to tell what their strong points and weak points are. These days they make too much make up, decoration. It is very difficult to see who they actually are. I think they want to show much more than they are and that is very difficult for me actually. (Interview 05.03.2013)

He did not differentiate between male or female candidates; in his eyes, both were very polite, well prepared for the job interview, and convinced him that they were able employees for the respective position. In the end, however, most failed to satisfy Mr. Jung. They were less productive than he expected, made many mistakes in calculating and accounting. "Why do you think they performed less?" I asked him. "From the beginning, they only want to go to university or college, but they have no aim. That is a big problem," he explained "The youth, they want to get a job after graduation but still, they don't have a specific aim, it is just coming and going to the company. They think they are well qualified, but I don't think so." I told him about the conversation I had with Dae-hyun about English proficiency and he noted a shortcoming of this form of qualification: "Language is language. The effort to learn should be the first thing, I mean the spirit. Although he or she is excellent in English, is it for the company, for the organisation, or for what?" Mr. Jung felt the effect of an eroding system of certificates to signs without meaning. Certificates as reified means to express qualities are standardised and thus, create uniformity. A TOEIC-certificate is a normed documentation of performance; the passion the CEO felt was missing, however, could not be expressed through pure certificates.

Practice showed the inadequacy of certificates and criteria for evaluating job candidates. Practice also rendered visible another inappropriate quality of certificates. Dae-hyun analysed the merits of English proficiency as criteria. Although he ac-

knowledged the ability and skills needed to learn the language, he reflected critically about the learning styles. "Rather than we learn it as a language, we simply mechanically learn it. We [students] don't learn the culture of US America or England; we just learn it [English] by reading books." Dae-hyun saw the need to combine language learning with studies of the specific culture or social setting in order to comprehend varieties of speech. He emphasised that to speak English well it was also necessary to spend money on education. "You need money to receive education or live abroad. It cannot but be different if a person studies 1:1 with a foreigner and a person who studies by reading books. So the question is for whom it is an advantage?" Money as means to pay for quality language education made visible the network necessary to obtain adequate language skills, and both Dae-hyun as well as the student reporter Min-a were critical of the link between wealth and English proficiency.

Mr. Jung and Dae-hyun both felt that the criteria established to evaluate people's ability were not sufficient; they felt the presentation of these criteria as staged. When I asked Dae-hyun what 'Spec' is, he clarified that not all activities automatically count as 'Spec'. "There are activities you do, that will help you when it comes to 'Spec' and there are some that will not," he stated. "When you are active in a social movement, that will not help you; on the contrary, it would be turned into something negative. But when you would manage a business conference or be active in something like that, then it would help you," he argued. Although, he emphasised, one had engaged in both activities, there existed one essential detail that made one activity count as 'Spec' and another not: "You need the acknowledgement of one person. If one person recognises and accepts it as 'Spec,' then you will need it. But one person has to recognise it first." In some cases, climbing a Himalayan mountain counts as 'Spec'; that is, it signifies a quality of the job candidate. In another case, employers interpret it in a negative way, as extreme sport that signifies the candidate's possible high readiness to take risks. In yet another case, it is not interpreted as a sign at all. There are diverse possible relationships between an activity, its interpretation and signs – for an activity to count as 'Spec,' a person must recognise it as such. Practices may change and give rise to new signs. However, these new signs must be acknowledged as such.

While Mr. Jung emphasised the gap between job candidates' acquired certificates and their actual performance in the company, Dae-hyun criticised the unequal opportunities for students to obtain significant certificates in the first place. In the accounts of Dae-hyun and Mr. Jung it was the erosion of a system of certificates and the effort to establish a new one that made ethical questions explicit.

Various dialogue partners criticised the certificate system for its uniformity, cost and inadequacy. However, the affordances of volunteer work or internships offered my research participants diverse ways of usage and the practices provided orientation and motivation, as Hyun-ae's narrative illustrates.

7.1.2 Meeting Real Life

Hyun-ae and I met in a small coffeeshop near Hyehwa subway station for our first interview, and I started by asking about her family background. She told me her parents' occupations and said her younger sister was working at a bank. Then she turned to her own work in a sales department of a big company: "I never thought that I would end up doing that kind of work, I actually wanted to study, I really wanted to study."

"What became of that wish?" I asked.

"Well, I had the opportunity to work as assistant for a professor, and I realised that I would not make money when studying and working at the university or at a research centre, so I turned my eyes to other possibilities. Studying became my hobby," she answered. After pausing for some seconds she stated, "Actually, I did not go to university much. I went to China for one year to do an internship and semester abroad, and then I travelled to Germany to study there for another year, so I did not visit university for almost two years." She added that she really hated university, which she found annoying.

This surprised me because she just said that she had wanted to work there as instructor or professor. "How come that you did not like it?" I asked.

"Well, the university courses were boring," she said simply. "Therefore, I did a lot of volunteer work, outside of my university with students from other universities. Then I did internships to work with other people from other communities. It really helped me for my life."

Hyun-ae told me about her wish to experience real life, 'real society' as she called it. Just going to university was not enough for her. Rather, she needed to engage in diverse activities and social relations to broaden her horizon. She distinguished between studying – taking part in courses – and doing research. Her aspiration to work at a university was influenced by her enthusiasm to learn; university courses, however, did not satisfy her expectations. When she concluded that she would not earn enough working at a university to sustain a living, she decided to retain studying as a hobby. The boredom she experienced attending courses led her outside the university, and she enthusiastically tried out other activities: volunteer work, part-time jobs, and internships. Here, I deal only with the first two of these.

Volunteer work encompassed diverse locations to work in and for, and multiple possible social relations for young people to engage in: from local community centres to various conglomerate programmes, such as Samsung Securities' 'YAHO'[89].

Ha-yun, who had been educated at Haja-Center, was highly judgemental regarding young people and their volunteer activities, describing them as "narcissistic,"

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[89] YAHO – 'Young Assistants providing Happy Opportunities' – is a programme for college students to work as financial education instructors at South Korean social welfare centres. For further information see Samsung Securities: College Student Volunteers Samsung YAHO (https://www.samsung securities.com/eng/business/yaho.do 19 January 2021).

"without energy and vitality," and "cynical about themselves." "The ones that I knew who worked in a social field were without any interest. They only worked there to collect 'Spec' so they would have greater opportunities for getting a job later," she explained. My research assistant Seon-ae, too, critically commented on that issue. While a comparison of students based on their GPA was "meaningless" because different courses had different standards, she explained that the competition to get good 'Spec' was tough, especially regarding the activities and programmes offered by conglomerates:

> Its application is tremendous, and the competition rate is high. There are volunteer abroad programmes of good companies and it is free, and there are really many students who want to do it. If they really want to do 'pure' volunteer work, why don't they go to the welfare centre near their home? It is pretty empty. (Meeting, 25.03.2013)

Hyun-ae decided to do exactly what my research assistant Seon-ae suggested would be 'right' volunteer work: she worked for a local welfare centre. "Outside the university, I met students with whom I could do volunteer work together and we did a lot of volunteer work. [...] I worked for 5 to 6 years. Well I am still doing it if I find the time." The programme she took part in offered middle school students from less well-off families the opportunity to see a movie, visit a museum, or go to the theatre. "You have to know that these students did not trust me easily," she explained. "Nevertheless, the more we would go to do something, the more their feelings changed. Of course, doing this work was stressful, although I visited the programme only once a week. Sometimes I hated to go," she clarified. "So, if you do not have the passion to do it [*maeum eopseumyeon*], you cannot stay the course." The term she used literally means 'heart' in the sense of heart-minded. As Nicholas Harkness describes: "The term *маŭм* [*maeum*] is culturally conceptualized in Korea as the place where personally felt emotional experiences meet the production of culturally recognizable emotionality" (Harkness 2014:203, original emphasis). The physical location of the heart is the side were feelings and emotions as well as thoughts are situated, and 'not having mind' can be translated as passionless.

Volunteer work, thus, was not something that Hyun-ae *just did;* rather, it required a high level of commitment, not only towards the school students but also her peers, and herself:

> I wanted to do this kind of work; I really wanted to do it. Since it is stressful, however, some quit early. We were 20 people when I started to volunteer, and, in the end, we remained 10. These 10 people seriously loved what they did, and I really like them. We overcame the stress together.
>
> (Interview, 24.10.2012)

For Hyun-ae, volunteer work was both a means and an end, not a means to an end as Ha-yun and Seon-ae criticised. With the help and engagement of her peers, she had mastered the difficulties she encountered – the conflicts with the school students and the struggle with herself to keep to her word. The social relations Hyun-ae developed with other programme participants deeply informed her life course. They motivated her to move beyond the boundaries of South Korea and visit China and Germany. "The memories I made with these people are very important matters in my life. They are not my co-workers, they are my real friends. If I would have only stayed in my university, only did my major at my department, I would not have gone to China or Germany." Nevertheless, "this outside activity made me want to visit China and Germany because these friends supported me in my ideas. I pondered if I should go or not, but the same friends said 'Quickly go and come back' [*Ppalli gatdawa*]."

Hyun-ae judged between the practice of going to university against doing volunteer work. She had to evaluate how she should live and acknowledged in retrospect "what has been done for what it was" (Lambek 2010b:43), that is, leaving boredom to "meet real life." In the end, Hyun-ae clearly contrasted life within and outside the university:

"If I would have stayed only in my university, my department, my club, I would just have had short conversations; I would just have made party, get drunk. The possibility to meet with people outside the campus opened up my horizon," she emphasised. "I got to know different ideas, gained new experiences, could share my opinions with others. I could develop." Reflection and thought, self-conduct and passion made up volunteer work for Hyun-ae and the social relations she engaged in enabled her to overcome difficulties, hang on to her wishes, and helped her to anticipate her future.

Part-time jobs were another way for Hyun-ae to "meet real society." She had worked in diverse locations: in the convenience store GS25, in a department store, and selling ice cream. Her primary reason was to earn money. "I could earn money by myself! I was already grown up and did not want to take my parents money all the time. My parents' money is my parents' money, not mine," she emphasised. Hyun-ae did not have to work part-time to sustain herself while studying, as students Dae-hyun told me about. She worked because she wanted to. Earning money by herself not only enabled her to become financially independent from her parents; as a university student of a certain age, she saw herself as an adult, which reduced, in her view, the justification to take her parents' money. She partly dissolved the social tie with her parents when she earned her own money. At the same time, however, she created new social relations through earmarking her owned money. "When we were university students, we had less money [*doni eodiseo*], so when we visited the middle school students we would buy some small yoghurt or something like that," she explained.

"To do what?" I asked.

"Well, because it was not expensive and the variety is huge. Now everyone of us [the participants in the volunteer programme] earns money. We are all working in

a company and earn a lot of money, so do we buy yoghurt?" she asked rhetorically. "No, we buy tasty bread or something like a cake. Now we have the money to buy the kids a present, we can buy them a lot of tasty food," she explained. Money as a gift – as in the case of Yun's wedding ceremony – was not appropriate for middle school students; rather Hyun-ae used money as means of payment to buy special foods for them. The value of the social relation Hyun-ae had with the school students was expressed and objectified through food (see also Riles 2004). Hyun-ae and her friends evaluated the exact 'going rate' for the gift in accordance with their own status. As university students with – imagined and actual – less money, a yoghurt was the appropriate provision; an expensive cake was adequate as present when they became employees and earned a monthly salary. They actively cared for the middle school students through the act of consumption turned into gifts turned into provision.

7.1.3 'Spec' as Orientation in Times of Change

Both, Ha-yun and my research assistant Seon-ae evaluated volunteer work activities of others based on their assumptions of what volunteer work should or should not be. Ha-yun judged other people through their interest (or lack of it) in the specific social field. Because she had worked in a social company and aspired to build up her own social project with blue-collar workers and artists, she could draw on her own experiences in her criticism. Furthermore, she got to know many university students taking part in programmes at Haja-Center. My research assistant Seon-ae, on the other hand, compared the volunteer work at a community centre with that offered by companies. She evaluated students based on her experiences as a university student. For both, self-interest and calculation were not the right motivators for doing volunteer work. At the same time, they understood the practices of other students. When I asked Ha-yun if the term 'Spec Generation' was appropriate to group young people like her, she agreed. "However, they cannot do something else. It is the establishment today. The people who are in the safe zone, those who had success made that outline," she stated. "When you want to enter a company, you need to have a lot of experiences. The space to fill out in the application form is huge. They create a lot of pressure this way," she explained. "I have to write about all my experiences, all the certificates I have, my educational background, and all the prizes I have won. That is oppressing."

Ha-yun criticised the standard judgements of young people's abilities and underlined that it was those who already had stable employment who were responsible for the 'obsession' with certificates. From the lectures she attended at Haja-Center, Ha-yun learnt that a student's life also means developing oneself, doing work that helps to develop a sense of independence *(jaribsim).* This approach to education followed the ideal Dae-hyun introduced me to: the development of a whole person.

Seon-ae used the possibility to do internships to gain knowledge and practical experience that would help her to define more concretely what interested her. Al-

though she was sceptical about the way some fellow students did volunteer work, she considered herself to be different. She explained that she used internships at diverse companies to "look around." A student of social science, she was not sure in what kind of field she wanted to work and hoped trying out different kinds of internships would help her decide. During the time we worked together, she was exploring journalism. Her account seemed to match Mr. Jung's description of students studying without a concrete goal. Additionally, her activities seemed to correspond to the standard image of the 'Spec Generation' with her jumping from one internship to another. In Seon-ae's own account, however, it was a technique to find a good way to live in the future.

In their accounts Hyun-ae, Dae-hyun, my research assistant Seon-ae, Mr. Jung and Ha-yun critically evaluated the concept of certificates as a normative way to judge about a person's abilities, and the limited and controlled conditions under which one could obtain them. They made ethical considerations explicit as they judged which practices and uses of certificates were right or wrong. At the same time, they used the same institutions that issued these certificates to improve both their social relations and their selves. Engaging in these practices made ethics explicit in the form of passion and commitment. Money as means of payment illustrated issues of unfairness and inequality (see chapter 5). Yet, its use as means of payment also showed how values of social relations changed and social ties were at the same time separated and created. Thus, although certificates established a kind of uniformity, through their use in actual practice they stimulated diversity.

Fashion, Appadurai (1986:25) argues, is the "functional equivalent" of licences and coupons; yet, status systems are protected through restriction of taste. In the next section I analyse how my research participants thought about uniformity and diversity in the context of fashion and beauty.

7.2 Fashion

In July 2012, the South Korean singer and rapper Park Jae-sang, known as Psy, and his label YG Entertainment released a video on YouTube that not only hit the South Korean charts but was a worldwide success: *Gangnam Style*. Because Psy released the song without copyright, people around the world, from NASA to farmers to Trekkies, were free to parody the horseback riding dance style however they liked. But in the original video and song, Psy was himself caricaturing the residents of Gangnam, one of the richest neighbourhoods in Seoul, and those that imitate them. The central message of the lyrics is simple and constantly repeated: *Oppan gangnam seutail. Oppa,* 'elder brother,' is used by younger women to address an elder male acquaintance. The grammatical form *neun* (here shortened to *n*) notifies the subject and verb in the sentence. Thus, Psy is referring to himself and the statement is simple: Elder brother has the Gangnam Style. Dancing his horseback riding moves, he demonstrates what this Gangnam Style is: luxurious saunas and spas, stables, water

sports, nightlife, and fashion. In his song, Psy critically reflects on the beauty and fashion standards in South Korea. I noted in sub-chapter 4.2.4 that beauty standards in South Korea follow a specific 'South Korean' ideal. But what exactly is appropriate to wear and look like and who judges about the appropriateness?

In discussing clothing and beauty styles with me, my research participants voiced how they experienced diversity, uniformity, and change.

7.2.1 Business Strategies: Size and Price

When I came to Seoul to do my fieldwork, I quickly felt the need to go shopping, purely based on my personal interest in the variety of clothes and styles not sold in Germany. Since it was not my first time in the city, I knew where to shop on a limited budget. Sinsa-dong in Gangnam district was surely too expensive, but Myong-dong, Dongdae-mun and of course Hongdae were possible places to look around for some new styles. In other words, I would go where my interlocutors went. In Hongdae, Eun-ji showed me how business practices of South Korea's conglomerates created uniformity. "Enterprises and cooperation belong mostly to LOTTE. So, LOTTE owns tiny things like clothing and make up stores. LOTTE controls small businesses, manufacturing and marketing techniques," she explained. "Although it is illegal, there are many lobbyists. Even in Hongdae where diversity is valued," and she pointed to the small shop selling baseball caps opposite the coffee shop where we were sitting. LOTTE is one of South Korea's big conglomerates. It presents itself as "Korea's No. 1 in department store chains" with articles ranging from clothes to electronic devices and food products. Its mission is to "enrich people's lives by providing superior products and services that our customers love and trust"[90]. LOTTE's business strategies, however, are multiple: its department stores sell diverse brands, but LOTTE also franchises small, single-product shops like the one selling baseball caps. Eun-ji noted, "You can find franchise things literally everywhere: food, clothes, coffee shops. They attract businessmen and -women to have a franchise."

Another business strategy she mentioned was the use of 'power bloggers'. "South Korean bloggers write intensive revenues about restaurants or make-up and are considered more trustworthy than newspapers," she explained, "so lobbyists from big companies hire them to have an indirect marketing effect." As a consequence of these business strategies, specific products and specific sales practices became dominant, as the *Sam Chobag* – three-second bag – illustrates. Eun-ji explained that this bag could be bought everywhere – walking the street one could find it every three seconds in a store or street sale; that is why people created that name. "Some people think it is special [unique], but others think it is not," and she compared this thought with the jackets from universities. The university logo made a jacket something special off campus, but at university many students wore them.

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[90] LOTTE: About LOTTE: Mission (https://www.lotte.co.kr/global/en/about/mission.do, accessed 19 January 2021).

Conglomerates create uniformity through their business strategies and Eun-ji told me about another way through which companies produced uniformity: the size and price of clothes. Sizes of clothes varied from store to store. Large, international shops like the Japanese-based UNIQLO or the Swedish H&M used sizes ranging from XS to XL. By contrast, small street retailers and even the LOTTE Department Stores at Young Plaza, located in Dongdae-mun, sold clothes labelled 'free size' – that is, only one size. Eun-ji criticised that these free-size clothes only fit an ideal body type; people who somehow diverged from this ideal could not wear them. In addition, the prices of standardised clothes and unique ones diverged considerably. The three-second bag, to remain with that example, was not only sold everywhere but was always the same price – 10,000 Won (approximately 9 Euros). However, the clothes in small designer shops were different from the uniform cloth styles I found in Dongdae-mun and Myung-dong. Hong-dae area, for example, was a place where designers opened their shops.[91] Samchon-dong was yet another example – a place for couples to date due to 'traditional' style Korean houses and the atmosphere the small alleys created, and for women to shop aside from department stores. The price of clothes and accessories, however, was higher than in Hongdae. Thus, the ability to possess individual clothes was not only restricted through standardised sizes, but also a question of the individual financial situation.

Yet, the internet presented another way to shop and find clothes that could express one's own style on a limited budget. In chapter 5, I mentioned that Bora was anxious about finding a job that would suit her interests *and* offers a good payment. "I want to make a lot of money so I kind of wonder how I can make a lot of money," she stated simply. Recognising her directness, she asked with a smile, "Am I too frank?" In response, I asked how much money she wanted to make.

"Unrealistic, but I want to be a millionaire," she answered.

"Can I ask you why? What would you do if you had so much money?" I asked.

"Oh I just, it is just a habit of mine. I love shopping; I love to buy things whatever it is. So, to maintain that hobby, I think I need to make a lot of money. It is just my personal reason." Bora did more internet-shopping – eye shopping as she called it – than she would go in shops to buy clothes. "I used to buy more when I did real shopping. But I have to consider my budget, otherwise I will get in trouble," she told me.

Because she was interested in Japan and studied it as minor, Japanese fashion styles influenced her shopping activity. At first, she showed me nfnl.co.kr, a kind of Japanese internet shopping site, and explained that, "I just look around what is new, what is cute. Nevertheless, I don't often buy something, I only buy when I feel I really need it." This website offers the possibility to create a wish list, which she

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[91] As conglomerates and international companies like H&M recognised the potential of Hongdae area, these small designer shops were pushed to nearby neighbourhoods as Ye-eun, who worked as a silversmith had told me. Nevertheless, the image of a unique fashion district remained and lots of university students went shopping there.

regularly used to save things she liked. What differentiated this website from others was her personal taste. "I always buy things to my preferences. I never buy things that don't fit my taste, however popular and in fashion they are," she told me in our first interview. While we were talking about internet shopping, she added, "I don't like the common; I like unique and cute styles."

"How would you define cute?" I asked.

"Well, the colour is important – pink, pastel-like colours. I don't like strong colours. I like simple clothes which are not too sexy and not too grown up," she emphasised while showing me the popular website clicknfunny.com, which she did not like. "I like details such as ruching and the model shot must be attractive too."

Another website on which she frequently searched for clothes, and eventually would buy some, was coupang.com. Websites of this format have special conditions for buyers to purchase things, for example, the availability of clothes is limited. A certain number of prospective buyers need to team up to purchase a product, and payment is direct. "They sell items cheaper," Bora explained. They were very popular and referred to as 'social commerce'.

Those of my interlocutors who were students had to shop on a limited budget. The conglomerates' business strategies standardised range of clothes available in a given price range, creating a standardised look for young people. Designers could sell their items at an affordable price only because other costs like the rent remained low. Internet-shopping malls allowed students like Bora to buy low-priced, unique items and even brought into being a new sociality through special price conditions. Shopping for clothes, often considered as hedonistic and individualistic, brought together young people in their search for something unique they could afford. However, the use of money as means of payment was subject to strict regulations.

Bora was careful only to buy clothes she needed, and she felt devoted to her shopping practices. Although she stressed that she wanted to earn a lot of money to maintain her hobby of shopping, while she shopped, she was very thrifty. Daniel Miller (2001:102) notes that "[t]he primary ritual of shopping is a performance that begins with a discourse of spending money and often a vision of excessive expenditure." But in the course of shopping it "transforms this into an experience of saving money and an emphasis on money as a substance primarily stored and retained rather than expended" (Miller 2001:102).

However, sometimes Bora would put some of these clothes on a wish list for later, as kind of treat to herself. The treat is an item that contains "some sense of extravagance or hedonism" (Miller 2001:103). Bora would give herself a treat to "reward" her not necessarily for the "labor involved in shopping" as Miller (2001:103) points out but for the effort she put in controlling and regulating her shopping practices. Bora very much controlled when, where and on what to spend her money. Her account makes visible how she balanced different practices while shopping. She had only a certain amount of money available but wanted to buy unique clothes, which she would not find among the standardised clothes offered by businesses in her budget class. Thus, she turned to internet shopping.

Whereas business strategies and the availability of money restricted the possible ways to obtain unique clothes, appropriateness was another one.

7.2.2 Clothes and Appropriateness

The workplace is one of the locations where the appropriateness of clothes became explicitly visible, as Eun-ji pointed out: "People have to impress employers and consumers in a short time. So, appearance is valued by companies and individuals." Business clothes such as suits in sober colours, usually black or dark blue, were appropriate to wear in a company. People associated business clothes with specific skills or knowledge, but they were only a surface and did not guarantee that the contract would be signed or the product sold. Nevertheless, they created uniformity through their texture, colour, cut and profile, which became especially visible during rush hour and lunch time.

When I asked Ahri about her shopping habits, she answered that she and her sister, since both wear a similar size, would often share clothes – so she described herself as not a real shopper. "Is it important how you dress?" I asked her.

"Partially it is. People treat you differently. If you would walk in a hotel or boutique in a humble dress, then nobody would care about you because they would think that you are not their guest and you will not buy anything. They would kind of ignore you," she explained. "But if a girl in a fine dress would enter, their behaviour would totally change."

In her description, a certain clothing style conveyed the sense that the wearer possessed the means to pay. However, she ascribed clothes yet another meaning:

> I guess that people's way of dressing shows their aesthetic taste as well as their diligence. If a girl has fine nails, fine make up and a fine dress, then it means that she cannot be lazy because she had spent a lot of time to make herself pretty. If you would go to work without make up and in a humble dress, then people would think you are lazy. (Interview 19.06.2013)

For Ahri, clothes conveyed a sense of professionalism, which improved both her motivation and comfort. "In a fine dress I feel like I am more professional for my work. It makes me feel good and gives me some fine and positive motivation. If I would wear a humble dress then I would feel a little bit weak and would lack confidence." She concluded that it is not necessary to show off too much for other people, but that she herself felt good when dressed up and wearing make-up.

"You are very professional when you make a good job and take care of yourself. It is crap to say that the woman is just busy with herself. All of the girls, especially my age, have the fantasy about being a career woman." She paused and asked me, "Do you know the movie *The Devil Wears Prada*?" I nodded.[92] "It is like a symbol.

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[92] The movie was released in 2006 and centres on the experiences of the second assistant (Anne

They are so professional in their field and their fashion is also fabulous. So, this is our fantasy, we want to be like them: very good at work, get an income, show up, very fashionable." Her enthusiasm about the movie surprised me because the protagonist, working at one of the biggest fashion magazines in the USA, constantly struggles with the practices at the company and even quits in the end. However, the right clothes gave Ahri personal confidence; they motivated her to take on new projects and to work hard for an appropriate salary.

Eun-ji specified the dimensions of how certain clothing styles came to have a meaning: "Unity was stretched in the 70s and 80s. People had to fit in, they had to look good, look fine. That is how individuality disappeared." The reader remembers that Eun-ji was an Emo, and people started to give her rude looks when she decided to wear Emo clothes with skulls. One of her friends was a Goth, but almost gave up this style due to disagreements with her family. Restrictions in clothing styles were primarily expressed in the family. Eun-ji explained: "Family, parents don't like their kids to be different in their regular values. They want them to stand out in a positive way." And she added: "When I dress like I want my mother finds a problem in this. But when I ask her why, she doesn't really find a reason."

Eun-ji ascribed the behaviour of parents to the island-like geographical and geo-political setting of South Korea: "South Korea is small, tiny, so they [parents] want to feel the sense of belonging towards the whole society." Eun-ji emphasised and drew my attention to the value regime concerning clothes. In a later interview, I asked her again what she thought such 'regular values' would be and she answered that they differ from family to family, "But clearly, parents are more conservative." She gave the following example: "Not many youngsters care about being elegant, but it is pursued by parents. I observe a lot of parents, even the poorest of them, buying their children formal suits or bags for the girls from luxurious department store brand when kids start to go to college."

She argued that such behaviours were based on past experiences: "I believe that South Korean parents of the moment, those in their 50s, have had to seek their ways to succeed economically and socially, because earlier generations suffered from every imaginable situation after the Korean War and emphasised wealth." Thus, she ascribed the meaning behind luxury goods to parents' wishes for their children to "be successful in the near future." Rather than focusing on status, Eun-ji described the care of parents for their children, their aspirations that their children will be eco-nomically successful and, thus, have lives free from hardship.

Luxury goods, however, were connected with maturity, as Cho-hee indicated. She described how a designer handbag costs as much as a two-month salary of an ordinary businesswoman. Thus, students who carried designer bags or wore expen-sive clothes would get weird looks because it was not considered appropriate to pos-sess such luxurious things at their age. People connected the luxury good with the owner's body and personality and evaluated if the luxury was suitable for the owner.

Hathaway) to the chief editor (Meryl Streep) of a fictive fashion magazine.

Thus, although inappropriate to own at a certain age, the meaning of luxury goods was broader. They showed economic success while at the same time they expressed the care and hope of parents towards their children – or the care and love towards the respective partner, as when Yun received a designer handbag from her husband as a wedding present.

Ahri had a different opinion about the meaning of luxury goods. "The middle class admires the high class, and when they buy some luxury goods they feel like upper class. So, this is one reason why they are so much obsessed with luxury goods. If you have a real Louise Vuitton or Prada handbag, then you feel rich. I feel like I am upper class." I asked her what she thought about such behaviour. "It is kind of showing off. I feel that it is a lack of self-confidence. If they would have self-confidence, they would not need to show off; they would not need to buy such things. But if people have a lack of self-confidence then they want to achieve the rich, the higher class."

In contrast to the fierce critique social scientists such as Cho (2002) voice towards the appearances of especially women, Ahri and Eun-ji presented me with different interpretations by focusing on the meaning of clothing styles and luxury goods. Ahri emphasised that clothes can express diligence and professionalism, while Eun-ji foregrounded why people attribute meanings to certain goods, such as luxury items. Right clothes, however, could not be reduced to their visual qualities; the feeling of wearing clothes made of good materials, colours that matched very well – in short, the comfort of clothes – fed back into one's self-esteem, as Ahri emphasised. Bora's demand to find clothes that matched her taste was not restricted to South Korean clothing styles. Instead, she turned to Japan for inspiration, and her decisions about whether or not to buy clothes involved concerns about design, colour, material, quality of fabrication and, of course, price – especially when shopping on the internet. "You cannot touch the material and usually, you cannot send the clothes back if you don't like it. Thus, you have to look carefully and that is one reason, why I hesitate," she said. Her feelings of comfort, physical and social, played an important role in her choice-making process.

Fashion also indicates change and, as Bora pointed out, novelty. What was fashionable, however, was anything but objective. Bora explained that a fashionable person in her view was somebody who can "easily mix and match what they wear, which always looks great on them." At the same time, she emphasised that being fashionable is a matter of subjective opinion. "People have their own preferences. Everybody thinks their style, the clothes they wear, are great. Sometimes people don't accept other people's style, while some would say it's so fantastic and fashionable." While fashion styles like Gothic or Emo were surely too extreme ones in the public opinion, Bora's orientation towards Japan was, partly, accepted.

Bora tried to differentiate herself from others through her clothing style. She went to Japan the week before we met, and she talked to me about differences between Japan and South Korea regarding clothing styles. "I can see unique styles in Japan, but I can't see it in South Korea," she said. "Nobody cares about old fashioned

clothes [in Japan]; if you would do that in South Korea, maybe people would start gossiping."

Although the fear of gossip restricted her choices, she was not restricted to South Korea to choose a style. She would turn to Japan to find not only inspiration but also a source to compare and evaluate South Korean fashion styles and how people respond to fashion in South Korea. Fashion styles in Japan implied for Bora novelty and extravagance, but also simplicity and permanence, and she evaluated the behaviour of South Koreans critically against those of Japanese.

Cultural and social notions affect and limit exchange, in my interlocutors' accounts, it was gossiping that articulated such restrictions. Bora criticised this practice by contrasting it with 'the West': "I heard westerners don't care about what others do or wear and although I don't know if it's true, I really envy them and that environment."

The comments of my research participants made me question the dichotomy between uniformity and diversity. Rather, people experience uniformity and diversity not only differently, but also characterise both qualities with very subjective categories and attributions. Furthermore, both qualities could merge, as in 'unity in diversity,' an expression another friend told me. Because their families restricted the clothes my research participants could wear, gossiping presented a wider social interaction which made explicit these young people's ethical stance. The control of society regarding the appearance of my interlocutors was, however, not only restricted to their clothing styles – it also included their bodies.

7.2.3 The Body and Appropriateness

> I should tell you that I'm a very timid person. I'm not very courageous or bold in showing styles. There are some styles that I want to try but I myself think it doesn't suit me because I'm not as pretty and skinny as the other girls. Maybe one of the reasons is that South Koreans tend to be very noisy about others. If a girl with overweight would wear a short skirt and walk in the street, people would whisper and gossip about her: 'How could she wear that short skirt? She's so fat!'. You may not believe this, but this is actually a case that can be seen or heard in quite a lot of situations, materials or media.
> (Bora, Interview 17.07.2013)

In her description, Bora restricted her clothing style based on the judgement of others, because she thought her bodily dimensions were not good enough for specific styles. People evaluated not only if certain clothes were appropriate for a specific situation – for example, the workplace where skills have to be demonstrated – but also if the body measurements were appropriate for specific clothes.

Eun-ji had had a similar experience with her family. She told me that she had gained around 10 kilos since she began university. Her family had problems with that and had forced her to go on a diet. "I find it common in South Korea," she

told me. This example shows that appropriate appearance is not just a matter of the combination of clothing style and body measurements, but also refers to the body alone.

While diets were the usual way to reduce weight, cosmetic surgery was the usual instrument to 'produce' an appropriate body. Many South Korean women have a double-eyelid operation, such as Bora did.

> When I was in middle school, one of my friends made fun of me that I was not pretty. She said my face is weird and I was shocked that she said that sort of things because she was one of my best friends. I pretended I was okay, but that sort of experience was very stressful for me because you know, girls of that age want to be fascinating, attractive and they're very interested in that kind of things. So, I got plastic surgery on my eyes, and now nobody says things like that. (Interview 17.07.2013)

Bora did not regret that she had had cosmetic surgery. Rather, it was very important for her that nobody would gossip about her appearance again. Nevertheless, she wondered, "Why have I come to this far [to have cosmetic surgery]?" The negative experience she had with her friend informed her decision to undergo an operation on her body, and she used the socially accepted method of cosmetic surgery to transform her face into what was accepted as beautiful.

"How do I have to look if I want to have a good appearance?" I asked her.

"Well in South Korea, you should be pretty, but pretty means that it has a standard: pretty means that you look like a celebrity [*yeonyein*] on TV," she answered. "People think they are pretty, and the media says they are pretty because they have a pretty face and all the looks they have. I think they say us that we should look like them or you are not pretty." Bora explained by referring to a celebrity famous at the time of my fieldwork. This female star combined "big eyes, double eyelid, a high nose [nasal bridge], a small and egg-shaped face," although she had not undergone cosmetic surgery. She was called a natural beauty.

I commented that if everybody looked like a TV star, then everybody would look alike. She answered:

> Actually, they look the same don't you think? That is what I think when I walk along the street or on university campus. All girls look the same. I think the media effect is quite huge on that topic because usually university students watch TV very often and they use their computers. What they see on TV or the internet is that girls and boys are very beautiful and that makes them think they want to be like them. (Interview 17.07.2013)

But why do they value beauty and undergo even dramatic bodily transformations such as cosmetic surgery? Bora and Eun-ji were both very clear in their answers: "Appearance affects on your job interview," Bora said, and Eun-ji told me that "people

treat them differently and beauty is linked to the personal character." In this context, Eun-ji directed my attention to physiognomy *(gwansang),* an issue also addressed by Ruth Holliday and Joanna Elfving-Hwang (2012). Both Eun-ji and Bora confirmed that having the 'right face' could be of importance in everyday life.

Beauty, however, "is not everything," as Eun-ji commented. The female celebrity Bora told me about was "very smart and she has a degree from a well-known university." Inferring from the appearance about a person's character, the meaning that is communicated, was part of a historically developed system of semiotics. Eunji and Bora emphasised that the standards for an appropriate physical appearance were limited in their respective environments, and they felt restricted in their possibilities to act, to be. Although being a natural beauty who embodies the South Korean beauty ideals was valued over cosmetic surgery, the latter was a way to create meaning for the person undergoing it – it enabled control over one's own life. However, Eun-ji and Bora argued that beauty was more than physical appearance; it was also expressed in intellect and personal character, which might not be visible from appearance alone. They made ethical questions explicit in judging and critically evaluating the social consensus of an appropriate appearance.

7.2.4 Creating Meaning through Consumption

Bora also argued with her mother about her clothing style, but for different reasons than Eun-ji. "My mother and I have very different tastes," she stated. "I don't think her style is very nice and she doesn't think I'm fashionable. She used to say something about my style and what I wear although she doesn't do it anymore because I told her to stop it." Bora could not understand why they had to argue about clothing and "put our noses in other people's taste." Bora and one of her friends, however, had different preferences in taste as well, but would go shopping together without arguing. Rather than incorporating a specific meaning, the discussion between mother and daughter about their respective clothing styles resonates with what Daniel Miller (2001:111) called "wider obligation": both had to consider the effects their clothing styles had on each other.

The complexity of social relations that shopping embodied became also visible in *hyodo* (filial piety). Recall Huyn-ae's friend Sook, who talked about the difficulties to be a dutiful child in light of the financial aspects of getting married. Hyun-ae came to speak of *hyodo* when we were talking about her activities outside of work. "At the weekend, I do something with my family, my grand mum, or I go and watch Baseball with my father. I do this for my father's and my happiness," she explained.

> I thought that *hyodo* means to buy one's parents a present, like a new TV, or to give them money, but now I do something with them, we as a family together. We buy chicken and beer and go to watch a Baseball game, or we go together to a concert or hiking. My father is really excited, I and my mother are excited

and even my sister.… I think this is what *hyodo* means. It is doing something together. (Interview 24.10.2012)

At first, Hyun-ae interpreted filial piety as an individual act of providing her parents with commodities, or she would give them a certain amount of money so they could actively choose for themselves what and if to buy something. However, her desire to make her parents happy was not met through the provision of goods. Thus, her thoughts changed over the time she practised filial piety. She turned to consuming something *together* with them rather than buying them something, which she thought would better represent the "nuances" (Miller 2001:107) and values of their relationship. Her use of money as means of payment changed, and she would rather embed her money in the specific moments that she spent with her parents.

She experienced the sorrow of a friend whose father suddenly died, and she thought her parents were lonely when she was in China and Germany. Hyun-ae saw that the relationship with her parents would change in the future, may it be her getting married or moving out for another reason, or a sudden death of one of her parents. Finding the right balance between filial piety and her preferred weekend activities, however, was not easy. "To be honest, I too want to sleep in at the weekend or go and spend time with my friend." *Hyodo,* however, did not have to be an extraordinary activity. "Even a long walk with my parents or just watching a baseball game on TV is fine." She knew what the right activity to show filial piety was and through practice she developed into the pious daughter she wanted to be. "My parents are really happy about that and even speak about our activities with other people," she said and contrasted that "when I just bought them a TV, they just talked once or twice with other people about it and the topic was finished. Since we do something together, they continuously speak about it with others and that gives me really warm feelings." The parents acknowledged her behaviour as expressing filial piety and judged her participation and practices as valuable. Striving for the happiness of the family before the relationship could change, motivated her to practice filial piety and to become the ethical person she wanted to be.

7.3　Chapter Conclusion

The main characteristic attributed to South Korea's 'Spec Generation' is the collection of certificates and qualifications. In this chapter, I aimed to illustrate the complex meanings behind certificates, while I broadened the analytical scope to fashion – another consumer good important in the narratives of my research participants. Both certificates and fashion have a similar function: they sustain status systems because they are restricted and controlled in the ways people can obtain them. Thus, they create uniformity and order – uniform ways to acquire certificates, uniform ways to display certificates – and at the same time distinction – between those who can and

cannot obtain them. I wanted to know how my research participants perceived this uniformity, and how they defined, in contrast, diversity.

Dae-hyun and Mr. Jung discussed with me how certificates function as criteria for evaluating people. Discussing the example of job candidates, both explained that employers can deduce abilities and knowledge from certificates acquired by applicants. At the same time, they pointed to the inadequacy of this practice. Mr. Jung drew from his experiences as employer and emphasised that certificates were like cosmetics used by applicants to enhance their appearance, but, in practice, they did not meet their promise because two important qualities were missing: passion and an aim. Dae-hyun pointed to the inequalities the system generated. First, he emphasised the monetary aspect that restricted access to certificates. Money as means of payment made visible how, for example, opportunities to receive a qualitatively high language education differed. Second, he clarified that the consensus about the validity of certificates depended and changed in accordance with people's perception and evaluation of the activity behind the certificate.

Passion and an aim were combined in the volunteer work Hyun-ae did. My research participants critically evaluated the volunteer work students did as ethically wrong because it aimed at enhancing their CVs. By doing volunteer work in a community centre, Hyun-ae wanted to experience what she termed 'real society'. Aside from university, where she felt the possibilities to enhance her self were limited, the work with middle-school students enabled her to become familiar with people with diverse backgrounds, ages, and localities and their ideas about how to live. She gained confidence, self-esteem, and independence through her work. Hyun-ae's account shows that commitment and passion are properties of certificates and that they invite to take on new projects.

Ha-yun and my research assistant Seon-ae pointed to the structure and cultural creation of certificates and complemented to Dae-hyun's narrative by pointing to job applications. Although Seon-ae was very critical when judging the behaviour of her fellow students, at the same time her decisions illustrate how certificates can function as orientation.

Fashion functions in the same way, yet it is taste that is restricted to sustain status systems. In the context my research participants lived in, what was appropriate to wear and appropriate to look like depended on the judgement of others. That is, taste was expressed and restricted through gossiping. My research participants were critical of this system and made ethical questions explicit as they judged and evaluated these practices as wrong. They used the room gossiping left to find their own clothing styles. However, they rarely attempted to break out of that room. At the same time, their narratives illustrate that shopping is anything but a hedonistic activity. Rather, their differentiated and thoughtful use of money as means of payment in these practices shows the social and active character of consumption. Ahri pointed to the professionalism clothes can express and what kind of different social interactions arose when wearing a fine dress compared to a humble one. Although she was not a real shopper, clothes and appearance were an important part in her self-care,

and Bora emphasised the material fabrication of clothes as equally significant in her considerations. She and Eun-ji talked especially about the restrictions of clothing styles and appearances, which they attributed to cultural notions developed during the time of rapid industrialisation: a sense of belonging and standards of beauty. At the same time, they found the room to express their difference through turning to Japanese clothing styles and, partly, Emo.

In particular, Hyun-ae expressed the social aspect of consumption in the form of wider obligations. She told me about how she could improve the relationship with her parents through practices of consumption, using money as means of payment not to buy something for her parents, but to purchase things that they could consume together as a family. My research participants' narratives show how reflective thoughts, feelings of responsibility, the awareness of consequences and possibilities characterise the act of consumption.

Certificates and fashion create uniformity through business practices, institutional practices, social practices such as gossiping, and cultural practices such as South Korean beauty ideals. However, my research participants used the available room these cultural and social understandings left to generate practices they considered as meaningful and thus, illustrated diversity through variations of use. Anticipation through consumption meant not only preparing for good employment, but experiencing 'real life,' gaining practical experience, and developing good relationships with one's social matrix. Self-formation, engaging in a mode of life, and questioning and judging about right and wrong practices were ethical matters that provided orientation, drew on passion, and invited engagement in new projects expressed in the concrete performance of consuming certificates and fashion to anticipate diverse futures.

8   Hoping for Good Work

The employment situation of young South Koreans is one of the most critically discussed issues in the academic and public sphere. In these narratives, the Asian Financial Crisis 1997/98 was the turning point from a Fordist working environment – stable and life-long employment – to a precarious post-Fordist working environment where part-time, temporary or contract employment prevails (see Song 2009). Diverse terms emerged to characterise these working conditions, especially among young people (see Cho 2018). These include '880,000 Won Generation,' which refers to the fact that young people work in insecure employment conditions earning only the minimum wage of 880,000 Won, and 'Spec Generation,' which emphasises the efforts of young people to find decent employment.

In contrast, I have emphasised, following Ji-Whan Yun (2010), that the structural imbalance of South Korea's corporate landscape contributes significantly to the segmentation of the labour force (sub-chapter 4.1). Yun (2010) stresses that these conditions not only present difficulties to young job seekers but also to elder people driven into marginal employment. My research participants emphasised these aspects as well.

In my interview with Min-hee, she clarified that the term '880,000 Won Generation' was inappropriate to use for young people only.

> People working in a social company or in a research centre at a university, or, like my sister, start to work in a fashion company earn the exact amount of 880,000 Won, but there are also people who earn much more. Nevertheless, in the generations above, there are many people who just earn 880,000 Won. The elderly women working in restaurants for example, but they are not called '880,000 Won Generation'. (Interview 08.12.2012)

She wondered if the term 'generation' could properly and effectively describe the problem of people earning the minimum wage and further stressed that it was now the youth of South Korea's middle classes who could not live from their earnings.

When I asked Cho-hee about what she thought of the term '880,000 Won Generation,' she said it was pitiful [*antakkapta*].

"Before I started to work, I thought that there are not enough jobs for all people and that is why some have to work for 880,000 Won. After I started to work, however, I learned that there are a lot of possible occupational ways to go," she said. "If you think you must enter a big company [*daegieob*], then of course, your possibilities are limited." She explained that companies would recruit young people without work experiences as intern and that the usual payment for an intern was 880,000 Won or 1,200,000 Won. "If you enter a small company [*jageun gieop*] first, gain experience and then change the position to a big company, then the '880,000 Won Generation' would not exist. That's what I think," she emphasised.

Cho (2018) emphasises that the term '880,000 Won Generation,' which was invented by Woo and Park (2007), increased concerns about the employment situation of young people in public discourses. Yet, my research participants saw the term very critically. Min-hee and Cho-hee raised several issues when discussing the term '880,000 Won Generation'. First, precarious working conditions characterised certain fields of work but not others; second, people experienced precarity differently; and third, it was also a gendered problematic. Social scientists attend to these different dimensions and the complexity behind the term 'precarity' as well. Anthropologist Corinne Schwaller (2017), for example, asks "who do we look at when we think about precarity?" And the social scientists Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter (2008:64) state that "[p]recarity […] becomes an experience from which differential capacities and regimes of value emerge." They argue that Fordism, associated with stable and full-time employment, is rather the exception than the norm, especially, but not exclusively, for women.[93]

In this last ethnographic chapter, I concentrate on narratives about work. I attend to the different values my research participants expressed about their work experi-

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[93] The EAPS (Economically Active Population Survey) that collected data about the employment status of South Korea's population since 1998 states that although the employment rate of male workers paralleled the OECD average, women's employment status remained 4% below the OECD average in 2005 (Grubb, Lee and Tergeist 2007:12). Yet, women made up the largest group of workers in temporary employment (33%) (Grubb, Lee and Tergeist 2007:21).

ences, their judgement about work and their striving for excellence in their respective professions, making ethics explicit, and the use of money as means of payment in their working contexts. I will look especially at the experiences of women in their employment situations, to answer Schwaller's (2017) question. However, I do not take precarity as given. Rather, I will present narratives from two different perspectives: first, I elaborate on white-collar office work through the narratives of Hyun-ae and Sook, as well as statements by Cho-hee. In the second section, I present narratives of three young working women who were either non-regular workers or self-employed.

I want to elaborate on how my female research participants experienced their employment situations, what values they emphasised in regard to their workplace and how they defined good work and hoped for it. I suggest that good work includes characteristics that exceed the simple realisation of a long-term and full-time contract and rather centres on possibilities to form good social relationships, personal development, and work-life balance.

8.1 Being an Office Worker

Gag Concert, a South Korean comedy show broadcasting since 1999 on KBS2, includes a parody of white-collar office work using the Beatles Song *Let it be*. Four comedians, (three male and one female) dressed in formal suits, play three subordinates and their chief executive. To the melody of *Let it be*, they sing and re-enact situations at their office such as an injustice they felt because of the actions of their CEO. These situations range from him handing down work he was required to do, thus hindering them from finishing their own work on time, or depriving them of free evenings or even weekends by announcing social drinking or social activities.[94] All performances finish with the same suggestion: "Everyone, hang in there. Everyone, smile. Even if you are tired or down, smile. [*Yeoreobun himnaeseyo. Yeoreobun useoyo. Himdeulgo jichyeodo useoyo.*]" Thus they suggest to the audience, who is very familiar and can identify with the situations presented, to relax and not to worry, just let it happen and concentrate on positive things.

In their parody, Gag Concert addresses the atmosphere between workers, their duties and responsibilities as well as the difficulties in form of increasing workload or obstacles to finish the workday at time. Hyun-ae and Sook, both white-collar workers, were examples of employees who felt the injustice and dissatisfaction with office work regarding place, time and workload portrayed in the parody. By contrast, Cho-hee, also a white-collar worker, had been able to develop an attitude towards her job

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[94] The episode from 27th of June 2015 for example addresses how the CEO justifies the transfer of his work to his employees as training and experience, see KBSWorld TV (30 June 2015): Let it Be (Gag Concert / 2015.06.27), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHHpDGmHcj4, accessed 19 January 2021).

close to that advised by Gag Concert. However, she knew her skills and potentials and set her boundaries when to 'hang in' or not.

In the next section, I elaborate on narratives about office work that address matters of place, time, and workload which illustrate these women's hopes of finding what they called 'a normal job'.

8.1.1 Searching for a Normal Job

I conducted a long interview with Hyun-ae and her friend Sook and addressed their experiences of the difficult relationship between getting married and finding employment (see sub-chapter 6.2.1). In what follows, I delve further into their narratives about workload, hours of work, and workplace, all important issues for them.

Sook had various jobs after graduating from university. She had worked as a white-collar office worker in a research centre in a company producing seeds. The research centre, however, was not located in Seoul but in the province *(jibang),* which presented a problem for her and Hyun-ae. "Unfortunately, there are no jobs in Seoul, only in the province. But nobody wants to go there. When you want to buy bread, you must drive for 30 minutes. There are no coffee shops or cinemas," Hyun-ae stated. She asked me rhetorically, "Would you want to go there?" Sook, however, forwarded to me the job opportunities that existed in the countryside. "There are opportunities to work in the province but..." she began.

"So that is why you resigned?" I asked.

"There is no culture," Hyun-ae answered on her friend's account.

In Hyun-ae's narrative, culture referred to film and theatre, but included also coffee shops, bakeries, and restaurants serving international menus. Hyun-ae and Sook were dissatisfied with the opportunities for recreation outside work that existed in the province, although they acknowledged the possibilities of jobs there. The felt and real absence of facilities they were used to go to in Seoul deterred them from taking on these jobs or made them quit.

The next company Sook worked in was located in the district of Gangnam in Seoul. The problematic aspect of this job was that she had to go on regular business trips near Busan. It was a full-time job as teacher for adults and she had to travel to a factory of one of South Korea's conglomerates. Together with her colleagues, her job was to educate the approximately thousand employees, almost all blue-collar workers, on how to develop a "positive mind," as Hyun-ae described it.

"This conglomerate arranged a programme for its manual labour force and made a contract with my company for sending teachers introducing employees to concepts such as how to grow the ability to communicate," Sook described. She did the job for three months and then resigned. "It was very stressful. It took two hours by car to go there and another two to come back to Seoul. Often, I could not sleep at home, and the salary was small." Compared to her job in the seed company, this teaching job included a smaller salary and required two-hour journeys from Seoul to Busan and

back. But like the other job, it was not the work itself which presented difficulties for her but rather external factors such as city's design or the commute.

Sook found her situation very problematic, and as I said before, she was desperately searching for a new job. "I need the money, but I don't have many chances. I had interviews, but the salaries offered were small." She paused and added, "Nevertheless, I said that I am ok with a small payment. I assured them that I can do the work, but the job interviewer wondered how I could be satisfied with much lesser money than I earned in jobs before."

Hyun-ae emphasised the problem of employment possibilities when clarifying that: "She had worked before and earned much money, but now she is unemployed. She knows that she cannot earn the same amount, but it is ok for her. She does not want to earn 10,000 Euro." Hyun-ae clarified that a salary of 1,000 Euros per month, even 700–800 Euros would be fine. However, both emphasised that small companies would not give her a chance.

"It is a pity," Hyun-ae said. "She has a high-level education, she went to a university, not a training school. […] she can speak Chinese and she can speak English. Besides, she has a working career because she had part-time jobs." I was confused about the remark both made because just a minute before Sook had mentioned that she resigned the job as trainer not only because of the business trips but also because of the small pay.

As she went on to recount her experiences and attempts to find employment, the contradiction of her wants and choices became ever more obvious and I asked her what she wanted a good company and a good job to be like. The first characteristic both emphasised was the possibility to get a bank loan. "When you work in a good company, it is easy to get a loan; when you work in a company below standards, you cannot get a loan," Hyun-ae explained and referred to conglomerates as well as international companies as good companies. Hyun-ae was working at a big company of this kind but expressed her dissatisfaction with that work while we were both meeting for a coffee a few days earlier.

I was surprised to hear the argument above and stated, "But you are working in a big company."

Hyun-ae answered: "Yes, that is why I am working there, the company can give me a guarantee. If I would not work there, I could not borrow any money from the bank […] concerning the guarantee, my company really is good." A loan was necessary to marry or buy an apartment, and the chance to receive a bank loan through the guarantee of the company was an important subject for Hyun-ae and Sook to evaluate a company as good.

Both returned to the problematic of finding a job at a conglomerate in the first place "It is really complicated. Compared to small and medium-sized companies, there are even less possibilities to work there. They are doing everything by themselves," Hyun-ae noted, adding, "Samsung makes its own smart phones and necessities for a living. They have their own insurance and their own finance office to grant

credits." Sook commented that this is the very reason why small companies cannot survive in the South Korean economy. Not working in a conglomerate, however, was socially debated because it was a necessary middle-class status symbol and was regarded as the next step of success after graduating from a top-tier university. "If you do not work in a big company, then you are a loser [*lujeo*]," Hyun-ae explained.

"But it is very difficult to get a job there because they don't pull many people, maybe 10%?" Sook asked Hyun-ae. But Hyun-ae was still concerned with the term loser: "The society calls people losers. South Korean people call them losers and this is really bad talk." Hyun-ae and Sook evaluated the social judgement about people who could not acquire this middle-class standard as ethically wrong.

"What is a normal job for you?" I asked them.

"A normal job [*jap*] means no stress. For example, I have to search or gather something in an office room, but without people annoying me. It is only the normal stress of work that I would feel. And of course, the salary should be normal," Hyun-ae said. Sook added, "Normal time is important too, from nine to six or eight to five. In South Korea, we have to do a lot of overwork. Although the working hours are regulated in the contract paper, you never finish at that time." Both drew attention to the hours of unpaid overtime. "There is a lot of overtime and when you get home it is already nine or ten. You take a shower, drink a coffee, eat dinner and it is eleven. You read a book and it is twelve when you sleep," Hyun-ae explained and added, "the next day in the morning, you get up and go to work. You don't have any private time."

I asked both what they do and would do in their private time.

"Go on a date with friends, drink a coffee together or go to the movies," Hyun-ae said with a smile.

"Nevertheless, it is difficult to meet friends in everyday life. When I was in school, I met my friends very often, but after we graduated it became nearly impossible," Sook said. And Hyun-ae gave an example: "Let's say you and I have a date with two other friends. We would meet on time, but you, Caro, would have not yet arrived. If I would call you and asked where you are, you would answer that you have to work overtime, and you don't know when you will finish."

Concerning work itself, Hyun-ae and Sook evaluated a balance between working hours and leisure time as an important aspect of good work, and the possibility to undertake leisure activities close to the workplace was a decisive criterion in their assessment of their work. Seoul, together with the capital region the economic centre of South Korea, is imagined as global, creative, and first-class city with new emerging fields of work (see sub-chapter 4.3). Hyun-ae and Sook's narratives illustrate the uneven relationship between the city and the provinces regarding opportunities for work and leisure.

The place of work and the conditions at work were not the only issues that mattered for Hyun-ae and Sook. In the next section, I will attend to a job which seemed to embody the qualities Hyun-ae and Sook associated with good employment: employment as government official.

8.1.2 A Normal Job

In sub-chapter 5.2.3, I introduced Gyeong and her preparation for the civil service examination to become a Certified Public Accountant – a result of her being educated at a university campus outside of Seoul – and Lim, who prepared for the examination to enter regular government service. Both were preparing for jobs as government official, a job Hyun-ae and Sook were critical about. "When I take the subway in the morning to work, there are the people wearing track suits, baseball caps and glasses. These young people are going to Noryangjin Station to prepare for their *gosi* at a private school located there," Hyun-ae explained. "It is totally useless to prepare for that test." Sook added: "When you do not pass the test, you cannot go somewhere else to work."

Hyun-ae directly asked me what I would think of a man who is 34 years old and still preparing for a test. "They are old, about 29, 30 or 34 years old and they don't earn any money, they just study. You know there is a joke about Noryangjin Station: there is no sunshine." The joke referred to students studying inside all day long.

"I have a friend," Hyun-ae added, "who, instead of going to a university, prepared for *gosi* after she finished high school. I asked her 'is it an interesting work?' and she answered 'no, it is not'." Hyun-ae went on with the dialogue: "'So, why do you do it?' I asked her. 'Because it is a safe and regular work,' she answered."

She told Hyun-ae about her regular working hours from 9am to 6pm or 9am to 5pm without having to work overtime or at the weekend. "I asked her about her work duties and she explained that she copies papers, is sitting on her task and surfs in the internet and if somebody wants something then she is doing it, but usually their co-workers don't ask anything," Hyun-ae illustrated her friend's tasks with expressive mimic and gestures. "You know, her mind is narrowing down," she clarified." She is a beautiful woman in her mid-twenties, but does not put any make-up on, there is no need for that. She just married. And she just lives [*Geunjang gyeolhon haesseo. Geurigo geunjang sara*]."

"The thing is that many young people want to become a government official," Sook explained.

"Why do they want to?" I asked.

"Because of the regular pay, regular working hours and the welfare," Hyun-ae described the advantages to me. "You know, especially women want to work as government officials because the workplaces in the free economy don't have that good welfare systems. You can take a paternal leave of absence for one year without problems." Hyun-ae's friend added that the government would be a 100% guarantor for banks, which allowed government officials to easily apply for a bank loan. Nevertheless, both differentiated between white-collar workers and government officials. Police officers or firefighters, for example, were considered blue-collar workers with bad working conditions, although they worked for the government and did the *gosi*.

I wondered about both using the term 'regular' and asked them about the difference between a job as government official and their wish for a 'normal' job. "Well, they are very lucky people because they will get a pension," Sook explained.

"However, it is a waste of time," Hyun-ae clarified. "They have no dreams that is why they want to become a government official," Sook said and Hyun-ae added, "When we were in middle school, we had dreams about becoming a researcher or trader or nurse, but now, students in middle school want to become government officials. They don't have any dreams anymore."

In this context, the term *geunjang* means "just, simply, not more than." Even though it seemed to me that the work as a government official conformed with the criteria Hyun-ae and Sook attributed to a good job, it did not satisfy their expectation and imagination of a work they liked. Thus, good work not only included rough criteria such as time, place and benefits. A satisfying job involved sophisticated tasks, activated skills and knowledge, and invited new challenges. Furthermore, it needed to fit personal aspirations and respective interests. Finally, it invited projects involving one's own body, such as putting on make-up or wearing specific clothes.

8.1.3 Possible Normal Jobs

I met Cho-hee for the first time while I was doing the Korean language course at Ewha Womans University. Cho-hee was searching for a native German speaker to prepare her job interview at Lufthansa. We started to meet on a regular basis in Apgujeong to practice German. When I returned to Seoul for my fieldwork in 2012, she was one of the people I contacted immediately for an interview.

Cho-hee's working career started early: "When I turned 20, I really wanted to work so I started to do student jobs [*areubaiteu*]. I started to work as a tutor for middle school students; worked at a steakhouse and in a coffee shop and I taught English at cram schools [*hagwon*]." She thought she had to go to university like all other young people, but she was not very enthusiastic about it. She found her courses in the first and second year not to be exciting and she did not understand why she had to study them. Thus, she was absent most of the times. In her third year, she got bad grades, worried about her graduation and finally started to study. In her fourth year at university, she understood why she had to study the different subjects and how she could use them; the courses became interesting. "I studied five and a half year at university because I did a study abroad for one year. I wanted to learn English and studied two to three months at an Institute," she explained and added, "after that, I did volunteer work and travelled to see the country, and I did yoga." Furthermore, she did a certificate, which allowed her to teach Business English at a high school for students doing their vocational diploma.

After she had finished all her courses for graduation, she decided to apply for the job at Lufthansa. However, she did not manage to get the job because she underestimated the difficulty of the application process. She sent her next job application to the embassy of Thailand. This time, she participated in a course with six other job

seekers to prepare herself for the application process and the interviews. However, because she did not apply for a national company, she did not undertake all the training steps. Although she failed in the final round of the application process, she felt no stress and applied for another position in an international company, where she finally was accepted. There, she started to work as intern before she was promoted to the public relations department and was offered a permanent position. Her plans, however, were different:

> I started to work as intern. One of the team members took a maternity leave for nine months, so I filled her position. You know that the world economy is not good at the moment. The company discharged elder people and I could enter. I was lucky that they quickly changed my contract from an intern to a full-time one. My plan, however, was to work there only one year, because I entered as an intern. […] If I would have liked my superiors, if I would have liked my boss, then I would probably have stayed till next year. It would have been good for my career, but I had no freedom [*jayu*] and power to decide [*gyeoljeonggwon*]. (Interview 02.11.2012)

The day before we met for our interview, she had just resigned and was planning her trip abroad.

Cho-hee's anticipation to work in an international environment ran like a thread through her career path. I refer to companies as international companies when the headquarters are located outside of South Korea, in the case of Cho-hee's company in the USA. Cho-hee worked in a subsidiary office located in Seoul. Hyun-ae also worked for an international company while Eun-ji told me that she would prefer to work in an international company. A different work culture and better social benefits were reasons for some of my research participants to anticipate and hope for a job in an international company. Cho-hee, however, did not apply to South Korean companies because she wanted to work with people from other countries. Nevertheless, she experienced a lack of freedom and decision-making power in her company and quit.

Lunchtime was an example of what she meant by freedom, "I had no freedom during lunchtime. All the members of the team had to eat together," she said. "If I would eat alone, like bring a lunch box with me, the manager would say something like 'we lead a corporate life [*danche saenghwal*] which means that we eat together, why do you want to eat alone?'" She brought her own lunch one or two times a week, which was acceptable. "That would not have been possible every day. We would go together to the restaurant, eat together and leave together – I thought that I have no freedom." Cho-hee further described that she felt a lot of pressure from this manager and a lot of her strength went into some demanding circumstances she encountered, whereas she emphasised that the work itself was interesting.

Compared to Hyun-ae and her friend, Cho-hee spoke about her work and the way she quit it with an air of calm. I met her for our second interview after I had

spoken to Hyun-ae and Sook. I told Cho-hee about the atmosphere of this interview, and I compared the calmness with which she narrated her stories with the anger Hyun-ae and Sook expressed about their work. When I described my other interview to her, Cho-hee laughed and said, "Well, it is my character. My friends, they have hard times too. They worry a lot. They prepare for job interviews, but I am, well, it is my character. Everything will turn out all right." She could, however, understand Hyun-ae and Sook's position. Cho-hee's friends did not speak about when their jobs or job searches became stressful and tiring. "One's pride can be hurt and so one does not ask. If a friend has problems to find a job, then one just asks 'how are you?' but does not ask further about details because it can be stressful."

Cho-hee was Catholic and had educated herself to become a Godmother, although she was not a regular churchgoer at the beginning.

"Was there a reason why you decided to join the Catholic Church?" I asked her.

"Yes, for me there was a reason. I worried a lot in the past and was very anxious," she paused and added, "I worried about everything. I would ask myself 'if I get sick, what should I do? If I will not pass the test, what will I do? If it would not turn out good, what should I do [*eotteokaji*]?'."

After she chose to become a member of the Catholic Church, she began to feel more at ease with herself. "What changed?" I asked her.

"Well, I do not worry any more. My thoughts changed to positive ones. I feel at ease with my heart [*maeumi pyeonanhae*]," she answered.

"Why did you choose the Catholic Church?" I wanted to know.

"It was a book about Christianity. I do not know, but it took around one to two years for me to change. It was not a sudden moment. The book said that every person is precious, that everybody has a talent. I wanted to use and exercise the book's sayings very well and thus, I got at ease with myself." In the same vein, she explained to me what she thought of reasons of complaining about work.

"If you say the name of a big company like Samsung, LG or CJ everybody wants to go there. Everybody. Because women think they can make a good catch to marry... And the welfare is good. You get a customer card and receive discounts when buying in-house products," she said. "Then, the benefits are good, and you earn more money compared to small or medium-sized companies." She confirmed Hyun-ae and Sook's narratives about why they would rather work in a conglomerate.

"Another reason everybody wants to work there is that parents like it. When parents' friends ask, 'What does your daughter do?' and they have to answer that she is still unemployed, searching for a job or something like that, it casts a damning light on them," Cho-hee explained. "Parents are prouder to answer that their son or daughter is working in a conglomerate." Cho-hee herself was rather critical about this standard and referred to it as 'showing off.' "Do you know the term middle class [*jungsancheung*]?" she asked and I nodded. "They live by common standards [*wenmankeum pyeongbeomhage sandaneun gijun*]: How much square metre has your home? How much money do you earn? What handbag are you wearing? What

mobile phone are you using?" she exemplified what these standards were and how people would inquire about other people's living conditions.

Cho-hee judged the requirement to attend one of South Korea's top-tier universities as equally hindering and continued to apply her critical evaluation of people's behaviour to work, where she pointed again to the purpose behind people's action and emphasised that the right aim to enter a conglomerate should be to get to know one's skills, abilities and interests.

> There are many ways even though you do not go to a prestigious university. You can go to a foreign language university for example. Finding a job will become much better. [...] You know that one must try the work [*Ireun haebwaya haneun geojanayo*]. It is about finding one's aptitude [*jeokseong*]. It is not like they want to try an occupation [*jigeopboneunge anira*] in a good company [*joeun gieobe*], it is just the name of the company they want. I don't know it exactly, but it seems to be so. Is it because you can show something? When you just enter a firm [*hoesa*] because of the firm then you will all the more complain. Instead, you have to try to get to know your speciality [*jeongong*]. (Interview 03.12.2012)

I asked her about a normal job and told her again about Hyun-ae and Sook. "At the moment it doesn't matter if you are in a big or small company, every job is stressful. That is a private matter. It is not like you do your job good and then you will receive no stress," she answered. "You are working with other people and that is stressful. When I am the lowest worker I have to adjust to everybody and everything," she clarified and added, "I want to do it this way, but the other person tells me that I have to do it another way and I have no choice but to obey. That is annoying. So, you naturally receive stress." Her solution to the problem resembled the advice given by Gag Concert: "If you would think it is fine and be thankful for the experience you make, then you would probably receive less stress."

Cho-hee originally planned to do the internship and then go abroad again. She did not expect to get promoted and would have stayed in the company until her contract ended but quit to follow her original plan, since she had had a tense relationship with her superior and found the lack of power too burdensome. Resigning from work was another way to handle stress.

"Why do you want to go abroad?" I asked her.

"It is just like I wanted to go continuously. I stayed only 8 months abroad. Repeatedly, I thought about to go again for a longer period. I want to stay for three to four years and bring my English to perfection," she said. "Later in my thirties it will become difficult to go. So, I want to go now as long as I am young and experience a free life. When I marry and have a child, I cannot go, so I want to go before I have a husband," she explained laughing. "As long as my mother is healthy and as long as I am healthy I have to go."

Cho-hee foregrounded accounts of freedom and talked about talent and skill. Unlike Hyun-ae and Sook, she did not narrate with frustration or anger but rather emphasised the possibilities and diverse opportunities young people have. She herself had become more at ease with her worries by applying the advice of the Christian book she had read.

I arranged the narratives of Hyun-ae, Sook and Cho-hee in this order to illustrate how these three women carefully and thoroughly thought about the characteristics of a 'normal job'.

One important characteristic was the balance between work and life. Hyun-ae and Sook mentioned the difference between the city Seoul and the non-metropolitan areas. Seoul, imagined as economic centre and global node (see sub-chapter 4.3), also offered the opportunity to participate in diverse leisure activities. The lack of such possibilities was a criterion to exclude the non-metropolitan area as place to work. At the same time, work-life balance became an issue for Hyun-ae and Sook when we discussed workload and overtime. In this context, they stressed the importance of having a workload that allowed them to enjoy their evenings with friends and family, or otherwise be compensated for the overtime they did. Appropriate monetary compensation for one's efforts was yet another significant theme in their narratives. Money as means of payment in form of a monthly salary or as remuneration for overtime needed to be in balance with the work performance. Finally, all three women emphasised the necessity of a balance between demanding work circumstances and the freedom to be on their own. Thus, besides issues of workplace, worktime and workload, the social relations with their respective co-workers or superiors, and the social notions of a corporate identity influenced their evaluation of a 'normal job'. Ethical questions became explicit when these criteria were out of balance. Accusations were made, injustices felt, and unfairness sensed when the workload exceeded the payment, or when social relations became too demanding. They attributed worth to their skills, knowledge and selves, and they negatively judged not only their job but also their social matrices when they experienced a lack of respect or unreasonable behaviour. These evaluations, however, were directed not only towards their employers or co-workers, but also to their peers.

8.2 Becoming a Professional

I met other women who were employed in fields other than the white-collar work Cho-hee, Hyun-ae and Sook did. These jobs can either be described as non-regular or self employment. The OECD uses a broad definition of temporary employment to ensure comparability between the OECD members. "Under the OECD definition […] temporary jobs are those forms of dependent employment which, by their nature, do not provide the prospect of a long-lasting employment relationship" (Grubb, Lee and Tergeist 2007:16). The EAPS (Economically Active Population Survey) defines regular workers as those who "work more than one year at a firm,

thus benefiting from the retirement allowance […] are paid standard wages, plus bonuses and overtime" (Grubb, Lee and Tergeist 2007:15). Non-regular workers, by contrast, are defined as employees who work in conditions of "low wages, precarious employment, large gaps between social insurance coverage and a near total absence of worker representatives" (Grubb, Lee and Tergeist 2007:1). The OECD points especially to the gap between large enterprises and small and medium-sized companies concerning productivity, and the segmentation of the labour market this gap produces (see for example the OECD Economic Surveys Korea 2018). Whereas only 13.6% of South Korean workers were employed in large enterprises, 41.3% worked in micro firms. Following the definition of the EAPS, the latter are non-regular workers due to their exclusion from benefits or retirement benefits, but they otherwise have, according to this definition, a stable job (Grubb, Lee and Tergeist 2007:16).

This paradoxical combination of stability and precarity was felt in one form or another by my research participants. Sora, who worked in marketing, and Jin-kyong, a lawyer, were both non-regular workers who nevertheless emphasised the stability of their jobs. Ye-eun, a self-employed young woman who owned her own business, was yet another case where stability was not associated with benefits but rather with the job itself and the tasks performed. These three women all emphasised skill and competence in our interviews. Ahri talked about young women aspiring to become professionals (see sub-chapter 7.2.2) and emphasised that competence, knowledge and expertise, but also appearance and bodily comfort, characterise professionalism. In the following, I elaborate how Ye-eun, Sora and Jin-kyong conceptualised professionalism and illustrate how specific working conditions not only characterised good work, but also invited them to take on new projects and to form their selves.

8.2.1 The Silversmith

Let me start with a woman who did not follow the usual education path from university to a company but who instead liked to work with her hands, as she told me: Ye-eun, the silversmith.

I met her at a small market near Gyongbukung Palace where she sold her silver products. I bought a ring and we talked a little. She gave me her business card, which I kept for a while in my wallet. After I had interviewed some young working people, I decided to contact her through the number on her business card. We agreed to meet in her workshop, located near the famous Hongdae area. I found my way through narrow crooked streets to her small workshop, which she shared with another jeweller. Ye-eun had wanted to open her workshop in Hongdae but had to move to an area nearby where the rent was cheaper. This area was also becoming famous, as Ye-eun illustrated using the number of coffee shops as an index of popularity: only one coffee shop had existed in the area when she had moved there, but more and more were opening up.

Entering her workshop, I found myself in a room full of different tools necessary for crafting jewellery and other ornaments. Gems, stones, and glass in all possible

colours, as well as precious metals, were scattered on her workplace, which was covered with a fine dry layer of dust from cuttings. The room itself was just big enough for two workplaces and an additional table and chair for visitors. Samples of work were displayed on the walls, as well as in the window to attract passers by.

"Please tell me about your life as you have lived it so far," I asked her at the start of our interview.

"Well, I went to high school and after it, I did not enter a university but did a training at a private educational institute [*hagwon*] and worked right after finishing my training." She told me that her friends went to study at a university, but her parents never forced her to study there, although she confirmed that it was the usual path for young South Koreans. She gave me the following account why she did not go: "Since I was a little child I liked things handmade. That is why I went to a private educational institute [*hagwon*] for one year. […]. You learn a lot there, but the training centres on sending you right to work. You don't learn much about theoretical things." People who study at a university are considered experts in their specific field – not like those who study at a *hagwon* and work in a technical post *(gisuljige ilhaneun saram).* Nevertheless, there were people, she said, who considered a university degree as unnecessary in the field of craft. In any case, she explained, artisans, technicians, craftsmen and craftswomen experienced lower social appreciation. Furthermore, she emphasised that it was very unusual for women to work in the field of handcraft; most would rather enter a company.

I asked her why she chose the craft. She replied that first, she became curious about silversmithing and started to practice it as a hobby. After attending the *hagwon,* she worked in a handicraft factory for four years before she could open her own workshop. She worked to gain practical experience and to save money for her own business. However, she also emphasised that there were not many books or magazines in South Korea about this handcraft. Thus, she turned to magazines from overseas to improve her skills. "I had the dream of becoming a skilled [*sillyeok joeun*] silversmith, but I did it year by year and then I could open my own workshop." First, she started to sell her silver art only at markets. After some time, she had saved enough money to open her workshop. She sometimes invited people she met at the markets, like me, back to her workshop. If they liked her jewellery, they could commission a special piece. "This is not a shop for merchandising. When you come here, you want a customised piece […]. Like you don't go anywhere to let your expensive trumpet or horn repair. You go to a specialist. I like my occupation [*jigeop*] very much."

I asked her how she built up her shop and if there was any government support for small entrepreneurs like herself. "I built it step by step. When I had some ten thousand Won, I bought the machinery. I furnished the shop bit by bit and bought this chair and then that table. You know I have to do everything by myself, I get no help from my parents," she explained. Concerning government support, she clarified that,

if the income is small then the tax due is also small, but I did not receive any benefit from the government yet. Self-employed small business owners have to do everything by themselves and they have to put a lot of work in even small things. The rent for every month or money like that is a burden. The earning is irregular and so anxiety rises. Furthermore, the financial resources are always a problem. You have to decide everything by yourself and the burden to do so presses on your heart [*Budamgami neul maeumsoge inneun geon gatayo*]. (Interview 20.06.2013)

The heart, the culturally prescribed place of feelings (cf. Harkness 2014), was where Ye-eun felt the weight of being self-employed. However, she was very satisfied with her work. She could choose her customers and schedule her work independently. Thus, she earned good money.

South Korea's self-employment rate of 25.5% in 2016 ranks sixth among OECD countries.[95] Of the people I interviewed, Ye-eun was an exceptional case in two ways: she was the only research participant who wanted to work as a craftswoman, and she was the only one who not only wanted, but also managed to, open her own small business. Self-employment was very demanding. As she emphasised, she not only had to decide everything by herself, she also had to make sure that she earned enough to sustain both her business and herself. She had already moved to an area where the rent was less expensive than in Hongdae, and she had to travel to every flea market in Seoul to sell her items and find new and, even more important, regular customers. Thus, money became an important means in the form of capital, which allowed her to pay for necessary materials, tools and working space, and as means to allow her customers to buy her products which sustained her business.

Although crafts were a key characteristic of the creative city that Seoul aspired to become (see sub-chapter 4.3), the narratives of Ye-eun make visible the uneven support and development of this economic sector.

8.2.2 The Marketing Artist

Sora had been interested in books since her time as a high school student; yet, her first priority during these years had been to enrol in a university in Seoul (sub-chapter 5.1.1). She achieved this aim through *suneung* but had to develop what she termed 'a sense of independence' [*jaribsim*], or 'a spirit of independence' [*dongnipsim*] to adjust to her new living conditions in Seoul. In this context, she could develop new aspirations, and she remembered the enjoyment and pleasure she had had with books. Because she had not achieved the required test results to study a subject related to book marketing or publishing, she decided to do social sciences and collect the needed 'Spec' outside the university.

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[95] OECD: https://data.oecd.org/chart/6mo2 (19 January 2021).

It was not easy, but I did a lot of volunteer work in the arts centre near my flat during the semester break and could do a two-month course in book marketing and I worked at book festivals. I made the best of my situation and hoped that employers would appreciate the work experience. Now I have a job that I like very much. (Interview 06.07.2013)

Before Sora found work that she enjoyed, she undertook a journey of different jobs. The experiences she gained in these different jobs made her reflect on what a good job meant for her.

She found her first salaried job while still a university student. "I worked in the administrative office at my university for eight months," she said. "As you know, the character of a university is really conservative, and I started to imagine what it would be like to work in the creative field of the book industry." She told me that she valued creativity and the development of new ideas and projects and that she needed to work in such an environment. After graduation, she quickly found a job in the field of book marketing. "Marketing is a job where you have to use your body. That is why many students avoid this type of job. Therefore, I had no problems and quickly started to work in a company," she explained. "I gained a lot of confidence in and also acknowledgement for my skills." Nevertheless, her first job was very stressful and the working environment comparable to the conservative conditions she experienced in the university administration office. "You know marketing is a job that you learn while doing. It is difficult when you have to do work that you do not know. Furthermore, I had to work a lot overtime. It is a work that has no end." Her official work hours were 10 am to 7pm, but she usually worked until 8 or 9 pm – and when new books were released she even had to do all-nighters. "My health got really bad and my family and friends seriously started to worry about me which put me under additional stress. The pay was not high as well, so I decided to rest for a little while and quit the job after not more than a year," she told me.

Sora critically reflected on and evaluated her work. Although it was the occupation she had aspired to, she felt an imbalance between workload, salary and her physical condition and left the company.

"What did you do next?" I asked.

"Well, I found another job with a higher salary and better working conditions," she answered, "but it was not the work I wanted to do." At her second workplace, she was responsible for the web presence of various companies and had to design a clinic's website. She was recommended to the company, which led to conflicts with the long-standing colleagues. "It was the first time for the company to hire a new employee this way. Usually, they would look at the application forms and do interviews," she explained and illustrated her experience that resulted from this hiring process. "I felt their gossip behind my back [*ttagaun nunchori*]. As I did not do my job very good, the female co-workers did not like me very much."

Over time, she seriously started to wonder why she was working in this area:

> I began to ask myself why I do this kind of work. Am I doing it just because I have to work or simply because of the money? I really lacked confidence [*Neomu jasini eomneun geoeyo*]. So, I decided to quit this well-paying workplace [*jikjang*] and go back to book marketing, and in looking back, I made the right decision; I am satisfied. If I would have been interested in the topic of the clinic, I would have stayed, but I had no interest at all. I quit after one year and two months. You can learn it quickly, if you have the interest, but you learn it very slowly if you do not. (Interview 06.07.2013)

Sora felt that her self-confidence began to decline even though she had a well-paid and secure job because she encountered yet another imbalance: Although the working conditions were better compared to her first salaried job, the work itself was not what she wanted to do. "Rather than chasing money, I prefer to chase honour [*myeongye*], so my situation is different," she stated. A third job opportunity finally balanced and settled her personal self-approach. "A close acquaintance of mine founded a company and asked me to work there. Now, I have no problems after all and I do my job well. The company is like a family for me."

As I have mentioned (sub-chapter 6.2.2), part of her future dream was to live happily together with her loved ones. Another part was related to her work: "I would like to work another ten to twenty years in the field of book marketing. The truth is that I developed greed [*yoksim*] for my work. It was different when I was younger, but as I grew older, I have these thoughts." She smiled and added, "I had times when I just wanted to quit my work, quickly marry, stay at home and do housework." Nevertheless, the difficult times had passed and she had found a stable life for herself, in her own way. "The main issue for my self-confidence is that I work until the end. If I earn much money or less money, I have to do my occupation [*jigeop*] until the end. It is important for my self-esteem [*jajongam*]."

I related Sora's work experiences chronologically to illustrate her reflections; the way she stepped back from her way of acting, presented it as an object to think about and asked about its condition and goals.

Sora emphasised how greed, honour, self-respect and pride moved her forward to excellence in her field of work. Although she experienced phases of frustration and the worries of her family and friends concerning her workload, she sought appreciation for her abilities, skills and expertise, not only from others, but also from herself. She wanted to do her work to the best of her ability so she would not lose her self-esteem and self-respect. Professionalism meant the drive for excellence through which she gained this self-confidence and respect. She continuously wanted to develop her expertise further and engaged in processes of self-formation. Furthermore, the conditions she found in the company of her friend gave her the possibility to imagine her working in this field for the next 20 years. In contrast to the company where she worked as web designer, she experienced what she termed a family-like atmosphere, where she felt welcomed, respected and valued. This last job united her aspirations towards her work, the workload and salary, and the collegial bond.

Like Ye-eun, Sora worked in the culture industry. Her company belonged to a business sector targeted by the city government as to boost Seoul's economic development. However, as Sora pointed out, this branch is labour intensive with long working hours and low pay. Her description is consistent with Yun's (2010) statements about the working and pay conditions of SMEs. However, Sora stated that she was satisfied with her work. She was earning enough money to pay for everything she needed for her life, and more importantly she was gaining confidence and earning respect for the work she was doing.

8.2.3 The Lawyer

Jin-kyong studied law because her father was a solicitor. He had told her about the advantages this job would bring to her as a woman. "The work as a lawyer is a very specialised occupation [*jigeop*], because you need not only to study law, but also the license which allows you to work in this field," she explained. "Thus, my father told me that it is a stable and secure work for a woman, as the status as working woman in the free economy is insecure and the environment more discriminating." She followed her father's advice and was accepted into the law programme through *susi,* the so-called irregular way of entering university (see chapter 5).

Later, she decided to continue with a master's in law at graduate school. Here, she felt a higher level of competition between the students than in her undergraduate years. She met students with much more work experiences, such as accountants, or with more additional qualifications than she had. Thus, she told me that she studied very hard to get good grades and was able to compete with her fellow students. "However, I didn't know if the work was really something I wanted to do until I started to work," she said and smiled. "Now, I am sure that the work matches my interest and personality." Jin-kyong quickly found a job at the law firm where she was working when we had our interview. "I assume that my relatively young age was the decisive factor for the head to choose me. Older women tend to get married and give birth sooner. I guess it was my good grades and my relatively young age."

Her account echoes the narratives of Hyun-ae and Sook about the discrimination against women concerning marriage and maternity. Although Jin-kyong mentioned these two aspects as crucial in her job finding process, later in our interview she told me about her volunteer work and she reflected that, besides her father's advice and objective factors like her grades, it was also her character that determined her career. "I had many interests in women rights. You know that disabled women who encountered violence are shocked and feel helpless," she said. "There are centres who counsel women with such experiences in Seoul and I started to volunteer in this field. Before I was allowed to speak with and counsel these women, I had to participate in and successfully conclude a 72-hour preparatory course." She finished that course and then volunteered at diverse places that focused on counselling crime victims. "Looking at it in retrospect, I think that this work was also a reason why I registered in law school and got my job quickly. […] It is also my character."

Jin-kyong wanted to improve this side of her character through her work. "I am still a newcomer, so I don't know much, but the work is more interesting than I thought," adding, "I feel that people think that the work as lawyer requires many hours of overtime work and has inhuman working conditions. Further, they think lawyers just see the money. I thought the same to be honest." When she started to work, however, her attitude changed. "My colleagues are really nice, they have a good character. They even work without money for clients who cannot afford a counselling," she voiced her respect. Her co-workers gave her a good working environment and encouraged her to think about her future: "When I entered the company, I began to think a lot about what kind of lawyer I want to become and my colleagues motivate me, strengthen me in my thoughts," she said.

Jin-kyong explained that the two main responsibilities of a lawyer are mediation between clients and the defence of clients in court. Preparing for court hearings, she emphasised, required her to do many hours of overtime. Her day would be busy with telephone calls with the client, consultations with her colleagues, and meetings with the opposite party. Thus, she had to delay the writing of reports and preparation of other necessary documents into the evening. Her health problems, which she emphasised as one of her two most pressing worries, developed due to this overwork, which meant less time for exercise.

When we spoke about her wishes for her future, she said: "I want to become a lawyer with an area of expertise [*jeonmunbunyaga inneun byeonhosa*]. At the moment, I am very interested in women's and workers' rights, but I think it might change when I am really into work." She paused and added, "I think also about doing my Ph. D. or going abroad to study, but I have not yet decided."

Jin-kyong worked in a field not usually mentioned in articles about young people. Although lawyers are contract workers, Jin-kyong emphasised that it was a special kind of contract work. She explained that because lawyers hold licenses, they are not employed in permanent positions. If there was no case to work on, they would just go home. However, she emphasised that lawyers would not be laid off from law offices. Thus, her employment position in the law office differed from other contract workers.

Jin-kyong aspired to become a professional lawyer, even as she incurred physical problems. She anticipated to counsel her clients in the best way possible and with skills she acquired through practice, experience and further education, that is, continuous self-formation. As in the case of Sora, professionalism did not mean earning a lot of money. For Jin-kyong, her co-workers who did *pro bono* work and encouraged her to reflect about her future were guiding examples of good lawyers. The interest that led her to volunteer in counselling centres for women who had experienced injustice continued to hold her attention and ran like a thread through her narratives. She referred to this feeling as being her character.

Ye-eun, Sora and Jin-kyong, each in their own way, reflected and judged about what kind of working women they wanted to become and answered the ethical question of how they should live with an active engagement in continuous self-formation

(see also Landgraf 2020b). They held to values such as care and respect, motivation and pride as means to an end, and they sought out the workplace where they could live in accordance with these values and engage in their aspirations to become skilled working women.

8.3 Chapter Conclusion

Following the narratives of several young working women, I introduced stories about conceptions of work, as well as duties, conditions, and social relationships at work. These young women were either working or looking for work as white-collar workers, or were non-regular workers or were self-employed. I asked them what they thought about their work conditions and looked at what kind of values they emphasised in regard to work and how they defined good work.

An important aspect in the narratives of Hyun-ae and Sook was the feeling that opportunities to work differed greatly between Seoul and the provinces. While they acknowledged the job opportunities available in non-metropolitan areas, they evaluated the living conditions there as less satisfying. It was not possible to have a lifestyle that included going to cinemas or eating at various restaurants, unlike Seoul where such facilities and places were easily attainable, but where jobs were rarer. Their narratives foregrounded descriptions of chance, opportunity, and room to manoeuvre. A normal job meant having tasks that included a certain amount of challenge and creativity. Commenting on the work of government officials, they highlighted the tedious, repetitive routine which they did not consider to be desirable. Both emphasised the advantages of working for a large enterprise, for example the financial benefits such as the possibility to obtain a bank loan, but they characterised the working environment, relationship with co-workers, and work schedule as unstable.

Cho-hee put forward accounts of freedom and choice. She focused her attention especially on possible alternative strategies for young people to follow, and she herself pursued a path where she would encounter and work together with people from different countries while she could enjoy the freedom to be on her own.

I presented Ye-eun, Sora and Jin-kyong as young women who sought professionalism in their respective jobs. This meant obtaining the skills and knowledge that would allow them to reach a state of perfection in their work. Ye-eun, who had taken a different educational pathway from the majority of young South Koreans, followed her interest in a job where she could work with her hands and had the freedom to be creative in her own right. Being self-employed, however, could result in what she named a burden in regard to first, acquiring financial and other resources, and second, undertaking important decisions that affected her business. Furthermore, she had to cope with social discourses about what an expert was or not.

In Sora's narratives, greed, honour, and respect were important qualities that led her to become the worker she aspired to be. Jin-kyong's narratives illustrate the significance of care in pursuing professionalism. Taking her co-workers as role models

of how a good lawyer could work, she strove to become an expert to counsel and defend her future clients the best way possible. Both sought to form their selves, which included also to endure physical discomfort and even pain.

My research participants used the word 'dream' [*kkum*] when they imagined their future work skills and workplace during their years in school or university. When working, however, they no longer dreamed but hoped, and they put their energy, effort and discipline into finding a desirable job or acquiring skills and knowledge in their job. It is through the 'resource' of hope these young women experienced and expressed their search or self-formation (cf. Miyazaki 2004). They redirected their knowledge with every experience they had, and this redirection was based on ethical and monetary considerations that put forward specific values important in their own rights rather than as means to an end.

Based on their experiences, they evaluated and judged about their respective working conditions. Here, the significance of what Appadurai (2013) calls the 'ethics of possibility' comes to the fore in the narratives of these six working women. These possibilities were first of all the chance, opportunity, room and freedom to work in accordance with their skills, knowledge, and potential; and second, a good working environment, where they could develop not only friendly relationships with their co-workers, even take them as role models, but that allowed them to be creative, to educate themselves, and to form their skills and develop their selves.

When it functioned as compensation for demanding working requirements or was a form of benefit, money as means of payment – either in form of a salary or as a price – expressed values such as the worth of these young women's hard work. However, insufficient payment could also express satisfying working conditions and a good character.

9   Conclusion: Aspiring to the Good Life

In the previous chapters, I have presented the reflections, judgements and reasonings of young South Koreans living, studying and working in contemporary Seoul. Our interviews and informal talks centred on the four themes around which I have organised this dissertation: education, marriage, consumption, and work. These four themes were important issues regarding a middle-class lifestyle. While I was doing my fieldwork in Seoul from September 2012 to September 2013, contemporary public and academic discourses portrayed young South Koreans as living in very problematic circumstances. Changing economic conditions were making it increasingly difficult for them to reproduce a middle-class status, leading them to an endless search for more and more qualifications, conveyed in the term 'Spec Generation,' or causing them to abandon their ambitions for this lifestyle at all, summed up in the term 'Give-up Generation'. This middle-class status, however, can only partly be inherited by young people. Rather, they have to reproduce the social, cultural and economic capital through personal effort and abilities by themselves (cf. Ehrenreich 1989).

In this dissertation, I have focused on the meaning these young people give their practices and added a perspective that centres on young South Koreans' reflections on the discourses that surround them and the values that are most important to them. I have asked how young people in South Korea negotiate contradicting values and practices in order to pursue a good life. I have suggested that these young people

aspire to nothing less than a life well lived, and my key argument is that living a good life means finding a balance between their own aspirations and those of their wider social matrices.

In my analysis, I have employed a theoretical perspective that combined the concept of aspiration with the concepts of imagination, design and planning, anticipation, and hope. These concepts helped me to elaborate on the good life my research participants strived for, the form and content, and the temporal and social frame of their aspirations. I delved into the imaginations they had for education, their plans and designs for a married life, the ways they anticipated their future through consumer goods, and their hopes for good employment. I approached the values that lay behind these four themes with conceptualisations of ordinary ethics and the everyday use of money. These concepts helped me to elaborate on the ongoing dialogue my research participants had with their wider social matrices about these publicly known values, to comprehend the processes of negotiation and the diverse ways these young Seoulites accomplished a balance between different and contradicting values.

In this last chapter, I briefly revisit the themes of education, marriage, consumption and work to add some concluding remarks and then focus on my final reflections concerning the life well lived to which my research participants aspired.

Imagining Education – Imagining Different Forms of Success

Education was the first theme I dealt with (chapter 5). Academic and public discourses foreground the importance of education, especially higher education, in South Korea (Seth 2002, 2012). The meaning of education derives from a social consensus that positions people hierarchically based on their educational background, and a degree from a university or college enables people not only to reproduce but also to achieve a high status (Lett 1998, Hwang 2004). However, I argued that the development of this social consensus and its reproduction must be viewed in the context of values and feelings such as fear and anxiety, but also hope and faith in a future yet unknown (Abelmann 2003). Uncertainty results not only from an unstable employment market that leads to concerns about whether investment in education will lead to good employment, but it also occurs as consequence of the inherent characteristic of the middle-class status. Thus, the success a specific educational path promises can only be realised through the efforts of young people themselves.

The number of people enrolling in tertiary educational institutions increased over the time of rapid economic transformation while at the same time the number of tertiary educational institutions multiplied. Currently, the majority of young South Koreans enrol in a university or college, one of the highest numbers among the OECD countries (sub-chapter 4.2.2).

The normative educational path that became established during the period of rapid economic transformation presents young South Koreans with a uniform pathway to success: finishing high school and achieving a high score on the university

entrance examination *(suneung)* or being accepted for early admission *(susi)* at one of Seoul's numerous universities. Society ascribed the most success, however, to an enrolment in Seoul's top-tier universities, such as Seoul National University, Korea University, Yonsei University, or Ewha Womans University (SKYE). My research participants were critical of this prescribed educational path and the content this socially approved form of success entailed, and they had developed imaginations about the definition of success in the context of education.

Imagination makes the production of social and cultural ideas and concepts possible because, different from mere fantasy, it involves concrete processes of representation and visualisation (Appadurai 1996, 2013). I considered my research participants' university years as a liminal period (cf. Turner 2005) where they reflected about and imagined new forms of social practices to redefine education and success. In the liminal moment of tertiary education, these young Seoulites experienced society in a condensed form, not only regarding the knowledge they received in their training but also in how they experienced their relationships to their social matrices. They learned what society expected from them, where the limits of their personal freedom were set, and how society in general perceived the life of young adults. They got to know not only the skills and knowledge necessary to sustain their futures, and the rules and norms they should adhere to in order to lead a socially approved life, but they also learned what to expect from their social matrix – if their social surrounding was able to provide them with the necessary resources to achieve the status of a 'whole adult'. These young Seoulites reflected on their experiences, emotions, dialogues, and narratives, and pictured to themselves concepts and ideas of how education should be. Their imaginations were a "quotidian energy" (Appadurai 2013:287) to start their projects – engage genuinely in their studies, take a leave of absence to go abroad, participate in workshops – whereby they combined values of the past with notions of how education should be in the present. Ethical considerations through which they negotiated important values and the values expressed in the use of money as means of payment formed the "map" (Appadurai 2013:288) for shaping their futures.

The young Seoulites I spoke to about their educational paths saw education as necessary for becoming 'whole adults,' for learning the practical and theoretical knowledge necessary to sustain a good life, and they emphasised that education should not be reduced to a path leading in one direction only. Dae-hyun stressed that to become a 'whole adult,' young people should be allowed to 'do as they want' – that is, they should be given the opportunity to engage in diverse educational pathways and experiment until they find the one that is the most satisfying (bringing pleasure, happiness). Eun-ji and Sora's accounts illustrated how they pictured alternative educational pathways. Bora and Duri, each in their own ways, were critical of the knowledge and skills they could acquire at university. And while Gyeong criticised the stratification of universities and the consequences this system had for students and their possibilities of choices, Dae-hyun was very doubtful that students could

receive a good education when they simultaneously had to pay for tuition fees, accommodation, clothes and food, and he wondered if the situation would become better after graduation.

Nancy Abelmann (2003) describes the complex considerations that accompanied the search for the right educational path, and these thoughts and reflections were still prevalent when I undertook my research. Every one of these young Seoulites negotiated differently with his or her respective social matrix about the value of education. Ethics became explicit not only in judgements about the form and content of good education, but also in the meaning these young people ascribed to good social relations, where duty and obligation combined with values of love and care. In this context, the use of money as means of payment illustrated the values my research participants viewed as important, such as fairness, responsibility, and freedom of choice.

Designing and Planning Marriage – Forming a Family

In the ethnographic chapter that centred on marriage (chapter 6), I drew special attention to the narratives of my young female research participants who had already graduated from university and were either in employment or searching for a new job.

Social life is the product of design and planning processes (Appadurai 2013), and I used the concepts of design and planning to emphasise the effort these female research participants devoted to shaping the wedding ceremony and their subsequent lives in accordance with their aspirations.

Yet, my research participants' employment situations revealed another dimension of getting married, and I showed how their diverse plans and designs that accompanied marriage related to work. Laurel Kendall (1996) stresses that working women who were supported by their families were able to independently decide about their marriages (sub-chapter 4.2.3), and I further elaborated on the relation of work and marriage, and the meanings of independence.

I took the reader to the wedding of my friend Yun, who married at short notice while I was doing my research. The effort she put in to prepare her wedding and the energy with which she engaged in the wedding ceremony illustrated the independence a working woman could exercise regarding first, the choice of her partner, and second, the form of the wedding ceremony. Yun had control over her wedding and was able to design it in accordance with her values. She 'earmarked' (Zelizer 1997) part of her earnings for her wedding and paid for the wedding preparations, the wedding ceremony, and her neo-local apartment.

For my research participants, the ritual was important because it represented the socially approved way to form a family and allowed them to live with their respective partner. I discussed the tension my research participants experienced between their parents' wishes for the wedding ceremony, and their own plans for the ceremony.

Hyun-ae, Sook, Sora and Jin-kyong especially attributed the recent increase in the cost of wedding ceremonies to public expectations, and they emphasised that the form and content of wedding ceremonies were primarily determined by their parents' understandings of a proper wedding ceremony. The plans and design my research participants envisioned for their wedding ceremony differed greatly from these notions; yet, they emphasised their wishes to fulfil their parents' wishes. Public discourses about wedding expenses – circulating between the poles of parsimony and conspicuous consumption – were found not only throughout South Korea's past (sub-chapter 4.2.3) but also dominated present imaginations about the proper form and content of wedding ceremonies, and my research participants continued this national dialogue when designing their own weddings, pondering about the use of money as means of payment in the process.

The relationship between work and marriage that I illustrated with the wedding of my friend Yun differed in the cases of Sook, Jin-kyong and Sora. On the one hand, a marriage could be a considerable obstacle to one's working career, as Sook explained. On the other hand, it was a strategy to escape the injustice and felt glass ceiling at work, as Hyun-ae stressed. In their narratives, ethics became explicit, especially in form of accusations as both emphasised the difficulties working women who were planning to marry face in their jobs. In contrast to their narratives, Sora and Jin-kyong's accounts illustrate how ethics became explicit as form of self-technology. Both had different plans about when to marry: while Jin-kyong wanted to delay marriage in order to shape a working career, Sora stressed that she wanted to marry quickly. Yet, they both emphasised that married life meant for both partners to do their best. Both Jin-kyong and Sora stressed the importance of investing time and energy into their aspirations for a good marital life – sharing the housework, respecting the partner's work, remaining faithful, and caring for the partner.

After I discussed the narratives of young women who were (supposed) to get married, I introduced women who were indifferent to and even rejected marriage. They stressed that the change to their individual life design would be too drastic and thus they chose to live by themselves. The independence working women such as Yun experienced in their decision regarding when and whom to marry was also experienced by working women such as Ha-yun and Min-hee in their decisions not to marry.

The lives these young working women designed and planned were based on ethical considerations about how they should live: considerations about how they should form their selves and which responsibilities and duties they should engage in so that their married lives flourish. And they approached these designs with effort and endeavour. They recognised the values important for their selves and their social matrices and acted to realise the social lives to which they aspired.

Anticipation and Consumption – Anticipating the Future through Consumption

Consumption was the third theme I discussed in this dissertation (chapter 7). Against the view that consumption is an extravagant and careless activity, I turned to theorists who emphasise the importance of values in exchange processes (Appadurai 1986), the complex role commodities play in social relations (Miller 2001), and how consumer goods invite people to undertake diverse activities and offer possibilities (Keane 2005). I discussed how discourses that moved between the two poles of conspicuous consumption and parsimony characterised the period of rapid economic transformation (chapter 4), and anthropologists carefully represented and analysed people's reflections about consumption within socially different expectations (Nelson 2000). In my dissertation, I have addressed the diversity of values and complexity of thoughts of my research participants regarding consumption, and I have emphasised that these young Seoulites anticipated their futures through consumption. Anticipation relates to processes of analysis and preparation to face an unknown future (Appadurai 2013), and ethical thoughts and reflections comprised how my research participants evaluated their present situation and how they endeavoured to predict their possible futures.

The term 'Spec Generation' already implies how young people anticipate their futures; yet, it refers especially to the effort to acquire qualifications, such as university degrees, certificates from volunteer work, or language tests, in the search for one of the rare jobs in a conglomerate. I conceptualised qualifications and certificates as belonging to the wider domain of licenses that are used to restrict access to specific positions (cf. Appadurai 1986). Their acquisition requires endeavour and resembles commerce. In the context of work, qualifications allow employers to categorise and rank job candidates in order to restrict access to and maintain company positions. In this context, I turned to the narratives of Dae-hyun and the CEO, Mr. Jung, who discussed with me how specific qualifications came into being as means to evaluate the abilities and skills of prospective job candidates and how effective these criteria were in indicating the actual work performance. Both were critical of this system and questioned the usefulness of these criteria for an accurate evaluation.

However, my research participants used the socially accepted activities of volunteer work, part-time jobs, or internships not only to prepare themselves for the job market but also as a way to engage in diverse activities outside university. I have shown how the acquisition of these special kinds of commodities invited my research participants to anticipate their futures in diverse ways. Hyun-ae emphasised how the experiences, contacts and practices she gained through volunteer work and part-time jobs motivated her to engage in further activities, helped her to form her self, and provided her with ideas about the ethical person she wanted to become. And my research assistant Seon-ae stressed how such activities offered her orientation in her search for the right job. Thus, volunteer work, internships and part-time jobs were a well-established part of South Korea's social landscape. On the one hand, these activities were a locally prescribed period of trial and error for young people. On the

other hand, they illustrated how young people assumed responsibilities and handled difficulties. My research participants attributed meaning and values to these practices and critically evaluated the practices of their peers, their peers' intention and righteousness when engaging in activities such as volunteer work.

In showing how these young Seoulites anticipated their futures through consumption, I also turned to fashion and plastic surgery. Fashion, as functional equivalent of licenses and qualifications (Appadurai 1986), and plastic surgery, as a means to reconstruct the body (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012), became important in my research participants' narratives when they discussed local understandings of desirable appearances and the social control it entails. Especially Eun-ji and Bora critically evaluated the values attributed to 'right clothes' and 'right body measures' and made ethical questions explicit when judging social control in the form of gossiping. At the same time, fashion also invited my research participants to engage in new activities. Bora, for example, turned to Japan not only to find inspiration but also as source to compare and evaluate South Korean fashion styles and attitudes, and Ahri emphasised that clothes played a very important role in her feeling herself to be a professional working woman.

Fashion functions as a socially established system that restricts access to social positions through the control of taste. However, just as my research participants used certificates and qualification to anticipate their long-term projects, they made use of the possibilities that clothes, handbags, make-up and even plastic surgery offered to anticipate their short-term wants and goals. Furthermore, the narrative of Hyun-ae showed how consumption played an important role in expressing filial piety towards one's parents. These young Seoulites consumed through the use of money as means of payment. Their consumption practices and the goods and services that they acquired through the use of money as means of payment illustrated diverse 'regimes of value' (Appadurai 1986).

Hoping for Good Work – Hoping for Personal Development and Respect through Work

The final theme I discussed was work (chapter 8), which I closely connected with hope (Appadurai 2013) as method (Miyazaki 2004, 2006): hope as method to redirect and reorient knowledge, as a method through which my research participants perceived and experienced their work.

Hope has a political dimension, and it is often, but not exclusively, young people whom public discourses most vividly associate with hope. Young people are thought to be willing to undertake risks and to possess the capacity to develop novel and fresh knowledge. Thus, they are associated with the future (Cole and Durham 2008). Appadurai (2013) terms the political dimension of hope 'politics of hope,' and he stresses the importance of such politics for society to envision a change of a status quo. He connects these politics with two qualities of ethics: 'ethics of possibility' – notions and practices that increase hope – and 'ethics of probability'– notions and practices that measure and calculate future outcomes. Young people need to experi-

ence that they can increase their hopes, that they can imagine different ways to live, that they can not only develop but also nurture their capacity to aspire. These ethics of possibility (Appadurai 2013) stand in sharp contrast to recent public and academic discourses that foreground the lack of possibilities young people face. Anthropologists' concerns about recent economic developments and governing practices are directed towards ethics of probabilities (Appadurai 2013), that is, notions that subjectify (young) people (chapter 2).

In South Korea, such discourses especially focus on the lack of possibilities for young South Koreans to find decent employment, that is, long-term or permanent positions. So-called precarious working conditions and the subjectivities young people are positioned in are one of the most prevailing issues (chapter 2). I foregrounded that precarity is an experience, and precarious working conditions were the norm rather than an exception, at least for women on whose narratives I concentrated (chapter 8). I focused on the experiences of these working women – white-collar workers in different offices, non-regular workers in marketing and law, and a self-employed silversmith – and I illustrated the individual effort and discipline they used to reorient and redirect their knowledge to find good work and achieve professionalism in their occupations.

I discussed how Hyun-ae and Sook critically evaluated the different treatment of women and men in the workplace (see also chapter 6). They emphasised the glass ceiling women face and the limited possibilities for career progression. Such differences in the treatment of female and male workers was very significant for my female research participants and they emphasised that being treated equally was an important criterion for good work. Yet, concerning the content, form and characteristics of good work, Hyun-ae and Sook stressed that the company must be a reliable guarantor for the bank to give credits, that the stipulated working hours, work load as well as salary needed to be maintained, and that possibilities for after-work recreation were important too. Sook hoped to find a position where she could establish a work-life balance. Hope became a method – rather than being merely wishful thinking – because she redirected her knowledge with every new experience she had. However, for both women it was also important to be employed in an environment where they could develop their skills and knowledge and they strongly contrasted these possibilities with what they described as the uninteresting and monotonous work of government officials.

Another characteristic of good work was mentioned by Cho-hee, who emphasised the importance of the relations with colleagues and supervisors and at least some form of personal freedom. Cho-hee found a permanent position and was satisfied with her work tasks (albeit not with her supervisor); yet, she hoped to gain wider, international experience and thus left her company. These three working women were employed as white-collar workers and yet, rather than a permanent position, they emphasised that good work meant interesting and challenging work tasks, good social relations that allowed for some freedom of choice, adherence to the conditions determined in their contracts, thus leading to a balance between work and life.

While such evaluations made ethical questions explicit, the narratives of Jin-kyong, Sora and Ye-eun centred on self-formation and becoming an ethical person. The professionalism they wanted to achieve in their respective field of work – marketing, law, craft – demanded long working hours, diverse and difficult work tasks, and even distress. Yet, I have shown that these three women accepted the effort necessary to achieve the professionalism they aspired to. In their respective working environments, they experienced these ethics of possibility (Appadurai 2013), that is, they were supported by their working environment in their aspirations and thus were able to nurture their capacities to aspire: Jin-kyong was unsure if the tasks of a lawyer would suit her, but she had hoped they would. And when she started to work in a law firm, she found that her work suited her character. Sora tried different jobs only to return in the end to the position in book marketing that she had held directly after graduation. The experiences she gained in these diverse jobs helped her to redirect her knowledge towards her skills and determine what she really wanted to do. Unlike the majority of young South Koreans, Ye-eun did not graduate from university. Rather, she pursued a craft of her choice.

In the context of work, money as means of payment became of special importance in the form of a salary. A salary characterised good work because it either enabled these young women to purchase important commodities and services, or it expressed valuable practices such as counselling without payment.

The reflections, judgements and practices that my research participants engaged in and which I discussed in the context of the four themes of education, marriage, consumption and work were based on public values. And because these values were public, these young Seoulites referred to them, used them, negotiated between them. Yet, these values differed, even contradicted each other, and the values that were important to my research participants' parents, teachers, or peers were contested by my research participants. The status quo, that is, a hierarchy of value associated with education, marriage, consumption and work, was questioned and sometimes even circumvented by my research participants. They aspired to a form of difference (cf. Appadurai 2004, 2013). Then, how did they realise their aspirations towards a good life?

Aspiring to the Good Life

Aspirations comprise short-term wants and long-term projects driving people on their journey from a present here to a future there. Aspiring – to strive for – conveys practices that allow people to manoeuvre along the journey from here to there (Appadurai 2004, 2013).

Aspirations and the capacity to aspire are important components, albeit subjective perceptions, of a good life (Fischer 2014), while at the same time, the majority of people – old and young, rich and poor – continuously aspire not only to an improvement of their situation (Jackson 2011) but also to a life worth living (Fischer 2014). The good life and aspirations are interdependent. People form their aspirations in a

local frame of social and cultural ideas about the form and content of a meaning-
ful life, and the young people portrayed in this book aspired to the good life in the
context of their ordinary, everyday lives in a middle-class context. Imaginations of
the form and content of education and educational pathways, designs of a wedding
ceremony and married life, anticipations towards their future and hopes for good
work, were the preoccupations that comprised their everyday aspirations. The stories
of these young Seoulites show that their aspirations towards a good life focused on
ordinary, everyday interactions, encounters and experiences rather than expressing
ideas about a utopian life.

   These aspirations always developed in their social matrices, although they did not
necessarily directly apply to their social surroundings (see also Westendorp, Finis and
Remmert 2020). Often, their aspirations aimed at benefiting others, such as when
Dae-hyun applied his aspirations to his fellow students, or Jin-kyong applied hers to
her clients. Though equally often their aspirations applied to their personal growth
and development, such as how Hyun-ae and Sora aspired to acquire knowledge and
skills to grow self-esteem and self-respect. Their aspirations also changed over time
and with the places they moved between (cf. Boccagni 2017). Living in the province
as a high-school student, Sora embraced the aspirations of her parents; living in
Seoul as a university student and working woman, she developed her own aspirations
towards her future life. The temporal horizon and spatial circumstances these young
Seoulites were living in framed their aspirations.

   The heterogeneity of practices these young Seoulites engaged in to achieve their
wants, goals and projects illustrates how they differed in their understandings of a
good life. Yet, their aspirations show one thing: living a meaningful life meant first
and foremost achieving a balance with the aspirations of their social matrices.

   I defined balance to be the continuous dialogue my research participants had
with their wider social matrices about the worth and value of different aspirations
and the control they could enact upon their aspirations. This balance is dynamic,
and I suggested that middle-class standards and status symbols incorporated social
and personal aspirations based on values which these young Seoulites reflected on,
evaluated and chose between so that they could navigate an intermediate course (cf.
Jackson 1998).

   When Appadurai (2013:180) emphasises that culture consists of the past as well
as the future, he foregrounds the effects and consequences values have for the con-
struction of both past and future. The values and practices that became relevant in
these young people's senses of themselves, their self-worth, were often different from
those of their social settings. Yet, these values just as often showed a continuity with
the past and they invited my research participants to aspire to a good life. These
young Seoulites were aware of the expectations their social and local context had,
the political and economic structures that constituted their lives, and the historical
legacy of a past of rapid economic transformation, and their reflections were first
and foremost built in dialogue with these surroundings, understandings and values.
They negotiated between their selves and others for their aspirations to come into

being, to be recognised, to have the feeling that they can determine their own faith (cf. Jackson 1998).

These processes of negotiation between different and contradicting values were neither solely about self-interested influence nor adjustment to duties. Rather, recognition comprised negotiation processes that were based on ethical considerations centring on the question of how these young Seoulites should live, and they reflected on what is good and right to do. Thus, the concepts and notions of a good life that these young Seoulites aspired to required hard work: negotiating diverse aspirations with the people around them, experiencing suffering and hardship in the process to live a life that they viewed as meaningful, and developing into the person they wanted to become. Yet, it also included passion and creative actions, joy and happiness: when their partners had the same design for life after marriage, when their parents accepted the educational pathway chosen, when 'making Spec' was socially approved as allowing one to experience diverse ways of life, or when colleagues were supportive and motivating.

Yet, recognition was also closely linked with redistribution, which illustrated the mutual relationship between the social and instrumental spheres (cf. Ferguson 2015). Having the possibility to study under good conditions, being able to marry in accordance with social and personal notions, possessing the potential to surpass the status system, or having the opportunity to have both interesting work tasks and good working conditions were connected to the redistribution of monetary resources.

Aspirations are oriented towards a future and combine notions and ideas of the past and present. The capacity to aspire allows one to navigate the journey towards unknown circumstances and becomes a cultural capacity that conveys 'the future as cultural fact' (Appadurai 2004, 2013). The future comprises differences and these young Seoulites also aspired to different forms of a good life: different forms of success, different ways to hold a wedding ceremony, different appearances, and different working conditions. They used the 'map,' to remain in the nautical language Appadurai (2004, 2013) uses to conceptualise the capacity to aspire, of their middle-class values to develop their aspirations further.

I have written this book from the perspective of an anthropology of the good that aims at attending to how people conceptualise and realise the good in their lives. I drew special attention to the diversity and juxtaposition of values in young people's lives and how they gave meaning to their practices. Furthermore, I conceptualised the economic sphere of South Korean capitalist society as an integral part of its social sphere. In looking at the mutual connection between the economic and social spheres, I aimed to show the significance these young people attributed to their everyday practices and to social relations. The concept of the good life combines both approaches.

Notions and concepts of a good life run through different realms of people's lives – and provide rich material for anthropologists. In this book, I have focused on the areas of education, marriage, consumption, and work. The strength of anthropological analyses is to show how the good is realised in particular times and places;

and an attention to the good, and how it is culturally constructed, contributes significantly to an understanding of how people live their lives. Focusing on the good life helped me to paint a more differentiated picture of how young Seoulites live their lives in contemporary economic conditions. In doing so, I hope that this book inspires the reader to not only look at how people struggle through their lives today, but also to attend to how they narrate, conceive of and construct the good in their own lives.

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Figures

Appendix

Brief Introductory Notes of the Seoulites Who Participated in My Research

Ahri was twenty-eight years old and a female master student of a university in Seoul.

Bora was twenty-three years old and a female bachelor student of a university in Seoul. She majored in English and took Japanese as minor.

Cho-hee was in her mid-twenties and had had a working career in diverse jobs. Her last one was in the public relation department of an international company, but she had resigned to go abroad to work.

Chul was in his early twenties and a male bachelor student in economics of a top-tier university in Seoul.

Dae-hyun was in his early twenties and a male bachelor student in social science of a top-tier university in Seoul. He wanted to go to law school after his bachelor.

Duri was twenty-two years old and a female bachelor student of business administration of a top-tier university in Seoul.

Eun-ji was twenty years old and a female bachelor student of literature of a top-tier university in Seoul. She was in Emo during her high school years.

Gi was in her early twenties and a female bachelor student of social and cultural anthropology of a top-tier university in Seoul.

Gyeong was in her early twenties and a female bachelor student of economics of a university whose campus was in Anseong, an adjacent area of Seoul. She was preparing for taking the examination *(gosi)* to become a Certified Public Accountant.

Ha-yun was in her mid-twenties and currently establishing a social company. She graduated from Haja Center and wanted to establish her own social company.

Hyun-ae was twenty-six-years old and worked in a large company in Seoul. She had graduated in business administration from Incheon National University.

Jin-kyong was twenty-seven years old and had just started to work as a lawyer. She had a partner.

Ji-u was twenty-seven years old and had worked in advertisement but was unemployed during our interview. She had travelled a comparatively long time through Europe and the Middle East.

Kwon was the husband of Yun. He was born and went to school and university in Daegu. He came to Seoul to work in a medium-sized company.

Lim was in his early thirties and preparing to take the *gosi*.

Min-hee was in her early thirties. She had graduated from a women's university and was working as a media designer. She was one of my research participants who was not planning to get married.

Mr. Jung was in his late fifties and the head of a small-size enterprise trading micro-electronic items from China to South Korea.

Nari was twenty-one years old and a female bachelor student of a top-tier university in Seoul.

Seon-ae was my research assistant. She went to one of the top-tier universities in Seoul and was in her early twenties. She studied social science.

Sora was twenty-seven years old and worked in the field of book marketing. She had a partner.

Sook was twenty-six-years old, unemployed during the interview and soon to get married. She graduated together with Hyun-ae in business administration from Incheon National University.

Ye-eun was in her late twenties and worked as silversmith. She had her own workshop near Hongkik University in Seoul. She decided to become a craftswoman and did not go to university.

Yun was in her early thirties and worked as a web designer in Seoul. She married her partner Kwon during my research.

Glossary

Revised romanisation	Korean	Translation, explanation
aju isanghada	아주 이상하다	very odd, very strange
ajumma	아줌마	middle-aged woman
antakkapta	안타깝다	pitiful
areubaiteu	아르바이트	part-time job, side job
baeksu	백수	remain idle, out of work
bam	밤	chestnut
Budamgami neul maeumsoge inneun geon gatayo.	부담감이 늘 마음 속에 있는 것 같 아요.	The burden to do so presses on your heart.
bulhyodo	불효도	lack of filial piety
bulhyodo hada	불효도 하다	being undutiful to one's parents

Revised romanisation	Korean	Translation, explanation
chaegimgam	책임감	responsibility
cheonmin	천민	lower common people
chil	칠	seven
chwijik	취직	find employment
chwijip	취집	term composed of the words *chwijik* and *sijip* with a strong negative connotation that indicates that a woman prefers to stay at home rather than to work
daechu	대추	jujube
daegieob	대기업	large company
daehak munwha	대학 문화	university culture
Dalgwan sedae	달관 세대	'*Dalgwan* Generation': young people who are not interested in a career or money, who rather feel fatigue (*dalgwan* literally means to be not interested in trivial matters and turn the view into the inside)
danche saenghwal	단체 생활	a corporate life
dapdap hada	답답하다	stuffy
dongari	동아리	club, society, class
dongnipsim	독립심	spirit of independence
doni eodiseo	돈이 어디서?	I had no money. (literally: Where is the money?)
Eotteokaji?	어떡하지?	What should I do?

Revised romanisation	Korean	Translation, explanation
Geuge museun bulhyonya?	그게 무슨 불효냐?	How can that be undutiful?
geunjang	그냥	just, simply, not more than
Geunjang gyeolhon haesseo. Geurigo geunjang sara.	그냥 결혼 했어. 그리고 그냥 살아.	She just married. And she just lives.
gimbab	김밥	a role of rice and purple laver mixed with a variety of other ingredients
gisuljige ilhaneun saram	기술직에 일하는 사람	a person working in a technical field/ post
Give-up sedae, also *N-Po sedae*	N–포 세대	'Give-up Generation' or '*N-Po* Generation': young people who have to give up certain material goods or immaterial assets
gongmuwon	공무원	government official
Gongmuwon haji, mwo	공무원 하지, 뭐.	Let's become a government official.
gosi	고시	examination, test here: short for the civil service entrance examination
gukjehwa	국제화	internationalisation (literally: make like the nations)
gundae munwha	군대 문화	military culture
gwanmun	관문	gateway
gwansang	관상	physiognomy
gwaoe	과외	extra private lessons

Revised romanisation	Korean	Translation, explanation
gwasobi	과소비	excessive consumption
gyeoljeonggwon	결정권	power to decide
gyeolhon	결혼	formally establishing that a man and a woman become husband and wife
gyeolhon saenghwal	결혼 생활	married life
gyeolhonsik	결혼식	wedding ceremony
hanbook	한복	'traditional' Korean clothes
Hell-Chosun	헬−조선	term composed of the English word hell and the name of the Joseon dynasty that illustrates that young people feel their living conditions to be hellish and backward
hoesa	회사	firm, company
hubae	후배	junior student
hyodo	효도	filial piety
hyodo hada	효도 하다	being dutiful to one's parents
igwa	이과	natural sciences
ihaehada	이해하다	to understand
il	일	one
il	일	work
Ireun haebwaya haneun geojanayo.	일은 해봐야 하는 거잖아요.	You know that one must try the work.
isanghada	이상하다	odd, strange

Revised romanisation	Korean	Translation, explanation
jaebeol (McCune-Reischauer transcription: *chaebŏl*)	재벌	family-owned conglomerate
jageun gieop	작은 기업	a small company
jajongam	자존감	self-esteem
jap	잡	job
jaribsim	자립심	sense of independence
jasin	자신	confidence, assurance
jayu	자유	freedom
jeokseong	적성	aptitude, natural ability, skill, talent, character
jeongong	전공	speciality
jeonmunbunyaga inneun byeonhosa	전문분야가 있는 변호사	lawyer with an area of expertise
jeonse	전세	lump sum deposit
jeontong	전통	tradition
jibang	지방	province
jigeop	직업	occupation, profession, work, vocation
jigeopboneunge anira	직업보는게 아니라	It is not about trying the job, profession.
jikjang	직장	job, workplace
jineun hea	지는 해	sinking sun
joeun gieobe	좋은 기업에	at a good company

Revised romanisation	Korean	Translation, explanation
jonjunghada	존중하다	respect, to hold of high value
jota	좋다	good
jungin	중인	the privileged class
jungsancheung	중산층	middle class
keun jeol	큰절	deep bow
kkum	꿈	dream
kimchi (Revised Romanisation of Korean: *gimshi*)	김치	salted and fermented vegetables, usually Chinese gabbage or radish
lujeo	루저	looser
maeneo	매너	manner
maeum (McCune-Reischauer transcription: *майм*)	마음	heart, mind (the place where emotions are felt and experienced)
maeum eopseumyeon	마음 없으면	if you do not have the passion to do it
Maeumi pyeonanhae.	마음이 편해.	I feel at ease with my heart.
mihon yeoseong (McCune-Reischauer transcription: *mihon yôsông*)	미혼 여성	unmarried woman
Millennial sedae	밀레니얼 세대	'Millennial Generation': young people who have excellent computer skills and are well educated and are also described as foregrounding their individuality apart from their social surrounding

Revised romanisation	Korean	Translation, explanation
mobeomsaengnyu	모범생류	model students
mungwa	문과	liberal arts
myeongye	명예	honour
Neomu jasini eopseoyo.	너무 자신이 없어요.	I lack the assurance for that.
Neungryeok andwae.	능력 안돼.	The effort would not be enough.
nolda	놀다	play, be outgoing
Neomu jasini eomneun geoeyo.	너무 자신이 없는 거에요.	I really lacked confidence.
noneunaedeul	노는애들	the term describes students who like to socialise (literally: playing kids)
oegugin	외국인	foreigner
onjeonhan seongin	온전한 성인	the term describes a person who possesses social skills and theoretical knowledge
oppa	오빠	elder brother, honorific term to address an elder male acquaintance
Oppaneun gangnamseutail.	오빠 강남스타일.	Elder brother has the Gangnam Style.
bihon yeoseong (McCune-Reischauer transcription: *pihon yôsông*)	비혼 여성	a woman who is unassociated with marriage
pogihada	포기하다	to give up
ppalli ppalli	빨리빨리	quick quick

Revised romanisation	Korean	Translation, explanation
Ppalli gatdawa.	빨리 갔다 와.	Quickly go and come back.
pyebaek	폐백	ritual to honour the parents-in-law
sabeopgosi	사법고시	bar exam
salkogi sedae	살코기 세대	'*Salkogi* Generation': young people who reduce, even avoid, social relations. Salkogi literally means lean meat.
sam chobag	삼초 백	three second bag
samgak gimbab	삼각 김밥	triangle gimbab
sangmin	상민	commoners
segyehwa	세계화	globalisation (literally: make like the world)
seupegiragi bodaneun geunyang siheomgongbu	스펙이라기 보다는 그냥 시험공부	study for tests, that do not count as Spec
seupgwan	습관	habit
sijip	시집	one's husband's home (used as a verb: a woman entering the household of her husband with the connotation of getting married)
sillyeok joeun	실력 좋은	skilled (literary: with good skills)
Sin sedae	신 세대	'New Generation': young people who entered university in the 1990s and engaged in creative and digital culture and different lifestyles

Revised romanisation	Korean	Translation, explanation
sogaeting	소개팅	blind date
so hawk haeng short for: *sosohajiman hwaksilhan haengbuk*	소확행 소소하지만 확실한 행북	doing or possessing small things in live yet feeling happy
sonbae	선배	senior student
Spec sedae	스펙 세대	'Spec Generation': 'Spec' is deduced from the word specification and refers to the collection of material and immaterial assets.
suneung short for: *daehak suhak neungnyeok siheom*	수능 대학 수학 능력 시험	College Scholastic Ability Test
susi	수시	early admission for university or college
susul	수술	surgery
ttagaun nunchori	따가운 눈초리	gossip, (literally: hot look)
tuja	투자	investment
uijihada	의지하다	rely on, lean on
uisikju	의식주	the necessities of life
wenmankeum pyeongbeomhage sandaneun gijun	웬만큼 평범하게 산다는 기준	live by common standards
yangban	양반	nobility
yangmin	양민	lower commoners

Revised romanisation	Korean	Translation, explanation
yedan	예단	gifts exchanged between the families of bride and groom in form of silk, cloth or jewels before the wedding
yedanbi	예단비	cash exchanged as gift between the families of bride and groom before the wedding
yemullo bonaeneun bidan	예물로 보내는 비단	silk exchanged as gift between the families of bride and groom before the wedding
yeonyein	연예인	celebrity
Yeoreobun himnaeseyo. Yeoreobun useoyo. Himdeulgo jichyeodo useoyo.	여러분 힘내세요. 여러분 웃어요. 힘들고 지쳐도 웃어요.	Everyone, hang in there. Everyone, smile. Even if you are tired or down, smile.
yeui	예의	politeness, manner, courtesy
yoksim	욕심	greed
yolo (yoro)	요로	short expression for 'you only live ones'
88 manwonsedae	88만원세대	'880,000 Won Generation': young people who were well-educated but stuck in contract work with the minimum wage of 880,000 Won

This dissertation explores the values and practices of young, middle-class South Koreans and what it means for them to live a good life. Based on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork, it attends to the pathways and life trajectories of young adults living, studying and working in Seoul, the country's economic, political, cultural and educational centre. Due to changing economic conditions, it appears to be increasingly difficult for young people today to reproduce middle-class status. In public discourse, these difficulties are expressed in the terms 'Spec' or 'Give-up Generation'. At the same time, young people are starting to question middle-class lifestyles and values and turn to practices which emphasise different standards. The author illustrates how young adults negotiate middle-class ideals by contextualising the values around four key themes – education, marriage, consumption, and work. In doing so, she explores her interlocutors' thoughts and reflections about middle-class values through a theoretical and methodological framework centred on ordinary ethics and the everyday use of money. This ethnography sheds light on the complex and heterogenous ways young people in South Korea conceptualise and realise the good in their lives, and it focuses attention on the explicitness of ethics and the relationship between money and values in these young Seoulites' everyday lives and social relations.

Carolin Landgraf completed her PhD at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Göttingen, where she has been working as a lecturer and researcher since 2014. Her regional focus is on Asia, specifically East-Asia, and she has conducted long-term ethnographic fieldwork in South Korea. Landgraf has a Master of Arts in Social Anthropology, with minors in Business Administration and Religious Studies.

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