

Week 2

PRIVILEGED MOBILITIES



Professional Migration,
Geo-Social Media, and

version of Chapter One along with the segments of the Introduction that describe the growing mobile professional workforce and the concept of digital place-making were published as “A Gateway to the Global City: Mobile Place-making Practices by Expats” in *New Media & Society*, a Sage journal (see Polson, 2015). An earlier, condensed version of Chapter Two, along with parts of the Introduction (sections on theories of the middle class, and globalizing the middle class) was published in 2011 as “Belonging to the Network Society: Social Media and the Production of a New Global Middle Class” in *Communication, Culture & Critique*, an International Communication Association journal published by John Wiley & Sons (see Polson, 2011). In 2014, a fortuitous invitation from André Jansson to contribute to a special journal issue on “Mobile Elites: Sojourners, Dwellers and Homecomers” led to my research in Bangalore (and attendance at the excellent GeoMedia conference in Karlstad, Sweden). An expanded version of that work appears here as Chapter Four, as well as in the Introduction chapter’s section on mobility and embodiment; the original article is forthcoming in *European Journal of Cultural Studies* (a Sage journal) in late 2016—available online in advance (see Polson, in press). Finally, this project has come to fruition as a book thanks to a great group of people at Peter Lang, especially Bernadette Shade, who guided the manuscript through production, Sophie Appel who designed a vibrant cover, Cameron McCarthy, who invited me to publish in the series, and Mary Savigar, who offered excellent encouragement and feedback as editor. Their patience and guidance, and overall enthusiasm for the research, are deeply appreciated.

INTRODUCTION

Make the world your home.

—Internations.org

Paris, September 2008—I stood alone in front of Galerie 31, a trendy bar in the Saint-Germain-des-Prés neighborhood. The building was one of the renovations common to contemporary Paris, a modern interior fit perfectly into a historic shell. Although I was only fifteen minutes late, the bar was already full, with smartly dressed late-twenties and thirty-somethings drifting out of the open floor-to-ceiling windows to the sidewalk area, drinks in hand and conversation swirling. The webpage had said that people should feel comfortable arriving solo, but from my vantage point outside, they all seemed to know one another already; I felt like an awkward intruder, crashing the party. Yet immediately as I walked in the door, a young man was waiting to say hello. He was so welcoming that I thought he must be the host. “Is this the meetup?” I asked, unsure of how to begin. He introduced himself as Aiden,¹ from Singapore. He wasn’t the host, just another member looking for people to meet. Soon we were part of a small group, including a Canadian man, a German woman, and a woman who stiffly introduced herself as “Lara, South America-U.S.” A news correspondent for one of Germany’s largest private TV stations joined the group and said he’d just moved to Paris two days earlier. He

had visited a colleague in Paris the year before and she took him to one of these events that took place on a riverboat. When he arrived a couple of days ago, she (who doesn't live here anymore) reminded him about it. He checked it out online, noticed there was a party in two hours, and decided to drop by.

The group soon drifted apart and I began talking to a woman from Toledo, Spain, who said she'd been in France for the past five years. I had lived in Spain previously and as we spoke, in a comforting mix of Spanish and English, relief crept into the place of the adrenaline that had been deployed to get me through arriving alone and immediately diving into a frenzy of interaction. But the conversation didn't last long; bodies jostled against each other in the standing room-only bar, and with a slight move of my head, I found myself speaking to two local men who said they came to the event to practice English but who mostly spoke to me in French. Quickly reaching the limits of my French, I excused myself to order a drink and, standing at the bar, met Claire, an American who had moved to Paris for work. This was her third stint living in France and she'd previously lived in Chile as well. Claire said she'd be going to the luncheon on Friday, hosted by another group called *Expats Paris*, and that she had also joined yet another, called *American Expats in Paris*. Aiden found us and joined the conversation. He said he liked *Expats Paris* the most because it had a wider range of age groups and types of people. Claire, who, like me, was attending for the first time, asked him about these groups: "Do people make real relationships from this?" He thought about it and answered, "Yes, and no."

"This" was a *meetup*—a face-to-face social event organized using the web-based platform *meetup.com*, one of many geo-social networking sites that have flourished by enabling people to use online, location-based technologies to organize and access offline gatherings.² In the scene described above, about one hundred fifty members of the *meetup group Internationals in Paris* had gathered on a Tuesday evening for an after-work *apero*—a free-to-enter cocktail party that met weekly at a rotating series of bars. I was in attendance as a researcher, kicking off a few months in Paris where I planned to attend as many such events as possible in order to learn how a new generation of 'mobile professionals' was using location-based media to foster their social integration into a foreign city. Such digitally organized expat gatherings have been growing in popularity in cities around the world, in a phenomenon that is interesting not only because of how an online application facilitates the meeting of strangers in co-located space, but also in terms of who is attending the events, and why.

Workforce Globalization

Key to the transnational expansion of business enterprises is what human resource consultants refer to as 'workforce globalization,' focused on the recruitment and deployment of professionals in service sectors such as advertising, finance, engineering, and law. Despite the recent economic recession and waves of corresponding layoffs in service sectors, young professionals who are bi- or multilingual, willing to live abroad, and able to work successfully in multicultural teams are highly sought after to staff corporate operations in the world's most strategic and/or emergent global cities.³ To keep pace with this labor trend, the demographics of the expatriate workforce are changing, with reports indicating that "third country nationals are increasingly being deployed, as are more women" (Morley, Heraty, & Collings, 2006, p. 5) and that "younger, single assignees are replacing the traditional expatriate family demographic" ("The Changing Nature of Expatriate Demographics," 2011, para. 1), which saw high and expensive failure rates.

At the margins of her ethnography of North American and European expatriate communities in Indonesia, Anne-Melike Fechter (2007) noted the emergence of a new generation of mobile professionals that differed from the traditional family expatriates of her study. Among her observations of this new group, Fechter claimed they were most likely to be single or in non-cohabitating relationships, were constructing themselves as "professionals with an international outlook in terms of their career, place of residence, and social networks," and had "mobile lives, and what they consider 'cosmopolitan' tastes in terms of lifestyle, housing and socializing" (p. 10). She added that while traditional expats accepted a period abroad as a step toward advancement back home, the new generation was explicitly aiming to work abroad—not only to gain international work experience, "but because a 'global' lifestyle is seen as attractive and exciting" (p. 128). A multicultural and multinational assemblage, this new generation of expats sees themselves as having, according to Fechter, "an international outlook with regard to their professional and social lives, which is unencumbered by national boundaries" (p. 134). Others have also noticed this emerging mobile generation: Malewski (2005) coined them 'GenXpat'; Nowicka (2006) explained that for many, lives become characterized by "geographic promiscuity" (p. 20); and Favell (2008) found that among them, movement was valorized as "a permanent state of mind" (p. 104).

Geo-Social Media & Professional Migration

Social media have developed along with these mobility trends. A 2012 report by the global recruitment firm ESCP Europe & the Hydrogen Group (2012), called "Global Professionals on the Move," found that social media are important drivers in helping young people to take up foreign work opportunities, as missing loved ones is the number one reason people choose not to go abroad. It may seem obvious, but the ability to keep in touch with friends and family via platforms such as Facebook, Skype, Twitter, YouTube, iChat, WhatsApp, travel blogs, and other interactive media is found to be greatly enabling of these moves. However, in her book *GenXpat: The Young Professional's Guide to Making a Successful Life Abroad*, Margaret Malewski (2005) warned readers against relying too heavily on electronic communications. She wrote:

At some point, you will find that your work is under control but that you linger at the office because you do not have anyone to head home to and no set social life or hobbies to draw you away. During this phase, you may also find yourself relying heavily on the friends and family you left back home, mostly because you have not had the time to develop any relationships locally. Keep in mind, though, that no number of e-mails or phone calls to your close ones can replace real, live people who witness your everyday joys and sorrows, even if it is on the superficial level of a new relationship. (pp. 119–120)

Social entrepreneurs have responded to the need to provide lonely foreigners with a means to gather face-to-face with others who are in a similar situation—even if on the superficial level of a new relationship—by using digital platforms such as meetup.com, Internations.org, Facebook groups, and other websites to create mobile expat clubs.

Although previous expats were known for reconstructing national communities abroad, the new mobile professionals seek integration into an 'imagined global community,'⁴ as opposed to separation into a group of compatriots. People who move alone to foreign countries, and arrive knowing nobody, can now use these geo-social media to locate an almost daily array of cocktail parties, dinners, barbecues, and activities such as bowling, hikes, or movies, which promise to be populated by 'global' and 'like-minded' people. On the meetup.com website, subscribers create their own groups and organize events that can be easily found and joined for free using a search based on geographic location and interest keywords (e.g., expats, sports); with 205,557 groups spread across 182 countries, the company's promotional materials call it "the world's largest network of local groups."⁵ The scope of possibility for connectivity and

belonging imagined through these sites reaches its optimistic pinnacle on the homepage of Internations.org (which boasts volunteer-hosted events in 390 cities worldwide), where members are invited to 'make the world your home.'

I propose that the invitation to 'make the world your home' is indicative of something much larger than a group of wayfaring people taking advantage of a useful technology to find parties on the go. As a call to embrace a place-less lifestyle and borderless identity—a call to join a global community where the literal and figurative ability to cross borders is key to social mobility—'make the world your home' echoes a broader set of discourses and practices through which a new global, mobile class is emerging.

Although these mobilities are privileged by comparison with the global majority, this book explores professional migration as a particularly middle-class phenomenon. In the following chapters, I trace the production of this global class identity through online and offline ethnographic study of location-based social media use in two of the world's most prominent global cities, both known for large expatriate populations—Paris and Singapore—as well as in Bangalore, an emerging market city of strategic importance in global network architecture. While there are many differences in the details of digitally organized expat sociality in these three cities, they share certain characteristics that indicate a larger logic to the way that the increasing mobility of professional career paths is connected to new subjectivities and changing forms of community among a growing demographic. That logic is deeply tied to corporate and educational discourses that privilege living and thinking globally as tied to new forms of social mobility for the middle classes.

Outward Mobility as Upward Mobility

According to the International Organization for Migration (2010), the world is 'on the move,' with at least 214 million people currently accounted for as living outside their countries of birth. Globalization theorists have focused a great deal of attention on this increase in cross-border migrations—a phenomenon linked to electronic media both in terms of inspiring movement and enabling new forms of living, being, and identifying beyond an originating homeland (e.g., Appadurai, 1996; Mazzarella, 2004; Morley & Robins, 1995). However, despite the implications of post-national or other post-modern forms of belonging that underlie much of the research on media, migration, and identity,⁶ many studies continue to focus on groups defined by national or ethnic identities.⁷ Even research on transnationalism or hybridity often takes

a particular nation or ethnicity as a primary identification that is somehow altered through a combination of interaction with new cultural forms and the maintenance of links to a 'home' culture.⁸ In this context, questions of class have been taken as a relative given, predetermined through the setup of research language: with *migration* connoting movements of the poor, and *mobility* referring to a monolithic cadre of 'elites.' (Researchers have argued that these class-based differences are also codified in the categorization of migrants, such as 'immigrant' versus 'expatriate'.⁹)

In this book, I argue that a new mode of belonging, centered on the *global*, is emerging partly through the social spaces formed through professional migration and location-based media, and that a class analysis—particularly a 'middle-class analysis'²—provides a fruitful method for understanding this new mobile assemblage. The 'middle-class' focus is a departure from early scholarship on professional mobility and globalization, which portrayed the emergence of an "inward-focused, globally-engaged elite, which interacts with the local only as much as it serves its economic purposes" (Moore, 2005, p. 35).

A Spectrum of Elite Mobilities

In what is now a standard tome on the emergence of a global culture, Manuel Castells (1996) described a new stratum of mobile professionals whose "identity is not linked to any specific society but to membership of the managerial circles of the informational economy across a global cultural spectrum" (p. 447), referring to this set as the 'techno-financial-managerial elites.' Bauman (1998) similarly identified a class of 'exterritorial elites' who isolate themselves from others while living cosmopolitan lifestyles that include traveling first class or using private aircraft, as they and their finances cross borders with ease, and included businesspeople, 'culture managers,' and academics in this new mobile class. Certainly the focus on a growing mobile elite has been an important development, welcomed after a period that Caletrio (2012) referred to as the "veil of silence enshrouding the rich [that] so effectively contributed to their invisibility and impunity" (p. 136). Yet the new body of critical work on the global mobilities of the 'super rich'¹⁰ seems to attribute the same material resources and power wielded by these elites to almost any professional business traveler or migrant. Some efforts to outline the characteristics of a new 'transnational capitalist class' (TCC) (e.g., Robinson, 2004; Sklair, 2001) do include middle-class professions; however, Sklair referred to his TCC as a dominant class, which was "more or less in control of the processes of globalization" (p. 5) and Robinson

attributed excessive agency to this class, claiming members take advantage of flexible resources from corporations and states, in order to live and act "above any local territories and politics" (p. 47, emphasis added).¹¹

In recent years, in disciplines such as anthropology, geography, and sociology, a growing literature has begun to acknowledge the wide middle range of groups that make up the overall spectrum of global migration—people not driven by dire circumstances but rather by professional employment, lifestyle choices, educational opportunities, or other forms of mobility that are of relative privilege, but for whom 'elite' as an empirical category is questionable. Noting that migration and globalization studies are "more attuned to thinking about immigrants at the lower end of the labor market and then usually in terms of minority race, ethnicity or culture," Smith and Favell (2006) asserted the need to "open up opportunities for researchers seeking to resist the clichéd opposition of 'elite' and 'ethnic' migrants in a polarized global economy" (p. 25). As they pointed out,

The lives and experiences of these frequent-flying, fast-lane, global elites are better known from the editorial and marketing content of glossy magazines or corporate brochures than they are from solid social science research. (p. 2)

Asserting that 'real' elites "have routine access to international travel and experience through family connections and schooling—as well as a far better chance of success in their chosen career at home—without needing to propel themselves individually onto an international stage" (p. 9), Smith and Favell proposed that the so-called elites who make up the migrating professional workforce are in fact ambitious, college-educated people from the middle classes of industrialized countries who see the chance to work internationally as a gateway to opportunities they would not have at home. Conversely, professionals coming from less-developed countries are more likely to be from relatively elite backgrounds, as in poorer countries it is the upper classes that have access to the education and networks necessary to find international professional opportunities. In both cases, mobile careers seem mainly undertaken to pursue opportunities that may not be found in the home country, suggesting that professional migration becomes a tool for improving upon one's life rather than the chosen lifestyle of an established 'global elite.'

Thurlow and Jaworski (2006) pointed to the need to differentiate between 'elite'—a structural, social category that refers to those who wield instrumental, political power—and 'elitism' as a discursively achieved identity and subject position. They demonstrated how airlines use frequent flyer programs to create an illusion of distinction, exploiting and creating symbolic capital by

"appearing to identify [the] elite status [of the passenger] rather than to create it from scratch" (p. 130). Rather than an empirical fact, "eliteness is talked into existence and otherwise semiotically achieved" (p. 103). To problematize assumptions about who may be accounted for in a mobile fraction of global elites raises the question: Is it possible that the naming of global professionals and other privileged migrants as 'elites' does important ideological work, hailing middle-class subjects for whom, as noted by Cohen (2004), social mobility is "the material manifestation of the ideal of self-realization" (p. 139)? Does a mobile elites discourse that runs through advertising, films, journalism, and academic writing function to set a cosmopolitan bar for the middle classes?

Globalizing the Middle Class

The nature of class has changed in an era of neoliberalism and globalization. The development of modern middle classes (or class identities) was linked to the development of the nation: National investments in institutions based on ideals of democratic upward mobility—such as public education, health and financial systems—were focused on, and in the process helped to create, an idealized 'middle class' (Cohen, 2004). Through this symbiotic relationship, individuals saw their own fates tied to the success of the nation and vice versa. Contemporary researchers studying the 'globalizing middle classes' find similar results across multiple national contexts: As part of the liberalization of global markets, middle classes that were once the carriers of national dreams and aspirations re-imagine themselves as individuals detached from national issues and obligations (Koning, 2009; Liechty, 2002; Rutz & Balkan, 2009).

Although some of the participants encountered in the research sites of this book will not have migrated at all, or will have just one or two international experiences, others have purposefully undertaken mobile careers. As the following chapters demonstrate, however, a global middle-class identity is not produced solely through geographic mobility. Instead, to achieve success in this social world, one must have a mobile worldview, and have acquired the symbolic means to express it.

The 'Middle Class' as an Aspirational Social Space

My discussion of class in this book is based on understanding the middle class as a set of cultural practices rather than a specific empirical condition. This approach to understanding class does not imply that 'class' is something false or

that structural elements are not relevant but, as Liechty (2002) pointed out, it "allows one to see class as process, perpetually reacted and recreated by the bearers of class culture" (p. 23). Considering that the socio-economic definition of which income level puts a person into the middle class varies significantly from country to country, an approach that looks at class *performatively* becomes even more relevant when conceptualizing a *global* middle-class identity.

I've found Pierre Bourdieu's notion of multiple forms of capital¹² helpful for analyzing discourses and practices that emerge as mobile professionals tap into and help carve out social spaces to support their so-called global lifestyles. Arguing that middle-class mobility comes from "discovering the powers or forms of capital which are or can become efficient, like aces in a game of cards" (1987, p. 4), Bourdieu (1984) pointed to *cultural 'distinction'* as the primary mechanism through which those identifying with the middle class differentiate themselves from upper and lower classes. Bourdieu's middle classes make up for what they lack in economic capital to improve their positions in a social field by *strategically creating and leveraging 'cultural capital'* (status-bearing competencies that are accumulated as a consequence of experience with formal and informal institutions that yield familiarity with knowledge, practices, lifestyles, and customs considered valuable in a particular field of cultural production) and *'social capital'* (representing the kind of associations and networks to which a person is connected within a cultural field, with value derived from how linked one is and what those links represent in terms of status and opportunity).

These forms of capital are developed and employed discursively through academic, ideological, and cultural means, including through the production and consumption of media. By conceiving of 'the middle class' as an aspirational social space, I seek to understand how innovative media forms become sites for creating and negotiating the parameters around distinctive identities that can be mobilized to forge new routes for upward mobility in changing and competitive global contexts.

Media & Class

Today, just as national media helped to reproduce the national territory around a middle-class identity,¹³ relationships to global media and consumer culture help *to* constitute new global subjectivities. Rutz and Balkan (2009) noted how in connection with practices such as the integration of English into local dialects, consumption of foreign media and products, and assumption of new

habits associated with global culture (such as drinking lattés), people around the world have begun to imagine themselves as part of an emerging global middle class. In this context, 'globalizing' or 'denationalized' middle classes develop in articulation with global cultural and economic opportunities, such as to study or work abroad (Kochhar, 2004)—and just as cultural and social capital may be leveraged to access 'global' opportunities, such capital is then further developed through engaging in these pursuits. For example, among Cairo's new middle class, Koning (2009) found new attachments to a global culture expressed through cosmopolitan consumption practices and tastes as well as connection to international social networks. Studying Kathmandu, Liechty (2002) claimed that such practices are not simply side effects of middle-class formation, but are themselves constitutive of the emergence of middle-class identity. Describing how neoliberalism has led to a restructuring of the middle class in Istanbul, Rutz and Balkan found that

A key part of Istanbul's transformation into a globalizing city was the appearance of a new cosmopolitanism, reflected in an outward-looking new middle class that was entrepreneurial in spirit, quick to embrace the cultural ideology of consuming everything foreign, and engrossed in postmodern preoccupations with the destruction of old identities in the interest of creating new ones. (p. 25)

The search for new identities beyond the nation puts middle-class individuals at the forefront of developing new modes of belonging in a globalizing era.

Efforts to identify and understand these new forms of belonging have been central to scholarship in a globalizing era. While scholarship on globalizing middle classes, mentioned above, has largely been concerned with how new global subjectivities manifest within national territories, this book calls attention to an emergent exterritorial middle class, with global corporations and mobile, location-based communication technologies seen as significant institutions in its production. Considering how identities might be shifting in a postnational context, socio-linguists Machin and Van Leeuwen (2008) wrote of the need to develop a more complex view of identity that acknowledges how "at least two powerful 'regimes' of identity, driven by different needs and interests, operate side by side, that of nation-states and that of large global corporations" (p. 56). I argue that while the creation of national middle classes was key to the nation-building projects of modernity, the production of the global middle-class identity, through privileged mobilities, is fundamental, economically and culturally, to global corporate expansion.

Investing in a Global Workforce

For educated professionals, 'opportunity' is increasingly found through an engagement with the world beyond national borders; however, a growing mobile professional labor force is not simply a consequence of the global economy but is one of its constituting factors. An urgent narrative has been building in recent years among international business and human resources experts, demanding the need for greater investment in the creation of globally focused and capable professional 'talent.' The English-language narrative coming from the United States and United Kingdom expresses two overall concerns. First, from the U.S. point of view, too many U.S. Americans aren't cutting it as expatriates. Many publications point to the large rate of 'failure' as a key driver for creating new tactics around expat recruitment and development. For example, in the early years of large-scale globalization, Marquardt and Engel (1993) claimed that "both government and private studies agree that more than 30 percent of U.S. corporates overseas assignments fail" (p. 59); the situation had not improved much a decade later, when Briscoe and Schuler (2004) estimated that the average cost per failure was USD 500k to USD 1 million or more (p. 243). While European failure rates are lower, and corporations increasingly recruit from labor markets outside of North America and Europe, the need for educated employees who can work across borders and cultures (in multiple directions) is seen as paramount to global corporate expansion. Against this backdrop, the development of a nationally diverse, global professional workforce has been the site of massive investment by global corporations and nation-states alike and, as Saskia Sassen (2006a) pointed out, entry into this global labor market is increasingly institutionalized.

As corporations concentrate top-level managerial functions in a world-wide network of global cities, they rely on infrastructure and capital-friendly regulatory regimes at the level of the nation-state to create a 'global and hyper-mobile' environment (Sassen, 2006b, p. 301). Sassen (2006a) noted that along with investment in a "vast physical infrastructure of state-of-the-art office buildings, residential districts, airports, and hotels" (para. 9), nation-states facilitate the movement of people through the network by providing 'rights of admission.' At the level of global governance, mobility rights are built into trade agreements; for example, within the charters of the World Trade Organization and the North American Free Trade Agreement (among others) are provisions to allow professionals in service areas such as accounting, finance,

and the like to legally reside and work in member countries for a specified amount of time (Sassen, 2006a). States have also established new visas to expedite access for professionals working with global firms as part of labor permit schemes stratified by education and profession (construction workers and nannies may gain admittance on new visa schemes as well, but these are different visas, with different rules and rights, from those offered to global professionals). As is seen in later chapters, Singapore and India are among the states experimenting with visa classifications to attract educated foreigners, with Singapore fast-tracking work permits for graduates of the world's top universities, and India creating a pipeline for reverse migration aimed at attracting the children of past émigrés.

A New Role for International HR

On the corporate side, the function of International Human Resources Management (IHRM) is increasingly devoted to developing and mobilizing a global workforce, and a growing subfield is focused on advancing this process. Warning that corporate employees were spending too much time learning how to adapt culturally at the expense of doing their actual business, Becker (2000) noted that companies would find it "increasingly difficult to respond to differing languages, values and perceptions in a manner that ... achieves company goals" (p. xi). To prepare for these challenges in a context wherein the conduct of business has become a truly global activity, Briscoe and Schuler (2004) suggested a new role for international human resource departments, arguing that the IHRM function should shift from "an administrative orientation to one that places primary attention on the processes of internationalization"—a new direction, they said, which should include "selecting and preparing employees for and transferring them between the various country locations of the firm" (p. 32).

The need for guidance on best practices for managing this internationalization of the corporate workforce has been met with a host of white papers, reports, and books generating information on the subject—information always accompanied by quotes about the exigencies of the situation at hand. In a 2006 Price Waterhouse Coopers report on expatriate investment, a director of a global corporation affirmed that, "a mobile workforce is important in helping us meet our business goals" (p. 10), and in the 2006 volume *Global Staffing*, Scullion and Collings noted that "there is an increasing realization among academics and practitioners alike that people are the key to successfully competing in the

global economy" (p. 39, emphasis added). However, IHRM experts now agree that simply recognizing the value of a global workforce has not been enough. In her 2012 book, *Cultural Agility: Building a Pipeline of Successful Global Professionals*, Paula Caligiuri claimed that business leaders remained concerned about "a shortage of the human talent required to meet the demands of future global business needs" (p. 1). Considering that "ultimately, the organization depends on its global professionals to make it increasingly more competitive in the global economy," she argued that "the time is right for investing in cultural agility" (pp. 3–4). In case there was any question about what this investment in cultural agility might yield, Caligiuri added: "Global business growth is the way to win the future, and this growth depends on the strategic management of human talent" (p. 4, emphasis added). Along with many other authors in the burgeoning IHRM-advice genre, Caligiuri promised to outline just "how to implement the most critical talent management practices to attract, recruit, select, train, and develop a culturally agile workforce" (p. 7).

Educational institutions have gotten on board to prepare young people for the global business environment, with internationalized educational curricula and a sharp growth in study abroad programs (at the University of Denver, where I teach, approximately 70 percent of undergraduates now participate in some form of foreign study) as well as proliferating undergraduate majors and master's programs with a global focus. To train students for global careers, a number of university international exchange programs have moved beyond a focus on providing a 'cultural experience,' and now include work-study programs or internships that may lead to full-time employment offers later (see Amit, 2007). Furthermore, Amit noted, "an increasingly important segment of 'guest' workers, a status once identified with relatively disadvantaged migrants, is ... now ... comprised of middle-class Western youths who can at one and the same time be wooed as tourists and serve as cheap, compliant, and temporary labor" (p. 5); such experiences become early notches on an international résumé.

Travel as Work

Highlighting opportunities for exploration, adventure, and achieving a higher consciousness, corporations and educational institutions alike bill international experiences as endeavors serving both the career-minded and adventure-seeking person in a complete lifestyle package. Although the very meaning of the word 'travel' was originally connected to work (e.g., 'travail'),¹⁴

by the late nineteenth century travel had become a bourgeois leisure pursuit associated with self-cultivation through the consumption of foreign experience. For aspirational middle classes, "travel was pursued as a status asset, as well as an enjoyable and exciting experience" (Rojek, 1993, p. 120). As mass tourism increased and ceased to be unique, divisions arose between 'travel' and 'tourism,' and middle-class subjects sought distinction through more 'authentic' travel experiences (Munt, 1994).

Today, the mantle of authenticity is taken up with confidence by expatriates, who depict living and working abroad as the highest path to genuine engagement with foreign cultures. *Expatica*, a large worldwide (for-profit) organization that serves mainly as an information clearinghouse for current and future expatriates, hosts an annual "I Am Not a Tourist Fair" for foreigners residing in cities around the world, and my interviews with expats found this to be a common refrain. However, although portrayals of expatriation are embedded in lofty discourses of sophistication and refinement, the subsumption of travel into labor exemplified through the growing mobile professional workforce returns the notion of travel to its original basis in work.

The corporate construction of mobile, global subjects as open, flexible, adaptable selves who take pride in eschewing the stability of home points to an evolution in the instrumentalization of travel in which work and leisure are merged. As such, mobile professionals may be situated in what autonomist Marxists call the 'precarity of labor' (Lazaratto, 1996), referring to "the multiplication of precarious, unstable, insecure forms of living" emerging in the post-Fordist context and including well-paid service or information sector employees (Gill & Pratt, 2008, p. 3). The collapse of travel and career into the unstable, uprooted lifestyles of global professionals is emblematic of the way in which precarious or immaterial labor becomes 'embodied experience.' It is by acknowledging the embodiment of mobile subjects that we can begin to flesh out the contours of an emerging middle class.

Embodied Mobility

A simple Google Image search for 'expatriate' yields dozens of images that depict expats very much as Bauman's (2000) 'kinetic elites'—the seamless traversing of geographic and geopolitical space is represented symbolically through composite graphics of airplanes, airports, maps, flag clusters, and various dash-and-arrow

vectors to demonstrate the complete fluidity and 'mastery of the globe' they supposedly embody. Yet, while mobile professionals with fast-lane passports may indeed flow across borders more smoothly than those not endowed with global capitalism's green light, research into the 'everyday lives' of transnational subjects is beginning to contest the supposed ease with which they slip from one context into another, and to acknowledge a range of other practical and emotional challenges that confront these migrants on the ground (Ho, 2009, p. 1). Key to this focus is an increasing awareness of mobility as an *embodied* experience. As Bude and Dürschmidt (2010) claimed, awareness of the 'body' has been largely missing from much of the scholarship on global mobility, which has focused heavily on the concept of 'flows' at the expense of attending to the embodied experiences of movement across borders.

Transnationals are far from being a monolithic group knit together by their common mobility. Yeoh and Willis (2005) pointed out the need to remember that transnational professionals are "embodied bearers of culture, ethnicity, class or gender" (p. 270), and the mobility and access to space afforded them is mediated by specific historical, political, and cultural contexts.¹⁵ In this vein, some scholars have moved away from a macro view of transnational mobility as occurring in a hyper-mobile 'space of flows' and begun to be concerned with embodiment as it relates to "the emplacement of mobile subjects" and the "historically mediated context in which transnational practices take place" (Smith, 2005, pp. 237–238, emphasis in original). Such studies highlight the "continued significance of place and locality while eschewing narratives of a frictionless world" (Ho, 2009, p. 2, in Conradson & Latham, 2005).

This attention to multiple forms of and experiences with movement occurs in relation to a new 'mobilities paradigm' dedicated to theorizing the "social world" as "a wide array of economic, social and political practices, infrastructures and ideologies that all involve, entail, or curtail various kinds of movement of people, or ideas, or information or objects" (Urry, 2007, p. 18). Wide ranging from the macro to micro, and encompassing virtual, geographic, and symbolic mobility, the new paradigm has gathered interest from scholars in diverse disciplines as a useful lens for interpreting life in an era of increasing use of mobile and networked technologies, expanding personal and business networks, and growth in short-distance and long-distance travel and migration. However, as Sheller and Urry (2006) pointed out in an article introducing the new paradigm, "a research agenda addressing mobilities need not embrace them as a supposed form of freedom or liberation from space and

place” (p. 210), nor as reason to neglect attention to the “corporeal body as an affective vehicle through which we sense place and movement” (p. 216).

Mobility and Place

The more people move and travel, transporting and maintaining connections to a series of places through relationships, memories, knowledge, cultural practices, and so on, the more *places* have become understood as stretching beyond geographic sites. Although Massey (1994, p. 162) pointed out that the boundaries of place have always been constituted by social relations more than postal codes, her work has demonstrated that those relations are increasingly stretched out over space and, as such, “less and less of these relations are contained within the place itself.” Massey suggested that, rather than “thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings” (p. 154). Appadurai (1996) described such spaces as *translocalities*.

As places have become increasingly networked or translocal, forms of communication are imagined as both a contaminant and a corrective in relation to the meanings associated with them. On the one hand, one set of perspectives describes the proliferation of *non-place* (Augé, 1995), as images and practices are deployed across multiple contexts, becoming less identified with the particularities and histories of any certain site; through living and traveling in spaces that are dis-embedded from historically situated geographic and social territories, Tomlinson (1999) claimed people may experience a sense of *detritorialization*. On the other hand, as noted by Caldas-Coulthard and Ledema (2008), in a deterritorialized context, communication also becomes crucial for creating and recreating a sense of place.¹⁶ Through recurring practices of communication and social engagement, the production of new meanings and feelings of belonging and attachment to a place may occur. This reterritorialization, enabling one to become ‘at home’ in a globalizing environment, is understood to develop as the subject finds oneself in contact with others who share similar understandings—as Augé notes (citing Descombes, 1987), it is about finding comfort in “the ability to make oneself understood without too much difficulty, and to follow the reasoning of others without the need for long explanations” (1995, p. 108).

Digital Place-Making

Media practices play an important role in creating this rhetorical sense of place¹⁷ and, in fact, scholars increasingly acknowledge that meaningful places may even be virtual ones. Moores and Merykova (2009) emphasized the importance of everyday media routines for place-making, noting how, “in the course of everyday living, people might routinely inhabit media environments ... as they simultaneously inhabit physical environments” (p. 316). Considering online games, Golub (2010) highlighted the role of relationships in the place-making process, arguing that while progress made in the realism of online worlds certainly improves user experiences, what makes these worlds seem like ‘real’ places is that point at which they become meaningful to participants through undertaking projects with others. Plunkett (2011) contended that if a virtual environment provides a meaningful experience, participants may develop a sense of place in, and place attachment to, that online world.

Parallel to this strand of thinking is a growing awareness of the interrelation between online and offline environments in meaning making. A range of studies supports the notion that online technologies are embedded in and shaped by larger social contexts,¹⁸ and a growing seamlessness of interrelations between digital and face-to-face communication suggests that the relationship between online and offline sociality will become increasingly taken for granted (Andersson, 2012). In fact, according to Andersson, media should be seen not only as *used* within everyday territories but also as playing a “vital role in the constitution of the territories, be it the home, or the city one resides in” (p. 12).¹⁹ Jansson (2009) identified this interrelation between space, place, and social relations as the space-communication nexus; to examine this nexus, he said, we should analyze “how space produces communication and how communication produces space” (p. 308).

These strands of thinking on place (that places are constituted through social relations and communication, combining on- and offline practices) create a conceptual starting-point for examining how the series of digital practices explored here facilitate place-making processes through a hybrid of online and face-to-face communication. For the subjects of this book, the importance of the ‘face-to-face’ in this process cannot be overstated; for, as much as transnational mobility has been enabled and, arguably, made

emotionally easier by developments in new communication technologies (and thus an ability to maintain connection to people and places across distance), people also feel an acute need for what Conradson and Latham (2007) call 'emplaced encounters'—or, an actual meeting of bodies in co-located places. The importance of physical contact builds on Amin and Thrift's (2002, p. 30) treatise on contemporary urban environments, in which they portray places "not so much as enduring sites but as moments of encounter." Putting 'the encounter' at the heart of the definition of place is important to the context of this book, as it highlights how places may be ad hoc and ephemeral without losing their meaning. While such encounters may be fleeting, the sense of place created is no less real to the mobile subjects who rely on them for a feeling of belonging.

Mobile Methodologies

To a large extent, the story of globalization is a story of movements across previously established borders, but although scholars have detected a growing 'global consciousness' (Robertson, 1992) in relation to cross-border communication and migrations, attempts to imagine new identities and spaces as 'global' have tended not to be empirically based and have been criticized for their purely conceptual nature.²⁰ Seeking to produce empirical understandings of meaning making and sociality at a global and/or virtual level, researchers have debated how to conduct ethnographic research that might achieve the level of detail and description traditionally associated with the geographically situated site. An early model for extending research beyond the single site came from George Marcus (1995), who suggested scholars "examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time/space" (p. 96). By following cultural processes beyond any one geographic locale, Marcus argued, researchers could try to balance the need to examine and appreciate empirical detail at a local level with an awareness of how subjects and objects are imbricated in larger macro/global processes. More recently, Büscher, Urry, and Witchger (2011) advised that researchers allow themselves to "move with and be moved by subjects" (p. 7). Their edited collection on 'mobile methods' includes researchers who observe the movements of people and those who 'walk with' subjects in a way that "involves sustained engagement within their worldview" (Ingold, 2004; Ingold & Vergunst, 2008, in Büscher et al., 2011, p. 8); additional mobile methods include studies of

virtual mobility through analysis of texts, blogs, emails, and the like as well as the study of the 'hybrid systems' that extend places through networks (p. 12).

These developing mobile frameworks became influential in the evolution of this book, which began as a case study in Paris, and slowly expanded to additional cities as I realized the benefit to situating the subject and site into a broader, networked global context. By the time the research was complete, I had taken a subject, 'mobile professionals,' and a cultural object, 'geo-social media for expats,' and followed them in various guises from Paris to Singapore to Bangalore.

Before and after each period of fieldwork, I spent months keeping up with online interactions between group organizers and their members. To organize my observations of online interaction, I drew from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which attends to the "structures, strategies or other properties of text, talk, verbal interaction or communicative events" that play a role in "(re)production and challenge of dominance" (Van Dijk, 1993, pp. 249–250). Fairclough (2000) emphasized that this process should integrate social theory so that social practices and their relationship to social structures can be examined, and pointed out that bringing social theory to the study of 'texts' means that social practice is seen as a 'practice of production' that leads to specific local relationships. CDA methods require consideration of the structures of interfaces in addition to the content embedded within them, and this guided my method of analysis. For example, I evaluate how, on meetup.com, organizer-produced template categories and texts relate to member performances according to category terms utilized, self- and group descriptions, range of experiences discussed, and other methods of presentation of self- and group identities. These performances are considered to illustrate (and constitute) groups' dominant social codes.

To reflect how technologies are instrumental in the creation of new practices, spaces, and collective identities among an emerging mobile demographic, I've been guided by Deleuze's point in *Postscript on the Societies of Control* that machines don't determine different types of society, but that they do "express those social forms capable of generating them and using them" (1992, p. 6). Consideration of such social forms has been central to my methodology, and throughout the chapters ethnographic details are interpreted against a broader societal background. For example, to connect the geo-social media practices of expats to larger macro/global phenomena, I've pointed to the internationalization of education curricula, and how expats recount leveraging educational exchanges to launch their global careers, and draw from an archive of consultancy and analyst-produced

texts about corporate workforce globalization. By considering corporate discourses and practices centered on creating a mobile professional workforce, alongside the emergence of a network of mobile yet location-based expat clubs, these clubs can be seen as much more than an interesting consequence of globalization.

Situating a Global Project

This research is situated in the new ethnographic turn that encouraged researchers to conduct 'reflexive anthropology' that attempts to break down barriers between scholar and subject, both by studying scenes in which the researcher can be a part²¹ and by writing in a way that makes explicit how fieldwork is conducted (Stuka & Robben, 2007). The 'new ethnography' aims to flexibly move among many sites and cultures, and is used to explore subjectivities and experiences within which the researcher is also situated rather than assuming a privileged spectatorship.

Throughout the book, I situate myself, somewhat auto-ethnographically, as a mobile researcher, and include many reflections of my experiences entering and participating in the field. I particularly highlight the moments where my own participation and related challenges lead to new understandings and awareness that inform the research. The book itself becomes a narrative that integrates my own reflections and observations with those of other participants—shared through interactions ranging from casual conversation to long, formal interviews. It must be recognized that the narrative I weave, like all ethnographic writing, represents piecing together, translating, and including and excluding the words, meanings, and realities of others; in this way it might be seen, as Clifford and Marcus (1986) argue, as 'true fiction' (p. 7). ✓

Research Context

Paris and Singapore consistently rank in the 'top five' in a variety of global city indexes, and both are known for large, diverse, and thriving expat communities, while Bangalore, as a global hub for information technology research, development, and labor, is an up-and-comer among global cities. The work that follows is based on combined online and offline ethnographic research²² conducted in Paris during a three-month period in the fall of 2008 with multiple return visits to Paris between 2009 and 2012, as well as three weeks in Singapore in December 2011 and two weeks in Bangalore in June 2014.

Additionally, from 2009 to 2011, I was an expatriate in Madrid, Spain, where I worked as a professor at Saint Louis University's Madrid campus. While I did not conduct research on expat groups in Madrid, I did join a French language meetup group and attended occasional *Interrations* events; I've certainly found myself drawing from my own experiences as a mobile professional to validate my interpretations here. Considering that I spent much more time in Paris than the other two sites, I cannot make precise comparisons between Paris, Singapore, and Bangalore. However, because the research was meant to interrogate how geo-social media might support sociality in a mobile context, even my brief forays into the latter countries produced useful insights, allowed me to ask new questions of how similar practices worked in disparate contexts, and helped to discern similarities and differences across various expat scenes.

In each site studied, I was one of many foreigners passing through the city for a limited time as a part of my career trajectory—in my case, in order to gather information for research. Important among the competencies for gaining access was first and foremost my comfort among the demographic that I was studying. Although I did not come from the upper-class background that I initially assumed the rest of the group did, I had traveled and lived abroad previously, and thus could understand a variety of cosmopolitan references that dotted conversations as well as insert my own. Although in some ways I too was a 'foreign professional,' I did not try to blend in at the expense of openness about my intentions and position as researcher. However, whenever a person undertakes to write the stories of others, and when the objective at hand is to 'get' that story, a level of vulnerability may emerge even if the participant is willing and cannot be politically, economically, or physically harmed by the research. Nicole Constable (2003), in her ethnography of online penal services for U.S. American men and Asian women, discussed the ethical dilemma that arises around the fuzzy line of whether she is a researcher or friend to people she has interviewed, corresponded with, and participated in online forum discussions with during her study. When an issue comes up on an online forum around whether or not she should be invited to attend a private face-to-face gathering of group members, and turns into a controversial debate, she posts the following message to the group:

Research and friendship are NOT necessarily incompatible! ... as I have become friends with people I have worked with in the past, it has created an even stronger sense of responsibility to represent them fairly... Yes, I'd be there as a researcher, but I am other things as well!! (p. 54)

One difference between my project and Constable's is that her presence was not intertwined with the *raison d'être* of the group. In my case, I met people at social gatherings for foreigners where I, too, was a foreigner. There were many days in which if I hadn't gone to a meetup I would not have spoken face-to-face with anyone outside of consumption interactions with taxi drivers, waiters, or retail clerks. Although acting as researcher, I had my lonely days and was open to new friendships or at least friendly conversations. Also, compared with the somewhat superficial level of conversation that could occur at events, the long one-on-one conversations of interviews could feel rather intimate. Perhaps a bond often develops through the interview process, but I believe the effect was magnified here in that the interviews mostly involved people who were lacking in face-to-face emotional support. Sometimes people I interviewed would later email or call, inviting me to meet on another occasion for a coffee or drink, and this carried a bit of a dilemma. When was I working and when was I socializing? I dealt with this issue by directing social connections made through the research back into the research field. So, for example, if someone I had interviewed asked me whether I wanted to hang out next week, I would say: "I'm going to X meetup on Tuesday—let's meet there." In fact, I learned that this was a way in which many people used the meetups. Habitual attendees, after arriving alone a few times, tended to develop a circle of 'meetup friends' with whom they coordinated which events to attend each week.

During my fieldwork in both Singapore and Bangalore, I had to admit to myself that I felt more comfortable in the groups where more participants, regardless of ethnicity or nationality, had come from or spent time in Europe or the Americas. This feeling of being drawn to participants with more Western cultural capital cannot help but have affected my observations, which is somewhat challenging considering that the very subject of study relates to an assessment of spaces and practices that purport to be 'global.' I remain heedful of the possibility that, despite a theoretical understanding of the problems with such thinking, I may find myself seeing 'the global' from a Eurocentric or U.S.-focused lens; I make every attempt to be reflexive about these limitations. While making concerted efforts to examine the spaces and practices of this study in their own right, as much as possible away from an inclination to see globalization as 'Westernization,' ultimately acknowledging my own positioning and attempting to keep it in mind throughout the process of writing and interpreting is important to this effort. However, Nagar and Geiger (2007) have pointed out that 'reflexivity'—where the researcher simply admits to

her own positionality among research participants—is not enough. In addition to positioning oneself, they argued, it is important to explicitly discuss "the economic, political and institutional processes and structures that provide the context for the fieldwork encounter and shape its effects" (p. 272). Each of the chapters provides an overview of this context alongside a situated account of the chapter's methods.

In the following chapters, through a detailed qualitative and participatory account of how location-based media are used by a diverse group of expats in Paris, Singapore, and Bangalore, I explore how techno-social practices are taken up by an emerging mobile, global middle class. Drawing from combined online and offline research in three global cities, I use this book to critically re-examine concepts of place, identity, class, and community in a changing context of digital media, mobility, and globalization.

Chapter Summaries

The first two chapters of this book are focused on digital expat clubs in Paris, with chapter 1 introducing the on- and offline sites and practices of the Paris-based research, as well as the context of a 'global Paris' as a site of friction for foreigners who live out the city's tensions between local and global ambitions. Using literature from the 'spatial turn' in media studies, which supports conceiving of emplaced encounters in the expat meetup scenes as mutually constituted by online and offline discourse and routines, I suggest geo-social media act as mobile 'emplacement platforms' that enable users to create and access global cities on a local level. Such platforms are particularly suited to the lifestyles of the mobile professionals I met through this research, as many of them live permanently or semi-permanently in what Sloterdijk (in Caldas-Coulthard & Iedema, 2008) called 'transition space,' residing outside of their home countries but with no conscious plans to settle down permanently in their current city of residence. While some have relocated for a short period with plans to return home after fulfilling a particular experience, many more are in Paris for a longer-term or open-ended stay with aspirations of going to yet another foreign city in their next move. Within this state of transience, they must make concerted efforts to create, or access, connections to a local social network. Constituted online but manifest in physical sites around the city, these interactive events produce a mobile yet consistent sense of place to which users may belong. The chapter demonstrates how discourses and routines of meeting up contribute to the production of a connection to

Paris, through what I call 'digital place-making,' which occurs through three intersecting means: first, creating a sense of belonging to an 'international community' in Paris; second, allowing participants to feel like 'locals,' which is crucial to that belonging; and third, routine practices of meeting up facilitate the development of 'mobile localities' that may be extended elsewhere. A following section argues that the new agencies afforded by this mobile, digital place-making are particularly important for women, who represent a growing force in professional migration. By highlighting how participants may use digital media to create a sense of belonging to an 'international community' extendable across a series of local places, the chapter diverges from earlier studies that have focused on how migrants use media to maintain connections to a 'homeland' or to reconstitute the home abroad.

Successfully building a global lifestyle entails not only living and working abroad, but also demands developing a repertoire of international experiences, associations, knowledge, and taste; as participants jockey to prove their global qualifications, they create new levels of distinction and exclusion. In chapter 2, using a Bourdieu-inspired framework, I trace how a range of new middle-class competencies based on cultural and social capital in the form of the 'authentically global' are acquired, wielded, and reproduced in the network of global expat meetups. A series of participant biographical sketches illustrates the wide range of member backgrounds and the varied circumstances that brought participants to Paris, and demonstrates that while mobility in and of itself is an important source of 'cultural capital,' it should not be automatically equated with elitism and particularly not structural economic elitism. Through analysis of online and offline participation, I demonstrate how categories of belonging, such as being an *international person* and being *globally minded*, are developed and reproduced, creating valuable capital for gain within a 'global corporate' personal and professional environment. Expat discourses of *global mindedness* are considered alongside human resources publications advising corporations on how to create and mobilize a globally minded workforce.

To trace how the rhetoric and practices of meeting up may extend to another global city, I traveled to Singapore in 2011 to spend three weeks attending expat events. There I found continuities and differences, both of which could be explained in articulation with local and global economic and social conditions. In chapter 3, I describe a highly stratified expat meetup scene, and situate it in the particular context of an Asian city-state with ambitions to be a major global city that links East and West, and where tensions simmer between 'cosmopolitans' and 'heartlanders'—a term used by the

government to refer to those who are taxed with representing what is locally particular about Singapore while supporting the globalizing aspirations of their cosmopolitan compatriots. To synthesize differences in Paris and Singapore, I draw from a global city report by the Economist Intelligence Unit (2012) that contains a section called 'Rebalancing West and East: Legacy Versus Growth'; 'legacy' underscores the cultural-historical attractiveness of European cities while for the entrepreneurial 'growth' set, the future is eastward. Through this frame, I contend that while Paris represents a site of 'arrival' where expats must prove their international credentials, Singapore offers a launching pad for a new generation of global pioneers (including local Singaporeans) where expats must simply demonstrate their *potential* as global. These differences are considered for their relation to the positioning and class mobility of those rising through a global middle class.

In chapter 4, understandings of privileged mobilities are reconfigured through a *gender-specific study* of professional migration in an emerging global city where societal norms have traditionally governed women's presence, behavior, and dress in public space. In this chapter, I discuss the frictions faced by single expatriate women as they negotiate life in Bangalore, a city in which getting around safely and comfortably in public is the central feature of their daily lives. In addition to digitally located expat clubs, other basic forms of location-based media—such as Google Maps—prove crucial to their ability to construct their lives in India. The ability to participate in the city on one's own terms becomes a marker to distinguish this fraction of the expatriate class from the traditional family expats and their corporate-sponsored lifestyles. Yet, once again corporate planning precedes or is at the very least maintaining pace with these trends, and in this chapter I consider the women's efforts to use mobile media to access the Bangalore expat labor market alongside corporate studies finding that young women make the 'ideal expats.' The concluding chapter treats ethnographic data from Paris, Singapore, and Bangalore as part of a greater whole, and asks what the impacts might be on expressions and experiences of 'community' for people undertaking mobile lives. In the context of media and migration, *community* as a concept has been dispersed and virtually reimaged, and *networked communications* are seen as conduits for building and maintaining a community feeling. However, considering dominant features of the expat meetups—such as mobility, anonymity, individualization, transience, and, very important, the lack of commitment required—I argue the offline communities created using these online tools in many ways mirror the characteristics and contain logics that

have been noted of *virtual* communities. I connect the utility of such community forms to corporate labor practices, including frequent business travel and relocation, work schedules that extend beyond local time zones to accommodate global work teams, and the expectation that 'global professionals' will develop an ability to work effectively in multicultural environments and build personal networks of trust that can be leveraged for professional gain. The book ends with a discussion of what transnational corporate priorities and investments in fostering mobile subjectivities might suggest about belonging and citizenship in the future. What is in store for this emerging middle class as mobility becomes a 'new normal'?

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A PORTAL TO PARIS

For the deterritorialized self, social coherence is pursued through more and more intense and dynamic forms of communication, seeking to create and recreate a sense of interactive place, however temporary.

—Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard and Rick Ledema, *Identity Trouble*, 2008, p. 2

I have some friends from 'Internationals' and so through that I felt more connected, maybe, to Paris.

—Kara, from Cyprus

Paris, Fall 2008—After just a couple weeks of fieldwork, I began to get the hang of life in a meetup world. Before traveling to France, I'd spent months studying online aspects of the site: reading the friendly email invitations from group organizers, skimming the chaty notes written by individuals alongside their event RSVPs, checking out the profiles of new members, and pouring through event photos uploaded after each gathering. I definitely developed a feel for the character of the groups through these lurking activities but, until I started to attend the actual events, those features seemed the insider-banter of a club of which I was an outsider. Once I started participating in person, virtual and physical elements began to converge into something more broadly resembling a community, of which I increasingly felt myself a part.

Shifting into the reality of participation entailed a process of orientation and acclimation. Arrival at each new venue invariably involved multiple

wrong turns with quick stops to squint at a pocket-map book, illuminated by the dim light of my flip-phone, finally arriving with anxious trepidation, yet, admittedly, standing uncomfortably alone only briefly before being integrated into a conversation by hospitable people, some of whom I was starting to recognize. By the beginning of the second month in the field, most of the venues were repeating, and I could comfortably arrive and move through the scene as someone who belonged.

One night, I'd been at an *Internationals in Paris* 'apéro' for about a half an hour when a French friend who had no connection to the research called to see if I'd like to have dinner. I told him I was at a meetup in Alcazar, a bar near the Odéon metro stop; he said he knew the place and that he'd stop by. Within minutes of his arrival, I knew I had made a mistake. Here in his own city, where he'd lived all his life, my friend suddenly seemed like a fish out of water. It wasn't as if there were no French people at the party—on the contrary, there were quite a few—and it wasn't as if my friend didn't have the social graces to speak comfortably and casually with strangers; his career involved plenty of cocktail parties and occasions for networking. He was even fluent in English. But he seemed confounded by the notion that he was supposed to interact directly with the others at this bar. I introduced him to a young German businessman I had been speaking with, but he was awkward and formal and killed the conversation; I tried to get him into other conversations with people around us but he was so closed off that I soon gave up. "Do you want to go somewhere else?" I finally asked, and his relief was palpable; we were out the door almost immediately. When I wrote about the experience in my notes later that night, I was really disappointed, thinking I'd wasted an evening of data gathering by having to leave early. However, as with so many research scenarios, this one took on new meaning later as I reflected on how unusual it was that a hundred or more people who were mostly foreigners and mostly strangers to each other could touch down in this Parisian bar and make it their own in a way that a 'local' might drop by and feel out of place. The meetup members had created their own 'place' in Paris by imparting on that locale, on that night, their own set of rules for communication and behavior. In an interview with me, the founder of *Expats Paris* pointed out the obvious simplicity yet uniqueness to this social formula:

The irony is if you—particularly within French culture—if you just walked into a bar and started talking to people, you'd be treated like the biggest psycho in the world. But here, you sign up and you go, and it's like, this is your free ticket to just talk to everyone around you.

This manner of combining online and offline discourse and practices to mark out the group's territory in Paris, to create a local place of its own, is at the heart of the innovation occurring as digital technologies intersect with new mobile professional lifestyles.

In this chapter, I introduce some of this book's research 'sites' through a reflection on meetups as tools for place-making. As noted by Caldas-Coulthard and Ledema (2008) at the beginning of the chapter, in a deterritorialized context, communication becomes crucial for creating and recreating a sense of place. Drawing from conceptions of place as created through communication norms and interactions, I explore how online and offline communication practices might work to create a sense of place extendable across multiple locations, where a 'sense of place' refers to "an individual's ability to experience feelings of attachment to particular settings" (Stokowski, 2002, p. 368). The chapter then considers the implications such mobile, digital place-making might have for the subjects of this research—people whose careers lead them to travel or relocate to new places, often on their own, and in some cases rather frequently.

I first develop the contextual backdrop with an overview of Paris's contemporary position as a global city, and discuss barriers to the social integration of expatriates, related to two issues that challenge the creation of stable local connections: perceptions of Paris as a closed society, and the temporary nature of expat stays. Then, building on literature discussed in the introductory chapter, which discussed new ways of understanding the characteristics and making of 'place,' I show how geo-social technologies such as meetup.com act as mobile platforms for emplacement into local environments, and consider implications of this new form of 'digital place-making' for expats.

Context: Global Paris

Paris has long been a cosmopolitan crossroads for people of many backgrounds. Arriving in 1750, Casanova claimed that "France was the home of foreigners" (1997, p. 121), and in 1883, the England-based *Pall Mall Gazette* analyzed census returns to find that "though the population of Paris has increased since the last statistics were published, the increase has chiefly consisted in the foreign residents" (Cosmopolitan Paris, 1883). Today, legal foreign residents make up 14 percent of the city's population (a statistic that doesn't count those who have taken French citizenship), and although 30 percent of foreigners living in the city are from European Union member states,

Paris's history as a former colonial metropole, combined with its important position in a global circuit of capital, services, and labor, has drawn many migrants from beyond the borders of Europe. Currently, just over a quarter of Paris's counted foreign residents are North Africans or Turks, and almost half are from beyond the EU, North Africa or Turkey (*Matric de Paris*, 2012). Yet despite its cosmopolitan positioning, Paris has long been a site of friction between an imagined authentic 'inside' and its constituting outside,² and such tensions live on today between the city's local and global ambitions.

Tensions Between Inside and Outside

The city's administration benefits from situating Paris as a global, rather than simply French, capital. The English-language version of the *Matric de Paris* website consists of links such as 'Foreign Residents,' 'A Cosmopolitan City,' and 'Paris, a city with an international profile,' the latter linking to a page listing international cultural and research exchanges as well as to information on multiple global alliances in which Paris plays a key role. For example, the United Cities and Local Governments organization (UCLG) was founded in Paris in 2004 and is focused on linking cities around the world based on shared interests (including those of their urban 'citizens') outside of national frameworks, and even has representation at the United Nations. This organization and other endeavors to create an integrated network of global urbanities are indicative of important economic and political changes that have occurred in recent decades, which have in some ways distanced cities from their national cohorts and increased ties to an interconnected web of 'global cities.'

Today, Paris ranks third in the world for the number of headquarters of major global corporations (Kearney, 2012) and is among the 'top four' global cities, alternating with Tokyo and Singapore for the third position in a variety of indexes;³ this is an important distinction, considering that for densely located European cities, the race for global city status is also a competition for foreign investment.⁴ In many indexes, Paris leads categories related to its 'appeal,' for example, by winning top honors for "Image and Attractiveness" in the Urban Land Institute's Global City Index ("ULI Launches Global City Index Report," 2008). However, the designed environment of the city and its contribution to quality of life are contested in ways that illuminate tensions around Paris's goal of globalism with a nationalistic and protectionist character that pervades French culture.

One of the first ways these tensions materialize is in the commercial backdrop of Paris proper. Across the urban landscape, Starbucks coffee shops filled with a mix of French and foreign customers are nestled among the more traditional café-bars with their tobacco counters and perennial clientele of retired gentlemen. It's not simply a generational divide—many younger Parisians still refuse to enter a Starbucks, seeing it as a crass symbol of globalization and U.S.-style capitalism. In recent years, the socialist local government tried to make a stand regarding the encroachment of global chains when it banned the giant Swedish clothing company H&M from opening a 'megastore' on the Champs-Élysées; former deputy mayor François Lebel warned it would be the first of many attempts to slow the banalization and over-commercialization of the avenue (Sciolino, 2007). Yet, following two years of fighting against a staunch opposition, H&M opened its 31,000-square-foot store in 2010, after winning permission from France's highest court (Sage, 2010).

More than 2 million residents live within the 41-square-mile city limits, with another 8.5 million people in the suburbs, and planning for the future is at an important crossroads. The former French president Nicolas Sarkozy made "reshaping Paris for the twenty-first century" one of his priorities, but just how to do this became a political battle with two separate proposals: one from the conservative party's Sarkozy, who wanted to create a 'Greater Paris,' and another from the city's former socialist mayor, Bertrand Delanoë, who spoke of a 'Paris Métropole' ("London and Paris," 2008, p. 2). Sarkozy created a ministerial position dedicated to soliciting architectural and city planning visions for making Paris a "global city, open and dynamic, attractive, a creator of wealth and jobs"—a move that was pronounced as imperative for future economic viability: "As the world's major cities 'hunt to attract the best,' the fight to draw investors is especially fierce within Europe, where workers and capital can move easily from one country to the next" ("Paris Looks Beyond," 2008, p. 1). Delanoë, on the other hand, was more focused on promoting projects to improve the quality of life for city residents, and was "less supportive of projects that flaunt the vitality of corporations and financial institutions eager to pitch towering office buildings inside Paris" (Vienné, 2008, p. 2). Perhaps the argument comes down to whether Paris can maintain global city status while holding on to the *je ne sais quoi* that defines its local particularity. In hailing the 'superiority' of London over Paris, the *Economist* cited London's openness to change and outside influences as that city's secret ingredient: "These days, there is nothing particularly British about London, bar its tolerance of chaos.

It has embraced globalization to become an international city, while Paris has remained unapologetically French" ("London and Paris," 2008, p. 2).

Indeed, while the Parisian government may seek to extend beyond the city's French-ness to assert leadership in a political, economic, and cultural sphere of global cities, some foreign-born residents and citizens claim a counter-reality: societal marginalization in the face of a deeply entrenched protectiveness around local identity.⁵ One of the biggest ironies noted is the long-celebrated discourse of universalism set against the Parisians' reputation for disdainng outsiders. It is one of the great clichés of European travel stories to hear that the French people were rude, and the Internet is full of articles and blogs with advice on how to avoid the ire of Parisians (suggestions, not surprisingly, include learning the language and customs) and how to cope with the scowls and short retorts that may be offered in response to requests for a menu in English or directions to the Louvre. Longtime resident Roman Polanski famously put it, "In Paris, one is always reminded of being a foreigner. If you park your car wrong, it is not the fact that it's on the sidewalk that matters, but the fact that you speak with an accent" (in Leaming, 1982).

Imprints of an Expatriate Past

Cosmopolitan and artistic expats have longed carved out places of their own in Paris, and the city is a global capital of expatriate living. Indeed, Paris's collective memory is imprinted with a multitude of settings made famous by foreigners. This is exemplified by the movie *Midnight in Paris*, Woody Allen's 2011 love letter to the city, which illustrates how the legacies of Paris's most famous foreign residents extend beyond a trove of creative works, and have eventually become enshrined as a place, set in time. In the film, which stars a collection of sites and characters made famous by the generation of foreign artists and writers living in Paris during the mid-war period, the hero's fantasies grant him passage into a 1920s nightlife scene that Allen presents as a vestige of not only his protagonist's imagination, but also of the imaginations of everyone enamored by early twentieth-century Western culture.

The character of this renown is exemplary of how the romance of a city and a desire to consume it are shaped by connections (real or imagined) to particular places. For example, today, visitors seeking to connect to the place-based histories of Paris do so by walking down certain streets or sipping coffee or scotch in this square or that bar: Ernest Hemingway wrote at La Closerie des Lilas and ate *pommes à l'huile* at the Brasserie Lipp; Pablo Picasso (and

Vincent van Gogh before him) frequented La Bonne Franquette in the Montmartre; Café de la Paix was one of Josephine Baker's favorite haunts. In fact, an entire genre of walking tours, guidebooks, and blogs has developed to connect people to the places that radiate Paris's artistic expatriate past, weaving a well-worn trail along which visitors can place themselves within a scene instilled with the inspired memory of a sundry assortment of part-time and long-term foreign residents. A variety of 'Black Paris Tours' now allows visitors to trace the paths of black colonial subjects and expatriates from Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States who, since the 1800s, gathered in Paris for reasons ranging from fleeing racial discrimination to pursuing educational opportunities in the metropole, collaborating on important writing projects and engaging in political and philosophical discussions of race, rights, and identity.⁶ One tour promises to take clients to a doorway that James Baldwin crossed, and a café where Richard Wright wrote.

The blending of imagination, consumption, and place allows visitors to drop into a foreign city and feel a sense of connection, even if that connection is based on a fantasy. Yet it is interesting to reflect on such places as they exist underneath the mythology that has grown up around them, to recognize that they don't hold magical qualities that by their very nature caused inspiration to pour forth. These were ordinary stops chosen by the foreigners who made them famous for reasons ranging from low prices, warmth, a kind bartender, the presence (or absence) of other foreigners, or simply a proximity to residences, and they were maintained for the simple reason that daily routines breed familiarity, comfort, and belonging. While the nature of Paris's expat scene has changed with the times, for today's foreign residents the onus remains to create their own familiar places within a local Paris that (while perhaps known in their imaginations) must initially be confronted as unfamiliar territory. A range of fixed landmarks exists for expats, and for those who wish to mingle with their co-nationals there are clubs, churches, community centers, and restaurants serving a variety of national cuisines.

A Gateway to the City

Those who turn to the meetups frequently refer to the closed-off nature of French society as partially driving the need to find alternative social outlets. It is not uncommon to hear accounts about initial efforts made to enter French social groups, only to resort to expatriate communities after encountering barriers to the local scene.⁷ Some see these barriers as a generalized French trait.

For example, Lara, an English teacher and PhD student from South America and the United States, explains meetups are important simply because “with the French, in general, [it’s] very difficult to make friends.” However, Tara, a Scottish co-organizer of one of the meetup groups, attributes difficulties making local friends to a culture in which socializing is not connected to the workplace, the site which had been an important path to new relationships in her previous relocations. At her first job in France, Tara learned through an awkward moment that women should not suggest to male colleagues that they grab a drink after work: “The first company I worked, one evening I said, ‘Do you want to go for a drink after work tonight?’ and he looked at me as if ‘My God!’—as if I were propositioning him.” In fact, in her job as a human resources manager dedicated to assisting foreign professionals in their relocation to France, Tara specifically warns recruits not to look to the workplace for their social life.

Some foreign residents with extensive history in Paris say the claim that the French are closed to newcomers is exaggerated. Part of the problem may be related to the temporary nature of many expat stays. Martina, a German expat, explained:

I’ve heard from a lot of French people that Paris is a passing-through city. You meet someone, you get along well, you become friends, and then two months, three months later, the person’s gone again. And some of them have said that they’re getting tired of just always investing time and then the person leaves.

Scott (2006) made a similar point in his study of middle-class British migrants in Paris. Among the ‘types’ he studied are the ‘young professionals’ living in the city because of international jobs. Recounting that one of the main complaints of interviewees in this group was that they couldn’t break into French social circles, he added, “however, given the ephemeral nature of the young mobile professional’s presence within the city, the response of the French is hardly surprising” (p. 1119). Although they may spend anywhere from one month to five years or more in the city, these ‘passers-through’ in Paris are marked by their transience, evident in both their lack of connection to the place of the past and an ambiguous relationship to the local future. And yet, because of this transience, a connection to Paris is exactly what they need.

Although previous expats were known for reconstructing their national communities abroad, the ethos of the new generation values integration into the city life rather than segregation into a community populated only by compatriots. With the meetups, this is accomplished through meeting diverse groups of other foreigners. As Kara, from Cyprus, explained: “With the

French, it’s a bit difficult to enter some circles, [but] I have some friends from ‘Internationals’ and so through that I felt more connected, maybe, to Paris.”

Meetup: ‘Using the Internet to Get Off the Internet’

Founded in 2002, meetup.com is not an obscure new website, and finding the groups does not particularly require that one is somehow ‘in the know.’ From the homepage, thousands of social options are a click away by inputting information into the Find a Meetup search box. To begin this research, I was able to specify that I would like to find groups in or near Paris, France, and then select ‘expatriates’ from a list of popular topics, including categories such as alternative health, parenting, music, and science. I was presented with a range of options, some with thousands of members, other with just a few. To become a member of any group, I had to create an overall account with a username and email address; I was then easily able to become a member of any meetup by clicking on the prominently displayed “[Join us]” box on each group’s homepage. The times, dates, and places of upcoming events/activities were listed on individual pages and also compiled on a calendar on my meetup *start page*; I also elected to receive email notifications about new events for the groups I joined.

The landing pages for the expat meetups all have a welcoming tone aimed at the single person who may be alone in the city, encouraging new members to join and attend events with assurances that they should feel comfortable arriving solo. Front and center on each group’s page is a note welcoming the visitor and explaining a bit about the group identity and goals, along with a photo and the name of the group’s host, a link to a calendar of events, a list of related meetups, and links to the profiles of other members. The most prominently displayed information on each homepage is the announcement of the next upcoming event. Members click on a tab to RSVP about whether they will attend, and all members can see the RSVP list. Thus not only is it possible to see how many people (along with their names and profile pictures) are planning to attend an event, but after the party is over it is also possible to return to the RSVP list to look up people whose acquaintances have been made, and even contact them by posting messages to their profiles. New group members create a profile by uploading a photo, and answering a variety of template questions, chosen by each meetup’s organizer. Hosts typically post welcoming messages on new member profiles, and members often write messages on the profiles of others who have RSVP’d to the same event.

The four groups I joined were *Expats Paris*, *Internationals in Paris*, the *Paris New in Town Meetup Group*, and *INC: International Nomad Community*. At first glance they all seemed very similar, and many people were registered members of all these groups; when I began to participate in the face-to-face events, it quickly became apparent that *Expats Paris* and *Internationals in Paris* were more active than the others, with a much larger and committed group of attendees. In fact, they are among the five largest expat-focused meetups in the world; their events occur with regularity and are nearly always packed wall to wall with people. In spite of a high turnover in attendees, and the fact that events are so full that it is impossible to meet and speak with more than the tiniest fraction of people, I very quickly began to run into people that I had met or noticed previously. With some of them, I engaged in conversation each time, and with others just exchanged a friendly wave and 'hello'; it did not take long at all to develop a comfort level wherein I would enter a gathering and notice at least a few familiar faces dotting the crowd.

Internations: 'Feeling at Home, Anywhere'

Meetup's main competitor in the expat events space is *Internations*, a site unique in that its local events function is just one part of a larger, global project, and its online component equals or surpasses its offline function. Once admitted to *Internations* (by filling out a form with a brief explanation of what makes you a 'global mind'), members create a profile and must choose a location from the list of 390 cities where the organization has a local presence. Upon selecting a local city, a member's homepage changes to reflect the services, events, other members, and discussion forums for that city. Each city has ambassadors, who plan monthly mixers, and a series of member-organized activity groups. When visiting another city, one can easily select that city to access its local content, and from there may contact members, post questions in the local forum, and find events.

The Expat Circuit

During the arc of time that spanned planning this research, attending events in Paris, getting to know members and organizers, and returning to virtual participation after the in-country fieldwork was complete, I saw my own conception of Paris change immensely. I had originally known the city through visits with French friends I'd met when traveling outside of the country. And,

although I continued to spend time with those 'native' friends, I didn't make any new French friends during the research period, instead becoming increasingly immersed in the expatriate scene. Becoming a part of that scene was relatively easy, as I quickly learned the rules and routines. The *Expat Paris* monthly cocktail party was always held in the basement of a centrally located Irish pub, and its monthly luncheon was always held in the upstairs room at a pizzeria in Montparnasse. *Internationals in Paris* rotated venues, with parties migrating to bars in different neighborhoods: a glitzy upstairs mezzanine at Alcazar, a grungy basement at La Baraque, a corporate-function-looking basement at Bizen, and the cozy, window-walled, Galerie 31. The rotation of sites served to keep the groups from becoming too associated with any one neighborhood or area of Paris while also providing a sense of consistency and routine. In a city known for its neighborhood living, the expat meetups managed to create a sense of local Paris that transcended any one area.

In the sections that follow, I describe how the on- and offline discourse and routines of meeting up contribute to the production of a connection to Paris through what I call 'digital place-making.' This occurs through three intersecting means, all of which are invaluable to the solo migrant trying to create connections to place on-the-go: First and foremost, these convergent practices create a sense of belonging to an 'international community' in Paris; second, crucial to this belonging is that it allows participants to feel like 'locals'; and third, routine practices of meeting up facilitate the development of 'mobile localities' that may be extended elsewhere.

Belonging to an 'International Community'

Hailing the International Person

Tobias, a Korean-German management consultant, is transferred to Paris from Munich. He has lived abroad previously and feels gratified to be embarking on a career that takes him to interesting foreign countries. In earlier experiences living abroad, Tobias had no problem making friends and building a social life. It all happened rather naturally through his doctoral program, which was done mainly in Switzerland and included eight months of research in Singapore, where his university had a cooperative agreement with the Singaporean campus of the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business. It turns out that this move to Paris is different. No longer connected to a university cohort, and finding that "here in France, private life and business life is

quite separated and so you don't hang out with your colleagues in the evenings and go for drinks," Tobias is on his own. He quickly turns to the Internet to look for social outlets. On meetup.com, he finds the *Expats Paris* group, where an upcoming event is listed, with at least a hundred people already planning to attend; an extensive list of past events contains the names (linked to the member profiles) of those who attended each. An entire community is waiting. The group's 'about us' text includes the following:

We have all lived abroad in a lot of different places and are all multilingual ... and not all of us are native English speakers. We welcome anyone who is, has been or wants to be part of the expatriate experience to join us. (meetup.com/ExpatsParis)

As the text clearly invites all expats (past, current, and future) but is particularly welcoming to those people who are multilingual and have lived abroad on many occasions, a majority of members (including French) refer to themselves as 'expats' in their profiles, and list languages spoken and places they have lived. For example, profile 'Introductions' on *Expats Paris* include:

Jennifer: I am an expat in Paris!
 Ashish: I am Indian by birth but have lived on 3 continents. I would love to meet other Expats in Paris to share their experiences as well as meet newer people in Paris from different parts of the world...
 Vincent: I am 34 and I used to be a French expat in the US. I would like to socialize with the Expat community currently living in the Paris area.
 Luana: I'm used to be sort of an expat everywhere I go....

There are thousands of members, most claiming to be expats in Paris with a desire to meet other expats.

Tobias fills out his profile. The first template field simply asks for an introduction. He writes, "Hi, just moved from Munich to Paris as expatriate. Having a half-Korean half-German background myself, I'm always happy to meet new people from all over the world." By introducing himself specifically as an expatriate, Tobias positions himself in relation to the group. To invite others to identify him this way as well, he adds that he has moved to Paris from Munich, and presents his dual ethnicity as evidence of legitimacy. The profile he creates is populated with information that supports his belonging to the 'expat' category, thereby reinforcing the characteristics of that category. It then becomes a part of a larger repository: an additional qualified participant has been added to the archive, to be discovered by the next prospective member who comes along.

The trend linking organizer text to self-description continues on the pages of *Internationals in Paris*. The group's name sets up a category of belonging (international), and a selection of member quotes again indicates how participants draw on the category when they identify themselves:

Florian: Want to meet international new friends here in Paris :o) ... Actually I'm French but I've spent the 2 last years in New York City and feel more international than French.
 Carlo: To meet engaging, international people.
 E: To connect with like-minded international people
 Mikela: Wishing to meet international people open minded, communicative ...

An archive of profiles in this group presents a constantly growing assemblage of 'international people.'

Although the meetup templates allow participants to use any descriptors to identify themselves, participants frequently draw from language that indicates shared belonging to the groups, whether that means presenting as an expat or an 'international person'; as new members join, and situate themselves within existing classifications, the defining characteristics of the group are fortified. Through these discursive practices, participants are hailed as 'international people' and an international community, as such, is called into being.

A Community Conglomerate

This international community is reinforced across meetup groups. As I scroll down the member pages of *Expats Paris*, alongside each person's name is a list of other meetups to which we both belong. I can see that most members of any one expat-related meetup are also members of the others, which confirms that we are all 'in' something together. Members express this feeling through their profile introductions, which are addressed to the presumed community. For example, a sample of profile introductions includes the following: "Hey everyone, after 3 years in New York and Sydney, I just moved to Paris and I look forward to meeting new friends"; and "Hi there, recently moved to Paris for at least 3 years and looking forward to meeting some new people."

Hi, Hi there, *Bonjour, Hey, Hi-ya* ... these common profile salutations presuppose the existence of a coherent audience, which is being addressed in common. A member who writes, "New in town and would love to meet everyone," suggests that an 'everyone' exists and that it might actually be possible to meet them. Such communication acts, while simple, augment the

idea that upon joining the meetups, new members have found a place where they might belong. Organizers typically post welcoming messages on a new member's 'wall' and many members reach out to each other directly via wall posts, just to say hello, to ask for information, or to suggest meeting at the next event. Although most of a member's profile page information is specific to each particular group, the profile's wall area combines messages from all groups to which s/he is a member. The collation of social messages reinforces a sense of connectivity across all groups. Online practices such as these set the stage for welcoming new members and suggesting they are a part of something bigger than any one group, continually refreshing and reproducing a shared identity. A feeling of belonging that begins in online discourse takes new shape offline via participation in face-to-face events, where a sense of community is formed.

Because many meetups serve an overlapping population, participants attend multiple events and often do not remember which group is associated with each, which leads to the creation of the 'international community' as a diffused concept. This is illustrated through an excerpt from an interview with Phoebe, a professional nanny from the United Kingdom who had been living in Paris and attending meetups regularly for more than one year. Here, we are talking about how an expat meetup can also be a way to meet some local French people, but I am trying to figure out whether we are talking about the same group. I cannot tell because she is conflating the names of the two main groups, *Expats Paris* and *Internationals in Paris*:

- Phoebe: But it's very hard to get integrated [with the French]
 Author: Well, it does seem like some of the groups have more French. The one, *Internationals in Paris* ...
 Phoebe: Yes. And *Expats International*—they have, they've got French.
 Author: Wait—the *Expats Paris* one or the *Internationals in Paris*?
 Phoebe: I think *Expats International*—the one that's run by Marco and ...
 Author: Yeah, yeah, it's *Internationals in Paris*.

While organizers think of their groups as individual and specific, the participants themselves experience all of the meetups as a conglomeration, which they refer to as 'the meetups' or 'the international community.' As most members attend multiple meetups, faces become familiar across different groups, and the difference between groups is flattened. However, this effect is pronounced by the fact that many of the groups with a web presence do not actually organize their own events in Paris. Rather, they often partner with meetup

groups or use their web space to promote specific expat-oriented events being hosted by other organizations.

For example, the previously mentioned hybrid of online community and offline events, *Internations.org*, is thriving in many cities around the world, yet during the period of this fieldwork in Paris the *Internations* ambassadors were also co-organizers of the meetup group *Expats Paris*. Because of this, the main *Internations* local events were tied in with *Expats Paris* events—the two websites acting as different portals for accessing the same social scene. The *Internationals in Paris* has multiple portals as well: In addition to its meetup.com site, the group has a dedicated website and a Facebook page—heavily utilized by longer-term members—that acts as a more insider format than the meetup page, which is focused on being found by newcomers. Overall, the fact that numerous websites act as portals to offline events creates a sense of many social outlets provided by a range of groups but, because the sites actually direct participants to a limited number of gatherings, the offline scene is much smaller than is portrayed online. While this can be confusing, and limits the diversity of events to which a person has access, the streamlined nature of using various channels to drive people to fewer events contributes to the impression of a tight-knit community in Paris.

Feeling Like a 'Local'

A common theme among participants is that the decision to move alone to Paris had involved anticipation and imagination about what it would be like to live there, daydreams that were often interrupted by the reality of what it is to arrive in a foreign city, knowing no one and often not speaking the language. Through encounters that begin at the online interface that sets up expectations and commonalities, and extend to face-to-face meetings that manifest in one physical site after another, the international community becomes a site through which meetup members may 'feel like locals.' Meetup rhetoric and practices facilitate the development of this feeling. For instance, although events usually occur in spaces segregated from other patrons, the language promoting them tends to accentuate the local-ness of venues, building an impression of connectedness to a Parisian scene. This is illustrated in the following invitation from *Expats Paris*:

Hello everybody!! Here we are back again at Charlie Birdy for another international drink. This awesome lounge-bar is located in the "quartier du commerce" (15th

arrondissement), away from traffic and the city center's mess. Lots of local Parisians like it for its ethnic-lounge atmosphere and trendy-world food cuisine. The first floor is being reserved for us so we can socialize and enjoy ourselves.... So, come and meet other internationally wandering people and share your stories!

This text emphasizes that local Parisians like the bar, but does so while using global keywords, such as 'ethnic,' 'world,' and 'international,' and specifying that the group will have its own reserved place, set aside not only from the rest of the bar but also from the 'city center's mess.' Again, despite language accentuating the local nature of venues, the international meetups are almost always set apart and distinguished from areas frequented by local clientele. This is accomplished either physically—through reserved areas set apart in the basement, upstairs, mezzanine, or 'cave' area of a restaurant or bar—or symbolically, such as at a large club off the Champs-Élysées where meetup partygoers were given gold bracelets to identify themselves to each other and to the bartenders, who would then give a small discount on drinks. Through these reserved spaces, attendees can enact their connection to the local scene while protecting themselves from the rejection or alienation that any one member may experience if left to wander alone into a bar. Although most participants would not consider Paris a dangerous place, the spaces created by meetups offer a social safe-zone that would otherwise be difficult to produce individually. This local connection expands beyond the events themselves, as each time attendees participate in these temporary encounters they are reminded that there are others like themselves, and take this knowledge with them into the daily struggles met as foreigners. The significance of this process can be seen in Martina's story.

A Place for the 'Passer-Through': Martina

Having explained that she herself is among the group she referred to as the 'passers-through' in Paris, Martina said the meetups are crucial to her ability to feel at home in the city. Originally from Germany, Martina is a multilingual secretary for international law firms and is living in Paris for the second time; she has also lived in London, Rome, and the Caribbean, where she worked as a deckhand on a large sailboat—her first experience living abroad. Martina first discovered meetups in London after becoming frustrated by many unsuccessful efforts to go to a pub alone and strike up conversation. One night in London, she'd gone solo to a restaurant party celebrating the Beaujolais Nouveau and was pleased to find it was easy to get into conversation with a

lot of French people in attendance. They told her they were there as part of a "French meetup group," and explained the website and how to join upcoming events. From then on, she attended many meetups, hosted by American, Italian, French, and German groups, and found each to be full of people from "all over the world." When Martina left London to move to Paris for a second time, she immediately joined *Expats Paris*, *Internationals in Paris*, and a couple other clubs aimed at bringing foreigners together.

It's not that she doesn't know any French people; Martina actually has a French flat-mate, French colleagues, and even some French friends. Yet she doesn't feel she can become truly integrated into those local networks the way she can in expat groups. As she explained,

Mostly the people who live here, who have lived here for awhile, they were born here, they have their friends from school, they have their little network.... They don't need me in their network. And of course I arrive and then all the expatriates they are going through the same situation, they're in the same position: They're looking for people—they don't have school friends or really good work colleagues.

For Martina, it is the balance of interaction that is important. Even if some of the French people she has met have been welcoming, her sense that they don't need her friendship the way she needs theirs puts a limit on the comfort she can get from those connections. Fitting in is made easier in a circumstance where others are 'in the same position' (a 'position,' I argue, that is representative of an emerging, shared class identity, which is discussed in the following chapter) and from Martina's point of view, the meetups provide the occasion for bringing those who 'don't belong' together, in person.

When Martina is in Germany she becomes bored and plots the next move, yet when living abroad she misses her friends and family dearly, and wonders what she has done, why she has followed these dreams. She explained how important the meetup groups have been for making friends and building more of a connection to the place she is living:

Even the most beautiful cities in the world are not anything if you don't know people. And it's nice to look at but it loses interest quite quickly, and you have to think, what are you doing here? And even, like next week there is this Carr's Meetup [hosted by *Expats Paris*]—and I don't even know if there will be anyone there that I've already met, but I'm already looking in my calendar and, "Oh!! I'll be there! I have a plan for next week!"... It's something to look forward to. It will be a nice evening. It's relaxing. It will be okay.... You know you're not alone.

As an emplacement platform, meetup enables Martina to drop in to a Parisian bar and instantly feel as if she is a part of a local scene. Her calendar is dotted with such events weekly, and just the knowledge that they are coming up makes her feel incorporated into the city life. It's not a simple solution—events can be chaotic and hectic, or quiet and dull. It's also not easy to keep tabs on the people with whom conversation has worked well, as Martina explained: "Sometimes you speak to so many people and then you've lost them, and you think, Oh I want to say goodbye to that person but they already left."

Yet, through the integration of meetups into her routine social life, and the continual reinforcement of the understanding that there are others in a similar situation, the daily practices and complexities of 'global living' now start to seem connected to *something* rather than alienated movements through an unfamiliar place. As Martina described it,

There's so many other people from anywhere and you can actually ... just a little excuse to start talking. Not even oh, let's talk about this and that topic. No—it's just we meet at 8:00 at that shop and that's it—and that's enough to connect people.

That connection builds partly from commonalities shared by participants: knowing they represent a range of nationalities, that most have had previous migration and/or travel experiences, and that they may draw on these 'global' perspectives and experiences to discuss a range of topics. Daily practices, including event attendance but extending to tasks undertaken individually but in common (e.g., dealing with French bureaucracy for the important health and residency cards; challenges with language, food, customs, and the search for various products or services) also knit attendees together and connect them to a new way of living locally, in an international community. However, a conversation with Kata highlighted the ambiguities of this connection.

The Routine of Connection: Kata

When I met Kata, she had been living in Paris for two and a half years. Originally from Cyprus, she'd come to Paris from New York, and before that had studied in London. Discovering the meetups after her first year in the city had made a big difference; she had been lonely at first, and found it hard to make friends with French people. When Kata explained that the international meetups, in that they had people from many nationalities, made her

feel "more connected to Paris," I was not surprised to hear it, as many other participants had stated something similar. Yet, frustrated by the vague language of this common response, I asked, "But what are you connected to?" She explained, "We see people that are mostly expats, they are mostly internationals. They have something in common.... I think *that's* what brings people together."

This commonality is critically explored in the following chapter, but what stands out about this comment in the context of a discussion about place-making is how abstract the commonality is in relation to the intensity of the insistence that there is connectedness. Indeed, what was apparent from my conversation with Kata is that although being of different nationalities may act as an initial icebreaker, spurring conversation at gatherings, any actual commonality is less important to building the connection than is the *routine of interaction and participation*—of creating and reproducing the moments of encounter. Although Kata had made some good friends from the groups, she recognized that the expat community was unstable ("people come and go"), so she continued to go to events, explaining, "There's always somebody I know, but there are always new people." Routine attendance was crucial to maintain that feeling of connection to a local, international community.

Developing Mobile Localities

The growing presence (and use) of web-facilitated projects for bringing strangers together in a network of sites around the world allows the expat-place to be replicated and stretched across geographies, and the sense of an 'international community' is extended even more widely. After becoming familiar with the routines of social meetups, many participants find that the mobility of the platform means they can easily extend their use to other locations, effectively facilitating local connections across multiple geographic contexts.

Facilitating Arrivals

The technological formats themselves make this easy: Meetup.com doesn't require members to anchor their participation to any one geographic location and members can join groups in unlimited sites. Similarly, while a home location is foregrounded on each member's homepage on Internations.org, it is very flexible; any member-city can be easily selected from a drop-down menu, instantly transforming the user's homepage to highlight events and

information based on the new location. These are not simply clever design features that allow for the web-based companies to serve populations located around the world (although they are that, too), but are in fact integral to the way that numerous participants use the sites for both travel and relocation. As participants develop increased comfort with the digital emplacement format, many extend their use of the platforms to situations of short-term business or leisure trips, and begin to see them as integral to the process of arrival in a new place and to the creation of a consistent lifeworld across multiple sites and cultures.

Rosen, Lafontaine, and Hendrickson (2011) have demonstrated how this works with the worldwide couchsurfing community—where members interact online to exchange information, set up get-togethers with local people, and organize short-term stays in other members' homes while traveling. Through participation in the online networking aspect of the organization, people form social network ties that make them feel a connection not only with the individuals with whom they interact, but also the groups and communities of which those members are a part. While previous studies have understood that travelers use their own social network connections (such as reaching out to 'friends-of-friends,' as explained by Granoveter's (1973) theory of the strength of weak ties), Rosen et al. discovered that, in *providing* those ties to users, the couchsurfing community "specifically allows people to locate, negotiate, and establish new social network ties in any geographic location, as opposed to existing ties in a finite cache of locations" (p. 984, emphasis in original). Through this network, travelers, often considered to be isolated and without connections, are able to feel as though they have "a social support network and friends in otherwise unknown locations" (p. 984).

As noted above, Martina first discovered the meetups in London, and turned to them immediately upon moving to Paris, and hers is a common story. Online profiles are replete with references to temporary or relocated access: for example, a Bulgarian woman living in Germany explains that she comes to Paris every two months for work and that, "Since I'm a member of meetup Dusseldorf and will be in Paris for the last week of May, I would love to join the Paris group too." Another woman explains that she used to live in Paris but has relocated to Berlin; her profile on *Expats Paris* describes that she "lived in Paris—now visiting for a few days." And a Brazilian posts that she is "in Paris just for this week and would like to meet new people." During this fieldwork, I heard many such stories in person. A Cameroonian man who had lived in the city for a couple of years explained in our interview that he'd joined the Paris groups after attending meetup events

when visiting his brother in Seoul, South Korea. Nick, a Korean-American participant, told me that he had used the Events function on a site similar to meetup to plan a dinner party when traveling in Argentina; he just put up a note on a forum section, saying, "Hey ... who's up for doing something?" and found a group of companions for an evening out. The following night he saw a separate post announcing a party, emailed for details, and was rewarded with a Hawaiian-themed party on someone's apartment rooftop, which went until 6 a.m. In fact, as Nick recounted his travels, his tales focused much more on the people he met and the social interactions that occurred in each place than on any particular geographic or cultural landmarks visited. For him, fundamental to a positive travel experience is to live 'like a local'; the fact that he can use online networks to temporarily immerse himself in each local social scene is key.

Maintaining Social Routines Across Borders

For some participants, the meetups are much more about coping with frequent business travel than about embracing the social opportunities of globalization. Suzy is a Chinese American who completed her master's degree in finance at a university in Shanghai and is now working for a French company based in New York City. She is frequently sent to the Paris headquarters, typically for two weeks at a time, and because she sometimes participates in meetups in New York, she decided it would be a good way to go out at night in Paris. "Otherwise," as she explains it, "I just order room service and watch TV in my hotel." Because she is now able to work during the day and go out at night, meetups allow her to turn a trip that would have been focused only on work into something vaguely resembling her social routines at home.

An Exclusive but Expansive Place?

Scott McQuire (2008, p. viii) argues that media convergence, understood in the context of twenty-first-century cities, "has catalyzed new means of producing social space and created new forms of social agency," which follow from the mobilities that increasingly define spaces and subjects. While the forms of mobile place-making illustrated above provide ethnographic support for the spatial aspects of this claim, they point to new exclusions in addition to social agencies. As Stokowski (2002, p. 368) points out, the power relations embedded in place-making practices affect attachments to place, and in terms of this study, it is worth asking *who* is welcome in these digitally managed spaces.

The answer to that question at once invites critical reflection on the types of cosmopolitan exclusivity that pervade the expat meetups (which is explored in the following chapter), while also illuminating new opportunities that digital place-making provides to people who may otherwise feel unwelcome to inhabit European public spaces alone.

Symbolic Barriers

Although events are 'open' and free to attend, the actual locality of the space is called into question by means that limit attendance to those vetted by an online rhetoric specifically extending a welcome to expatriates and international people, as well as by the tendency to physically separate meetup groups from regular clientele. In Jansson's (2011) study of expatriates in Nicaragua, he noted how social/networked media contribute to the creation of 'cosmopolitan capsules'—social spheres of like-minded individuals in which participants may live out the cosmopolitan ethos of cultural openness and global engagement, while also remaining safely sheltered from perceived perils of their foreign host environment. Within this encapsulation, actors build and expand their networks and further reinforce their sense of purpose and belonging to the capsule. Although Jansson refers to online networks, the concept can certainly be extended here. Through events that combine open online platforms with segregating rhetoric and set-apart offline spaces, and where both on- and offline a cosmopolitan, mobile lifestyle is prerequisite to belonging, the demarcation of meetups demonstrates how digital encapsulation may manifest in co-present spaces. However, in spite of the exclusions through which cosmopolitan cultural capital mediates access to the meetup scene, this digital place-making arguably opens up access to public spaces to a range of individuals.

While participants engaged through this project were gender balanced and represent a broad range of ethnic and national identities, the people who provided interview anecdotes and online data most relevant to an exploration of place-making practices turned out to be either women or non-white males. This detail is significant, and while the groups prove beneficial to an extensive swath of mobile professionals, they seem to hold particular significance for these two broad demographics. Massey (1994) argued that "among the many other things [that] clearly influence that experience [of space], there are, for instance, 'race' and gender" (p. 2). Cresswell (1996) suggested the need to ask how rules set up around space and place are used to structure a

normative landscape, and linked the norms for behavior in any given place to an actor's social position. To illustrate, he pointed to examples of how racial minorities automatically become 'suspects' when walking in affluent white neighborhoods in England. In a historical context, referring to segregation of public and private spheres, Morley (2001) pointed out that women were among those made to feel as outsiders in a European public sphere dominated by 'metropolitan middle-class white men' (p. 437).

Facilitating Women's Spatial Agency

Even as the inclusion of women in public space has become a norm in egalitarian societies, and as Europe has become increasingly racially diverse, these mobilities continue to be limited. Although women make up a growing percentage of mobile professionals, and corporations are increasingly recruiting individuals with non-white and non-European backgrounds for their ability to work successfully with teams and clients in 'emerging markets,' the business world and its social/public spaces of France continue to be zones where women and non-white males are minorities⁸ (particularly standing out as such if arriving alone).

While intersectionalities relating to 'race,' ethnicity, gender, and class feature in later chapters, in this section I would like to point out how women in particular are using meetup formats to gain new spatial agency. Until recently, research on professional migration has focused mainly on men, simply because men tended to make up the majority of this population. Where women were the subjects of scholarly study, it was mostly through efforts to understand how they navigated their positions as 'colonial wives' (see Fechter, 2010) or 'trailing spouses' (Bruegel, 1996), following husbands to foreign posts. In these contexts, women were studied for the work they did to reconstruct the home abroad, for example, through bridge clubs, afternoon teas, and enrolling the children in international schools (Fechter, 2007; Wagner, 1998)—activities that endeavored to reconstruct symbols of national life in the face of immense cultural, bureaucratic, and logistical differences. Men, conversely, were found to have a much more coherent experience through a workplace atmosphere and related social experiences that maintained a certain consistency across geographic and cultural space.

Although the expectations governing the range of behaviors open to women in public have opened up considerably, in many cities women continue to be at a disadvantage when alone in public; the unescorted foreign woman, out at night, may be seen as vulnerable or suspicious. For example,

Massey (1994) pointed out that “survey after survey has shown how women’s mobility . . . is restricted—in a thousand different ways, from physical violence to being ogled at or made to feel quite simply ‘out of place’” (p. 2). Such constraints on women’s mobility can be understood as an area of contestation that reflects larger societal tensions on changing female roles. Cresswell (1996) argued that although value and meaning in space are created and reproduced in accordance with ideological tenets, space and place also become sites for transgression, where the ideologies structuring space can be challenged. The expat professional women encountered through this research take advantage of meetups to gain entrée into a social environment, an affordance that makes embarking on a mobile lifestyle/career more thinkable.

Female participants expressed that in many ways they experience life abroad differently from the ways that men do, and for this reason meetups take on a unique importance. Many noted that they would have a difficult time entering a bar alone to try to meet people, if it were not for the fact that such was the norm at meetup events. As Martina explained, she tried many times to go into a bar in London and strike up conversations, only to be ignored or treated as strange. It was not until she accidentally arrived at a bar with a meetup in progress that she found a welcoming crowd, and from then on meetup became her main social tool. Many other women still found arriving alone intimidating even when they knew it was the meetup norm; in those cases, a common strategy was to reach out to other women through the site function allowing people to post on each other’s walls to make plans to attend events together. Suzy told me how she realized that she could use the meetup email function this way:

I’ve had like seven guys who emailed me [on meetup.com] . . . This one guy who was kind of creepy was hitting on me . . . and I was like, “I hope I don’t see him again at this event!” I was saying like, I should email girls on there so that I have a female friend in Paris!

Kata also found that having female friends at events was helpful in warding off the men who, while not necessarily representative of the ‘typical attendee,’ were only there to pick up women. These men were easily identifiable not only by their behavior at events but also through their online actions. For instance, she explained that if a man posted something on her profile wall, she immediately looked to see on which other women’s profiles he had posted messages and what he had said. Tara, the Scottish co-organizer of a meetup group, said she had received quite a few ‘vulgar and suggestive’ emails from men through the site, but conceded that although this behavior made her feel vulnerable, it was better to get it online and then know who to avoid in the offline events.

However, despite the utility of meetup platforms for providing women with access to a public social scene, Lara said she believes that single women in the groups are still looked at as desperate or as simply searching for a husband, whereas for the men it is seen as normal and even cool to be single and living alone in a foreign country. Still, if women are becoming increasingly equal in terms of gender representation in their professional fields and are, as Kennedy (2004) said, “at the forefront of constructing a global society” (p. 101), a parallel evolution in their ability to access public space—particularly during ‘off-hours’—while abroad is a must. Digital place-making, in that it allows for communication and behavior expectations to be set up and connections to be made in advance, in the semi-private spaces where participants meet online, seems to open up opportunities for women to more comfortably and equitably access corresponding offline spaces. This is explored further in chapter 4.

Conclusion: Feeling in Place

Increasing forms of mobility and innovations in electronic connectivity have opened up new questions about what it is to belong or feel connected to a place, and questions of how one might find or create a sense of place in transition are taken up with new urgency. If our experiences of places are constituted more through relationships and communicative interactions than by geographic location, then online interfaces that both produce and manage offline interactions can be understood as platforms for mobile, digital place-making. This chapter has explored this form of place-making as a way of introducing the sites and practices of a study that aims to shed light on a type of migration that is growing rapidly as businesses continue to expand into new global markets—the lone professional migrant—and the role of geo-located media in enabling the lifestyles and fostering identity development among these migrants. This chapter contends that a new type of local place is being created through globalization; specifically, the case of expat meetups illustrates how the production of space can be a mobile process, and indeed, how places themselves may be mobile.

The nearly unlimited geographic range of sites such as Meetup and *Inter-nations*, along with a technical flexibility that allows members to use services without being attached to any one location, enables place-making practices to become mobile by providing portals to localities in any location where membership exists. To be clear, however, while the technology involved is a tool used to organize and enable the communications needed to create emplaced

encounters, the technology itself does not create place. This is accomplished through routine communication practices, by which a meaningful social space may be manifest in a physical environment that lacks the historical and cultural context that is usually seen as connecting place to identity.

Marc Augé (1995) contrasted the ahistorical *non-places* of supermodernity with what he referred to as 'anthropological place'—historical territories where identities and meaning are tied to a specific location. To conclude this chapter, I'd like to return to the anecdote about my French friend who was so obviously out of place at a meetup, to think about relationships between place, belonging, and identity. The story about my friend illuminated a moment in which two different notions of how patrons should behave in a Parisian bar came into conflict, with the 'local' losing his ground. However, were he to have returned to the same bar the following night, he would likely have found it returned to 'normal'—a typical bar where patrons mainly speak to the people with whom they arrived, with perhaps a bit of serendipitous crossover into other conversations. He likely would have felt much more comfortable, much more as though he was where he belonged. On the night referenced, the bar had been taken over by the 'international community,' a group that had come into being through a combination of online discourse and interactions that produced shared understandings, along with routine practices that took those interactions from online to offline space.

In that they mediate and mete out belonging in a context where people are physically (if not electronically) isolated from traditional relational institutions such as the family, state, or other solidarity groups, it is possible to conceive of expat meetups as a new institutional form. Considering that one of the most important aspects of these new institutions is that they bring people out of the online network and into a series of offline interfaces, yet have no permanent offline home, discourse by both organizers and participants becomes important for producing a new solidarity around which the group can configure belonging. But what makes up this common identity? And, what might notions of an international community made up of international people mean for understandings of nationality, ethnicity and other forms of identification in increasingly globalized professional circuits? The indeterminate nature of the group boundaries is important to understanding how distinctions and exclusions work in the formation of this emerging identity, which is explored in the following chapter.

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BELONGING TO THE GLOBAL NETWORK SOCIETY

[A] trend of cultural distinctiveness of the elites in the information society is to create a lifestyle and to design spatial forms aimed at unifying the symbolic environment of the elites around the world... [T]he practice of jogging, the mandatory diet of grilled salmon and green salad; ... the ubiquitous laptop computer, and Internet access; the combination of business suits and sportswear... All these are symbols of an international culture whose identity is not linked to any specific society but to membership of the managerial circles of the informational economy across a global cultural spectrum.

—Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 1996, p. 447

Will wander in from Tokyo in about a month. I had a great meetup experience there and look forward to the same again in a brand new city.

—Alisa's introduction on the *International Nomad Community* meetup page