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Working Towards the Good Life

Here we again draw from the practice theory approach outlined in Chap. 1, in order to frame an understanding of the relationship between work and migration for privileged migrants. We shift focus from the diversity of lives prior to migration, which we examined in the previous chapter, to the lives as lived in the destinations. This will illustrate how (a) work and privileged migration variously interplay and (b) the creative navigation of changing structures by those who work, as well as by those who engage in voluntary and entrepreneurial forms of occupation. We argue here that work is not as central a defining feature of privileged migrants' lives as assumed in popular conceptions, and some academic work to date. Nor can we assume all privileged migrants are or have been wealthy expatriates, mobile professionals, or part of a business elite. Nevertheless, work and occupation shape identities and relationships to place, informing why or how migrants moved in the first place, how they funded the move, their relationships to each other, and their daily lives.

The themes we draw out below are intended to challenge the focus of much of the literature on privileged migration and work, which has centred either on retirement or expatriacy. Here we look at both, but also at the complexities of each as well as at many other forms of work

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and occupation. Included amongst British in Malaysia and Americans in Panama are what Fechter (2007) has termed corporate expatriates (see Chap. 1); some of these, as we will see, are on excellent remuneration packages, with extremely high wages, some employed by highly ranked transnational companies. However, these were not of central interest for our research, with its focus on lifestyle migration. Furthermore, as we will go on to describe, such 'expat packages' are on the decline, organisations are trying to employ more local labour, and some of the packages or contracts can be quite insecure. We will illustrate how the role of free choice in privileged migration is not as straightforward as it might appear from a cursory glance. Furthermore, thinking of the classic 'trailing spouse', or corporate expatriate wives (Fechter 2010), we will see that some of the wives and partners of corporate expatriates have perhaps not specifically chosen the migration path at all; rather, it was imposed on them. We will also introduce women who had been left behind in Malaysia (or had chosen to stay behind) when husbands met other life partners or their work took them elsewhere. Some of them were quite entrepreneurial. We also met men who were entrepreneurial and had blurred the boundaries of migrant life and local life. We discuss the way teaching was a job several we met had chosen, perhaps as a way of experiencing an area and funding travel. Women and men were involved in this, but contracts were often short, so it can be a difficult decision for a family. Among those we met and spoke with were many who were retired, as in the work of Paul Green (2014) in Malaysia; we also met poorer people, who were struggling financially, and we will show how many of these are heavily involved in other types of work such as in the associations. We will illustrate how, beyond the realm of paid work and entrepreneurial activity, there is large amount of volunteering and charity work being engaged in by our lifestyle migrants. Some of this is located in the clubs, as we have discussed in the previous chapter, and some is more individual.

This chapter thus highlights local articulations of the practices of postcolonial living. The focus on diverse forms of work and occupation, that we outline in more detail below, gives us the opportunity to examine the ways in which quality of life is not only sought but achieved, the flexibility of migrants' lives, and the myriad ways in which they are able (or not)

to respond through the practice of daily life and in their communities of practice to the many contingencies, twists and turns, with which they are confronted. We see that their responses are locally meaningful, responsive to proximate structures and to conjuncturally specific, rapidly changing conditions they meet on the ground.

Beyond the 'Expatriate Package'

One of our goals in this chapter is to contribute to and extend academic debates about the relationship between privileged migration, work, and occupation. As has now been recognised by a number of scholars (Conway and Leonard 2014; Fechter 2007; Fechter and Walsh 2010; Green 2014; Kunz 2016), there has been a tendency to conflate Western migration, privileged migration, and skilled migration, or expatriacy. This is based on, we suspect, a further, more deep-seated tendency to see labour as the primary motivation for any migration that is not otherwise for asylum or refuge. As we discuss in Chap. 1, there is a tendency to classify migrants drawing on assumptions about class, country of origin, and economic status, and this lexicon is carried over into the academic literature where, rather than talk of Western (im)migrants in Indonesia or South Africa, for example, we hear of mobile professionals (Fechter and Walsh 2010), skilled expatriates (Beaverstock 2002), business or corporate expatriates, or mobile young people (Amit and Dyck 2010). Even when popular literature and common lexicon refer to 'trailing spouses', the link to formal work is made through reference to its absence (see Coles and Fechter 2008). This tendency to conflate privileged migration and highly skilled work is further evidenced in the more recent term 'self-initiated expatriates' (Butler and Richardson 2013) to distinguish those who choose to move abroad for work (as opposed to being sent by their organisation). Furthermore, these studies all tend to look at work lives, careers, or related experiences.

Similarly, where the literature on privileged migration is focused on retirement migration, the assumed link between work (in this case, end of work life) and migration remains as taken-for-granted prior condition. While these conceptual framings work to distinguish these privileged

subjects from other migrant populations, they understate the changing conditions of the global labour market that affect those moving for work, irrespective of their background. As Green (2015) emphasises, what we might term an expatriate is changing; for the large part, the 'expatriate package' is on the decline (as discussed in Chap. 1), and while corporate and diplomatic postings remain privileged postings, they co-exist with other forms of working. As Butler and Richardson (2013) has identified, the current landscape is markedly different from 'conventional expatriacy'; there are diverse entry routes into this from the corporate expatriate to those seeking foreign placements, indicative of various relationships between labour and migration. The extent to which choice is possible within this also varies; for example, some individuals choose to move, but not where to go or for how long; and some are uncertain where they will go next, as we will go on to illustrate.

Corporate Expatriates and Mobile Professionals in Malaysia and Panama

Some of those who took part in our research would fit with these broad understandings of the relationship between privilege, labour, and migration; there was evidence of comfortable levels of wealth, people on good-quality 'expatriate packages', and those owning large companies. In Malaysia, especially in Kuala Lumpur (and to a lesser extent in Penang), several men and some of the women worked for large transnational companies located in or around the free trade zones. Examples include a man working as a writer for a multinational analytics company in Butterworth; an independent tax advisor; an editor for a large online 'expatriate' magazine; a chartered accountant; a diplomat; an executive chairman of an Asian-based education company; Asia-Pacific president of an electronics company; and several who declined to name the company they worked for but who were on those very comfortable expatriate packages discussed in Chap. 1. As Christian, who had worked himself for many years as a tax adviser, told us, many of the larger local companies in Penang continue to hire expatriates despite the express intention in more recent years for companies to employ more local labour:

> if you look at any local companies, like all those electrical companies near the airport, they all have their foreigners. Not necessarily, let's say, a German company has a German, but they might have an American or an English, or they might have an Indian even, but, yes, they are normally expatriates.

In the research in Panama, the primary focus on Boquete means that such corporate expatriates and mobile professionals were not such an evident presence. Nevertheless, when visiting Panama City for short research trips, Michaela would meet those we might more comfortably call expatriates or mobile professionals. In some cases, these people worked for transnational companies—for example, in shipping and banking—but it was also clear that some had chosen to move to Panama City because of the opportunities it offered, with several of them attempting to set up their own businesses. Even these brief insights to life in Panama intimated some of the complex ways in which privileged migrations are tied to working lives: certainly, the relationship between work, employment, and migration is more complicated than a model of 'conventional expatriacy' permits (Butler and Richardson 2013; Green 2014).

There were a couple of exceptions to this in Boquete. Laurie, a young woman in her 30s, had moved to Panama with the multinational bank she worked for, having previously worked in various locations around the world. She gave this up though, moving to Boquete with her Panamanian husband, seeking a less frenetic life; they now ran a tourism business. Terry, who we met in Chap. 5, was another exception. An Englishman, now in his 70s, married to a Panamanian woman, had moved to Panama from Indonesia in the 1970s, and worked first piloting tankers at the oil trans-shipment terminal and then, when work became scarce, moved across to pilot ships through the Canal. This made him unusual within the context of Boquete, which was telling in how he understood the broader population of 'gringos', 'That's why I'm different' he said, 'I had to conform to the labour code of Panama, and of course learn the language.' What this trajectory demonstrates for us, however, is a flexibility to changing employment circumstances that allowed him to stay in Boquete, where he had family. We discuss this flexibility of migrants and the resourcefulness to respond to changing circumstances in more detail below.

As discussed in Chap. 7, the luxurious residential developments in these urban environments are part of the landscape within which such privileged migrants live and work, as illustrated in the photos that those taking part in Karen's research in Malaysia sent her. Indeed, many of the condominiums in Kuala Lumpur and Penang are built especially for wealthy investors and are populated by those who have become known as internationals or expatriates, terms that indicate that this is not restricted to white Westerners but also includes mobile professionals from other Asian countries, and even Malaysia itself. As Panama's ambitions for a more prominent position in the global economy have been realised, there have been similar residential developments in Panama City; these at one and the same time provide homes for the expatriated workers and are promoted as investment opportunities for international buyers (see also Chap. 3).

So, true to the common assumption among academics and publics alike, our migrants in Malaysia and Panama do include privileged corporate expatriates or mobile professionals who move with work. But our main goal here is to trouble the notion of the 'expat'. Indeed, we avoid the term wherever possible, precisely because of its many connotations but also because our participants themselves often did not fit this mould (see Chap. 1). At the heart of such a challenge is the assumed relationship between work and migration. As we demonstrate in the following sections, the choice to be mobile that is characteristic of contemporary forms of corporate expatriacy and mobile professionals is paired with insecurities, flexibilities, resourcefulness, and practice; this reveals how even such privileged migration is structured and constrained by, and shaped in response to, a range of forces.

Choice and Insecurity in Working Lives Abroad

In this next section we show how what we might still call 'corporate expatriates' (Fechter 2005) were sometimes sent or invited by companies and sometimes chose to go, or self-initiated (Butler and Richardson 2013). As outlined in Chap. 1, expatriate packages are now in decline or less attractive, especially for families. Organisations are trying to employ local labour more; the 'expatriate package', which included certain securities—for example,

healthcare and insurance, income in the currency of the country of origin—is being supplanted (as discussed in Chap. 1); and 'expatriate' life can be insecure, rapidly changing, and part of this is the classic 'trailing spouse'—women (and men occasionally) who have perhaps not chosen this path at all. Migrants and their partners who seek work are subject to the practices of governance, as discussed in Chap. 4. In each case, these migrants respond in practice to changing circumstances, and may have to be very resourceful and flexible when confronted by a limited set of choices, potential insecurity, and risk. While it is still true that some individuals (and families) are sent abroad by their companies for a temporary posting, in many cases people actually seek this out either from the opportunities offered by their current employer or by applying specifically for a posting abroad. This was the same in the research by Butler and Richardson:

> Indeed, our respondents had 'self-initiated' their foreign placements by searching for jobs in Malaysia (or typically within Southeast Asia) through job websites, recruitment consultants or via contacts they had made within industry networks. This is an important factor in the formation of our decision to avoid the term 'expatriate', particularly as conventional expatriates have been predominantly identified as professionals who are assigned to locations around the globe without choice. (Butler and Richardson 2013: 253)

Seeking a foreign placement is telling of the privilege and agency of these individuals, while also, at least to their minds, distinguishing them from expatriates; indeed, several of those Karen spoke to in Penang and Kuala Lumpur spoke of choosing to go abroad for the experience, the travel, to experience new cultures, and they appreciated our use of the term 'lifestyle migration' as it enabled them to be distinguished from the lifestyles and stereotypes of corporate expatriates.

Choice also came into play as migrants made decisions about their future mobilities; as the British Consul in Penang explained of his residential biography:

> [I] worked for an American company, and then in 2004 it restructured. They moved the section I was running down to Singapore, but we wanted to stay here. We do have permanent residence, so we can stay here. So we decided to stay on.

What this also reveals are the ongoing changes to the proximate and wider structures that facilitate these migrant lives and employment; companies change their foreign operations—perhaps in response to changing regulations and governance, or the emergence of new overseas markets—and this has direct consequences for the people working for them, or for the opportunities available to those choosing to live abroad. Such restructuring and change can also be an insecure experience. As Julia described, she had spent years moving with her husband who was on short-term contracts, including time spent between the United Kingdom and Malaysia while her children were at college or university. Eventually, Julia's husband was fired for low performance, as his company went through restructuring. When Karen spoke to them, he was looking for new employment and Julia herself was also thinking of looking for work. But, to illustrate the ongoing contingencies and various forms of capital that enable such migrants to cope with complex circumstances, Julia's children are growing up, which frees up some of her time, her husband fought the decision to fire him and was made redundant instead, getting a small payout, and they now have MM2H visas (see Chap. 4), both the payout and their visas helping them deal with gaps between jobs.

These stories of redundancy, unemployment, short-term contracts, and insecurity are also stories of resourcefulness, flexibility, and an 'expatriate habitus' in the practice of daily life. These privileged migrants seem able to deal with the structural changes thrown their way and to adapt positively to changing circumstances. Ultimately, as with Julia, who could rely on some invested capital and the MM2H visa, to see her through the difficult times, most privileged migrants do not really experience destitution.

Sally, an interpreter, is a good example of someone who, with her family, 'travelled where the work was'. She had lived and worked in many different countries before marrying a British man and settling in Hong Kong for a while, where he had work. They both then returned briefly to the United Kingdom before her husband took another posting, this time in Bangkok, followed by one in Kuala Lumpur. Their residential trajectory reflects the short-term contracts, redundancies, and uncertainties about where the next work would come from, all the while matched by a desire to not return to the United Kingdom. At one stage, when her

husband was made redundant, they moved with their four children to a chalet on the French/Swiss border. But, she says, 'we learnt that we were not ready to be Heidi and Peter up the mountain! So, back we came to KL and he started his own company, with me as a director.' The company is now 13 years old, and they are doing well. At the time of talking to her, Sally and her family had been in Kuala Lumpur 20 years and were very happy.

Other postings abroad (sometimes self-initiated) included people working as teachers of English but also in schools teaching different subjects. This was also common amongst those Karen met in Penang. However, again this was often precarious work, as many of the teachers were on short-term contracts of two to three years. Some were happy to move on to different countries as they started a new contract; others, however, were bringing up children and wanted to settle more long-term, an ambition complicated by the short-term contracts.

Gender and Expatriacy

Another significant dimension of the research on expatriates is gender, particularly as this has been articulated through the concept of the 'trailing spouse'. This is particularly prominent in this body of work because of the ways in which expatriate postings reproduce the gender inequalities within the labour market (see, for example, Fechter 2010; Walsh 2007), the jobs of male breadwinners often being privileged over those of their wives and partners. Our research in Malaysia and Panama provides further insights into the negotiations that take place between couples within the decision to migrate, and relationships beyond migration, demonstrating that these are more complex than they might appear at first sight.

Leslie, who we met in Chap. 5, shows the difficulties some women have in finding a place for themselves as 'trailing spouses'. When her husband was offered a short-term contract in Malaysia (two years extendable to five), they moved there. Neither of them came from 'expatriate' backgrounds, and neither had lived abroad before. She described thinking she could simply be, as she put it, an expat wife, and live by the pool, but she

was bored within three weeks. She started to look for work, and was quickly offered what she thought could be her dream job, in HR in Penang. But then she stopped herself:

> when we came out here I made a promise to my husband that would we would not compete for the alpha job—you know the right to be stressed, the right to not be the one making dinner that night. If I took the job I'd never be able to start a family, I'd be reneging on everything we agreed. So, I turned it down, and I cried for nearly two days straight. Now, I am over it and, you know what, it was just my ego. I was flattered that I was wanted and I could have this top job. But I know it's not what I want for my life, and I know if I took it I'd be as unhappy in five years' time as I was before I came here. So, to finally answer your question, quality of life is knowing it's okay to be here, to be only working part-time. It is okay to spend an hour by the pool in the afternoon. Revel in what you've got, you know. For me, it's also the weather. I'm a hot country girl. Having the opportunity to live somewhere where going to the jungle for the weekend or Singapore for the weekend is viable. So, all these things that create opportunities that just wouldn't exist in England. I suppose that's it …. I think perhaps we are a kind of new generation, *a new style of expat*. I wouldn't be surprised if lifestyle migration didn't just take off, if the recession doesn't put it off. (Emphasis added)

We also met women who had been left behind in Malaysia (or had chosen to stay behind) when husbands met other life partners or their work took them elsewhere. Some of these were quite entrepreneurial. Melanie, for example, had moved to Penang because her husband had work there, but he left her for a Malaysian woman he met. She now runs a small business, running workshops and classes, organising tours and day trips, talks, exhibitions, and social events. In a way, she is using her energies, and making a living, marketing and selling (and creating) the Penang she wants to live in.

These brief examples illustrate how different employment conditions interplay with the experiences of such (privileged) populations abroad in ways that complicate the commonly held image of the relationship between work and privileged migration. Even an expatriate posting can be challenging, limited, short-term, or risky. While for many within these

populations, migration is a choice, working conditions cannot be guaranteed and may be more of a compromise. But we also see that these privileged migrants can be resourceful in the practice of their lives as migrants, drawing on economic and human capital, pulling in their communities of practice, flexible in their attitudes towards migration, safe in their awareness they can return home if necessary, and rarely curtailed by borders, because despite not always being absolutely wealthy or secure, they are still the 'desirable' among migrants (see Chaps. 3 and 4).

Decoupling Work and Migration

In further troubling the notion of the expat, we decouple the relationship of work and migration at its heart. Through our discussion of lifestyle entrepreneurs, the role of work in the creation of the good life, and the ways in which migrants, through teaching, draw personal benefit from having English as their first language, we highlight the various ways in which work or occupation, migration, and lifestyle articulate with everyday lives and the reproduction of privilege. As these examples further demonstrate, changing personal circumstances interplay with the entrepreneurial activities of these migrants. While in the case of 'corporate expatriates', work and migration appear to be inseparable, the case of these lifestyle entrepreneurs demonstrates a more flexible, active, and creative relationship between them.

Flexible Work(ers) and Lifestyle Entrepreneurs

In both Malaysia and Panama, we found examples of people who we might refer to as lifestyle entrepreneurs. Our use of the concept here echoes that of Stone and Stubbs (2007), who argue that, in some cases, entrepreneurial activities act as a way of supporting the better way of life that people seek. Entrepreneurial work is, then, as much about creating a life for oneself in ways that fit with one's self-perception, as a simple means of providing income. There were many routes for our participants into entrepreneurship: while some had migrated with the idea that they

would see what opportunities arose once they had settled, a priori deciding that they would set up a business, for others it was a creative response to changing personal and political circumstances. It is also clear that there are different stakes within this; for some, the livelihood from these enterprises is crucial to supporting their day-to-day living, while for others, it merely supplements a private income from pension, savings, stocks, or other investments.

Emma, who we met in Chap. 5, had fulfilled her ambitions of setting up a not-for-profit organisation tailored towards helping disadvantaged members of Panamanian society. As she explained, she felt that the difference that she could make in Panama as opposed to the United States was tangible. In addition, the presence of a high volume of US citizens in the locale, for whom non-profits—with their possibility of empowering people—were part of their culture meant that she had a ready population of people who wanted to be involved in charitable work. The organisation offered a range of volunteering opportunities, to those visiting the area for a short period of time and more permanent residents, and offered an international intern programme. Since her son was born, Emma has shifted focus, and she now runs a yoga centre, providing regular classes and also training up yoga teachers. What this shows is the extent to which entrepreneurial activities might change over time, perhaps adapting to the opportunities that present themselves, while also matching onto new interests of the entrepreneurs themselves and their changing personal circumstances. This is thus an example of the practice of social life, as outlined in Chap. 1.

Despite the seemingly easy progression from a not-for-profit to a yoga studio, it is important to register that the success of these lifestyle enterprises is not guaranteed. Various factors may intervene that interrupt this. We met Clare in Chap. 5. Although her path to Penang had been a rocky one, with many twists and turns, Clare noted to Karen how privileged she felt being able to get a passport to anywhere as a Westerner, when her partner only got a short-term visa and had to keep going in and out. Having left Sri Lanka and trying to run cafes and bars in Penang, Clare and her Sri Lankan partner eventually had to give up. Property rental prices in Batu Ferringhi were too high—'they saw two foreigners coming, and thought oh, oh we can make a killing here', she told Karen, and the

savings Clare had been using to shore up their businesses were disappearing fast. In the end, Clare walked away from the café and from her partner, and, at the age of 63, she was living very modestly on her teacher's pension and a small amount of savings.

It was common to find these stories of travel and work that run counter to the commonly held understandings of the relationship between work and expatriacy. Paul, who we also met in Chap. 5, had lived and worked in Africa for 33 years—working in private security—before settling in Boquete where he ran a bar, art gallery, and two furniture shops. Nicola who tells her own story, below, illustrates an even more flexible adaptation to changing circumstances.

> I got so ill I thought I didn't have very long to live. And I thought, I'm not staying around in London. I was 45 then, and I thought I'm going to die, and I thought I think I'm going to live in the East. So, in 1998 I booked a holiday in Sri Lanka and I fell in love with Sri Lanka. It just reminded me of the Malaya of the 1960s. Of course, I had been back to Malaysia so I knew things have moved on there, whereas in Sri Lanka I could just live an easier life and it reminded me of how things had been in Penang …. And I did get better from my illness, and in the end I bought a little bit of land there … Various things happened and I got into financial difficulties, and so I decided to become a teacher of English … Eventually that got pretty boring and I thought I've got to move, so where shall I go? So, I went and had a look at Langkawi. But that was a shit hole really … So, my next holiday I took a trip to Penang, and I went in the British Council and I said have you got anything for an hourly paid teacher and they said, can you start this afternoon?

Nicola moved to Penang shortly after that. The teaching wasn't easy, she said, because the students were not keen; they were often rich and didn't really know why they were studying English. So, she set up her own business, teaching English, but that failed as well after a bad experience with a business partner, and eventually Nicola started freelance writing on the Internet. She did some ghost writing for a university professor, and now does bits of journalism.

The entrepreneurialism of such migrants reflects wider approaches to their careers; Carol, who was using her social security payments from the

United States to support her life in Panama, had worked variously as a systems engineer, a notary signature, training in psychology in later life, only to find that she was unemployable because of her age. She had borrowed against her house in the United States as much as possible, but still found that life on a pension in the United States was unaffordable. Since moving to Boquete, she has written a book of poetry and has been working on a novel.

Gary worked for a large electronics firm, living in Malaysia, then Singapore, and then China; he got divorced (possibly as a result of being away so much, he wonders), then worked as a freelance consultant for four years. He met and married an Indonesian woman, and they moved to Penang, where Gary now has the MM2H visa. He was recently asked to join a colleague in setting up a catering company—a field he has never worked in before, but when Karen met him again he had decided to give it a go.

We have spent considerable time sharing these stories because they are so rich and powerful in undermining the simple association between privileged migrants and corporate expatriates or professional employees, which is so common (see Chap. 1). They also highlight the incredible flexibility and creativity of these migrants in creating the work they need to support their lives and to give it its quality. But, of course, it is also clear these migrants have sufficient diverse forms of capital to structurally underscore the creativity and fluidity of contemporary Western lifestyles inscribed in the habitus of these flexible individuals.

The Role of Work in the Creation of the Good Life

Many of the activities of these entrepreneurs aim to provide services or develop activities that are reliant on the support of other lifestyle migrants. Such activities are made possible by the establishment of communities of practice, in turn supporting and perpetuating this. In other words, much entrepreneurial work serves to help create the communities of practice, the conjuncturally specific external structures, and the new emergent structures that serve their pursuit of the good life.

The market that takes place in the Boquete Community Theatre every Tuesday morning is perhaps the best illustration of this. The market is

bustling; those selling goods are almost without exception members of the migrant community, as are those purchasing the goods for sale. Angie sits at her small table, her hand-sewn and embroidered handbags and purses on display. She had come to Boquete with very little money. The handbags, which are intricately detailed and colourful, are one way that she can raise the funds to live from day to day. Lindy had worked as an academic back in the United States, but had retrained as a masseuse, drawn to the spirituality and healing that this offered, moving to Boquete, which she felt was more 'sacred'. She runs her massage business from one of the hotels and also has a stall in the market, a way of making people aware of her business. Outside, there are several food stalls, including a soup stall run by Carlos; previously a chef in Argentina, this is not a way of supporting his life—he and his wife live in a large house in one of the new residential estates around Boquete—but a way of continuing the work that he had enjoyed.

While the entrepreneurialism of these populations, demonstrating their creativity and flexibility, might speak to their privilege, this is not without insecurities. Moving to a new location might necessitate these more flexible modes of working, or it might be unduly skewed towards those who are predisposed to such ways of working. But what is also notable is that work has different meanings and significance for those who undertake it, framed by their access to resources to support their lives for some, but also by their sense of who they are and their place in the world, for others. The relationship between work and migration—at least for these lifestyle migrants—is far more complicated than other models for understanding this might allow.

Capitalising on the English Language

While earlier we touched briefly on teaching English as a form of 'foreign posting', it was also the case that there were more informal routes into teaching English, in both Malaysia and Panama. Indeed, teaching English—whether remunerated or not—was among the most frequently listed activities of these migrant populations. We comment on this in particular here to demonstrate the persistent value placed on the

English language, but also as a way of reflecting on how an innate, unquestioned ability becomes transformed into a skill, re-evaluated within the destination.

At the time of the research, Malaysia had invested in a major government programme aimed at improving education and English proficiency amongst teachers and students. In particular, the programme promotes the delivery of maths and science education in English, a move that maps onto the government's ambitions to improve the prospects of the country. This has resulted in a recruitment drive in the fields of English as a second language, teaching English to teachers, and training fellows to deliver teacher training (from personal interview with training provider). In the case of Malaysia, designated 'foreign postings' to teach English are part of the landscape of work and migration; for individuals, they serve as a way of travelling or experiencing an area over a period of time. They thus exploit an innate ability in order to fund the opportunity to pursue quality of life through migration.

In Panama, teaching English was also widespread; at the time of the research, opportunities to teach English in Boquete were limited. Those who did teach English—or in English—often had to travel to David, the local city. As Margaret explained, the arrangement for her to teach literature in English at the local university had been initiated after she worked closely to establish an exchange programme with a US university. She had no experience of teaching literature, having previously worked as a psychotherapist. Her encounters and interactions with those working in the university thus paved the way for her to enter the local labour market—admittedly with fewer qualifications than would be required of a Panamanian—the value and recognition placed on her skills providing her with an opportunity to continue to use these rather than 'retire' them. In this way, teaching at the university gives her a sense of being useful, while also exercising her mind.

The question of what teaching English does for the migrants themselves is also complex, and somewhat related to the home-making practices we discuss in Chap. 7. For Rebecca, who was retired on a modest pension in Malaysia, teaching English was a way of earning a little bit of extra cash and of feeling she had a place and a role: 'So, I do private teaching over here, but I'm not really allowed to do it here, due to age, you

know … It makes me feel needed; it keeps my head there.' Greg who had been living in Panama for 15 years—first moving there when he was in his mid-30s—worked various jobs to support the simple life that he led; while at one point he had run his own English school from his house, he now worked as a handyman—building on his training as a carpenter back in Canada—but also taught English at the local university. 'I didn't know what I was going to do when I came here. I didn't think I'd be teaching English. But whether you're here or there, you've got to do something.' Others among those living in Boquete might help out at the local schools, teaching English, or they might provide informal teaching at their homes after school to the children of the neighbourhood. The framing of this informal support as 'helping out' by many of these migrants is telling of the ways in which their elite status was so taken-for-granted that benevolence was a norm.

It is in the case of teaching English that the significance of language in the reproduction of privilege is laid bare, and the postcolonial framings of their migration were made visible. Here we find Erel's (2010) work with Turkish female migrants living in Britain and Germany particularly useful. As Erel describes, speaking and understanding lesser known dialects and languages was taken as a sign of lower social status within Turkey. However, these migrants discovered these language skills were valued within the new labour markets they entered. As Erel (2010: 655) points out, though this signals the active agency of migrants, nevertheless '[T]his process cannot be reduced to individual resources but is bound up with wider historical, socio-political and institutional factors.'

The de facto privilege of the migrants in our research renders this equation slightly differently. It speaks to inequalities between the place of origin and the site of settlement that translate into the positioning of these migrants—irrespective of levels of education and income—in positions of power and dominance in local settings. The creation of new cultural resources that Erel (2010) highlights requires less work from these populations, a result precisely of the historical and material conditions that support their migration. Nevertheless, it is important to remain mindful of how these articulate with personal circumstances and biographies, and the various meanings that are placed on teaching English.

Retired but Not Retiring

In this final section, we consider the lives of retirees and what they might variously reveal about how work and privileged migration interplay. Retirees featured highly among the populations in both Malaysia and Panama, and yet their circumstances varied significantly (see Green 2014).

Living (Well) on a Pension?

We know from the early work on retirement migration in Spain that cultural attitudes, expectations of increased social and recreational activities, and notions of self-transformation frame attempts at and experiences of positive ageing through migration (see Gustafson 2001; Casado-Diaz 2006; Oliver 2008; Haas 2012; O'Reilly 2000). As Caroline Oliver's (2008) ethnography so evocatively details, the act of migration and ability to live in another country often is interpreted as a positive act of agency in which control and autonomy contrast starkly with visions of the degenerating body and mind that are more usually associated with old age. Such migrants continually celebrate their new lives, contrasting the lives they would have led had they stayed put in their country of origin, with a discourse about life in Spain, where they are welcomed, are more active, feel happier and healthier, and feel less of a burden (see also O'Reilly 2000). This is all discussed in more detail in Chap. 8.

As we discussed in Chap. 5, the cost of retirement—in particular healthcare and tax—in the United States and Canada was a common tale, motivating migration to Panama, a lower-cost economy (see also Hayes 2014). But there were other mitigating factors that helped to explain this migration at this point in people's lives. Carol, who we introduced earlier, explained how her house in Florida was 'under water'; her mortgage on it was greater than its value. Tessa described how many people moving to Panama were literally leaving the keys in the front door of their homes in the United States—anticipating the foreclosure on these properties—and walking away, shipping off to places such as Boquete—lock, stock, and barrel. More than anything, this narrative tells of the timing of the research and its coincidence with the financial

crisis. But Howard's (2008, 2009) research, in Thailand, also complicates assumptions of privilege and economic power amongst Western migrants; his study confirms that significant numbers of former tourists and retirees live in Thailand on limited financial resources. In Malaysia, some of these more 'marginal migrants', as Howard terms them (2009: 195), have even resorted to begging (Green 2014: 2).

However, it is clear that there were others who had substantially more resources. Richard and Louise, who we met in Chap. 5, had initially retired to Malaysia as much because they wanted to be somewhere warm as for any other properties it might have. They thought about Spain but decided there were too many British there. Richard liked Asia, so they looked at Hong Kong and Singapore but found them too expensive, and they thought Thailand was too tacky. In Penang, they can get by speaking English, even with their Chinese friends; it has a good climate all year round, it is good value for money (for their British pensions), and they could afford to apply for the MM2H visa. Similarly, Tim, who we met in Chap. 5, a British man who had retired at the age of 40, had previously lived in Brussels, Florida, and was just about to move on from Boquete to Mexico.

While narratives position this within the context of positive ageing, an individualised pursuit of a better way of life by neoliberal subjects, it is also clear that this is made possible not only by the ubiquitous promotion of some destinations as offering a better way of life, but the active curation of the lives available by those who have already made the move (O'Reilly and Benson 2015). This is clear from the many online forums and blogs, which simultaneously act to provide advice and support to those thinking about moving to these destinations and also become hubs for sharing information among those living in these locations (see also Chaps. 3 and 7).

One example of this is a group of retired men and women in Penang who had set up an online forum where they shared ideas about where to visit, what to eat, where to buy certain goods, and information about visas and taxes and so on. This group also met face-to-face quite regularly. The members of the forum were majority male, and British, and one thing that was noticeable was how derogatory these people were about Britain. They complained about high immigration, high taxes, poor

weather, liberal government, and 'political correctness'. The forum (which has since closed down) was ostensibly to enable retired people to settle and understand the way of life and especially the bureaucracy in Malaysia. This particular community of practice, then, endorsed running down the United Kingdom and using the Bad Britain discourse (O'Reilly 2000) to justify all sorts of behaviour in Penang, including tax avoidance, and sharing among themselves the capital lump sum they would use, in turn, in order to support their applications for the MM2H visa.

In Boquete, several Internet-based communities exist and play an important role in communicating about events, but also issues of concern and interest to its English-speaking residents. The communities of practice that build up around these fora, become a significant part of the landscape in which the positive ageing of these retired populations takes place. As with the discussion in the rest of this chapter, we see here the complexity of the relationship between work, or retirement, and supposedly privileged migrants. These people may not all be absolutely wealthy, even in retirement, yet they are being creative in their co-creation and management of how they understand the good life.

Working Retirement

While the equation of migration with retirement might suggest the end of working lives, as should already be clear from the discussion in this chapter, this is not necessarily the case. Migration instead marks a shift in how these migrants conceive of work. As Nicholas—a resident of Boquete—describes on his blog, his retirement keeps him busy; Ben also describes how the challenges for retirement lie in not knowing how to stop working, but also that in continuing to work, he adopts a different pace. The theme that underpins both of these narratives strongly articulates with the ideas of positive ageing outlined above, and in Chap. 8, but with work continuing to play a role within this. At the heart of this is a consideration over the work that is required to produce a better way of life.

We illustrate this here by turning to Boquete and the production of coffee. The rezoning of agricultural land—most often large coffee-growing estates—for residential development was one of the factors that

led to the establishment of the area as a retirement destination. In consequence, those migrants who have purchased individual plots or properties outside the town and gated developments have often built on land that was previously used to grow coffee. On their (relatively) small plots, several of them have chosen to reuse the land to produce their own small crop of coffee. Nicholas and Tracy described to Michaela their experience of cultivating coffee:

> My wife who all our married life, I'd buy her a plant and she could kill everything, and suddenly she's got this great interest in agriculture and growing coffee and she's very good at it … *It's a lot of work* … I'd never really drank coffee that much. It's a little like, there've been comparisons made between Boquete and Napa. If you go up to Napa the whole focus is wine, and it's kind of like that here with coffee. (Nicholas)

When they originally bought the plot of land where the coffee farm is, they had no intention of reviving the farm. They just liked the land, with its views of the mountains. It was only after they bought it that Tracy started to investigate the possibility of getting the farm up and running again. She told Michaela that it was very difficult to find information about growing and harvesting coffee; even on the Internet there is very little information. Then she met a young man who needed a ride, and he became her local teacher on how to make coffee. He had taught her carefully and clearly how to read her plants, how to know when they were not well, which plants to prune, and which to let grow. She also explained how, over time, even the people who she takes the coffee to once it has been harvested accept her. Standing there, she realises that her coffee is of a good quality—it looks better than that of the local Panamanian farmers. Her pride in mastering the art of coffee production speaks to issues of connoisseurship, and the social distinction that this permits. In many ways, this echoes the significance of claims to 'authentic' living among the British residents of rural France, the subjects of Michaela's previous work (Benson 2011a, 2013a). And yet, while this led the reproduction of the British middle classes, what appears to be at stake in the case of these North Americans in Panama is somewhat different; with its local significance, this knowledge and understanding of coffee production combined with land ownership

locates Tracy—and others like her—within the local hierarchy in ways that speak to the ongoing reproduction of privilege within this setting.

In Penang too, several of the people we have met are already combining work and retirement. Rebecca, for example, was doing some English teaching, and others were doing odd jobs, perhaps helping in a café or working in an art gallery. This was not anywhere near on the scale Karen had seen previously on the Costa del Sol, partly because the migrants in Penang were generally more well off and partly because of the regulations around working that are more closely monitored in Malaysia than in Spain. The work they did served to earn a little extra money, but was often more about finding a place for themselves and a community of friends, as in the work of Casado-Diaz (2006) and Haas (2012). They were practising lifestyle migration by working towards the creation of the lifestyle they had imagined (and reimagined over time).

Volunteering

In this final section, we would like to spend a little time talking about work and migration in a very different way: voluntary and unpaid work. In the following chapter, we describe the work that is done by migrants in making a home for themselves, and the role of associations in this. Although this is not usually paid work, effort expended in running and organising events within these organisations and associations can be quite time-consuming and labour-intensive; in Malaysia, in particular, this labour is very gendered.

Of course, there are those who avoid all organisational life altogether, but many of those Karen met in Penang were either involved in associational life or in doing some voluntary work elsewhere. And in many cases, both associational life and volunteering were combined. Here we are usually referring to what we have elsewhere referred to as 'trailing spouses' (Chap. 5), to retired people, or those of independent means. It is arguable that Western migrants who are not in full-time work feel a moral imperative to appear active, influenced by what Cole (2007) terms the 'moral discourse of work'. For these lifestyle migrants, volunteering is viewed as an unquestionable good, an expression of social responsibility (Kiy and

McEnany 2010), and a worthy use of one's spare time. However, volunteering is also a product of—and has the potential to reproduce—the inequalities between these migrant populations and local populations. As Michaela has argued previously in the case of North Americans in Boquete, philanthropy and charitable work

> emerge out of postcoloniality and relative privilege; the inequalities between these migrants and the local population on both structural and systemic levels make this almost inevitable … [T]he practise of philanthropy and charity thus relies upon the privileged position of the migrant community and their social networks. (Benson 2013b: 326)

The ways migrants spoke to us about their volunteering revealed both the moral discourse behind their actions and the implicit hierarchies that supported these. Jane, talking about the Malaysian Cultural Club, told Karen, for example:

> There are some women there who are very keen on volunteering and they do some marvellous things, they do things for the disabled, for children, I mean people are doing a lot. Where women may not be working they are actually doing other work in a good way and leaving a good legacy … these are often well educated women with time on their hands and they put it to good use. They are a good asset.

It is clear, here, that work (in this case voluntary work), just as with work as a corporate expatriate, is not labour the locals would be doing; it instead serves to distance migrants from others not like them. Rebecca similarly said, explaining why she enjoys her life in Penang so much:

> I don't mind the climate, I love the people, and volunteer work is entering into it too, becaus' I didn't have much opportunity to do that in Japan … here there is a plethora of volunteer activities that you can do; and the one that I chose is to go to the St Nicholas home around the corner and read books into the computer to make audiobooks for the Blind, given my husband … So I like that one, it suits me, I can go at my own speed and 'f I don't go, like last week'or if I'm out of town or something like that, 't doesn't matter. I like to read, I know the value of books, I know blind people value books, I like the sound of my own voice (laughs). I just love it.

Later, Rebecca said, 'life here is full, and I know I'm doing good work'.

Similarly, in Panama, philanthropy was a significant feature of the daily lives of many of the migrants; this was visible in the active presence of the Lions and Rotary clubs—international organisations that coordinate community service—the volunteering through the Catholic church, new community groups, the establishment of a global volunteer network in Boquete, and ground-up initiatives based on perceived local needs. Indeed, the extent to which volunteering—for the benefit either of the local population or for the migrant community—was part of everyday life was notable (see also Benson 2013b). However, it was also made clear that these migrants had been similarly involved in such activities before migration (see also Kiy and McEnany 2010); it is important to acknowledge this context in explaining what work volunteering then does within these migrants' accounts of their lives in Boquete. We stress here the way in which discussions of volunteering demonstrate the significance of the local within the claims to belonging that we discuss in more detail in the following chapter.

Indeed, volunteering was often—although not exclusively—organised around perceived *local* needs. To be clear, this volunteer work was so common among those Michaela spoke to in Boquete that it was unusual for her to come across people who did not volunteer in some way. It was precisely the extent to which people were interested in volunteering, charity, and philanthropy that had led Emma, who we met in Chap. 5, to establish her volunteering programme in Boquete.

On an individual level, people described how they supported individual children in buying the school uniforms and shoes they required if they were to attend school and taught local children how to read and speak English. But it was also clear that beyond these relatively one-to-one activities that there was a bigger programme of fundraising ongoing within this migrant population, with regular news about the amounts of money that they had raised through the annual auction and other activities spread throughout the year and donated to a variety of local charities. Almost every Tuesday Morning Meeting would end with announcements about the latest fundraising event—bingo, quiz night, murder mystery night, soup kitchen, a dance—demonstrating the way in which this is part of the everyday life of this migrant community. Fundraising and donations also drew on the wider links that these migrants had, as they encouraged coordinating funds and contributions from their friends, family, and acquaintances back in the

United States and Canada. Indeed, it was clear that those in the local chapters of large international organisations—Lions and Rotary—applied for support from these; others might organise this through their own interpersonal relationships, as in the case of Sarah, who regularly organises for a container of donated goods to be transported to Panama where she arranges its distribution to those in need.

What does this do for the migrants themselves? Ed, who we met in the previous chapter, described to Michaela how his volunteer work—which included his roles in the local Rotary Club, the Boquete Community Players, and in setting up a local hospice—was a response to staying active following migration (and retirement). However, as he talked about his dislike of gated communities, the insularity of the people who lived there and their unwillingness to take part in the local community, he highlighted that it was important for him to be involved with and contributing to the local community in some way. In this way, it became clear that through their organised activities, members of this migrant community made a clear statement about their contribution to Boquete, actively working for the benefit of the local community. It was also clear that these activities gave them a sense that they were giving back. It is also clear that volunteering brings members of this migrant community together and is central to the formation of communities of practice, as we discuss in Chap. 7.

However, it is important to remember that the volunteering of these migrants is embedded within global power inequalities (see also Benson 2013b). We recall here a tale—intended as a parable rather than a statement of fact—that was in constant circulation around the migrant community at the time of the research that illustrates this well, while also highlighting that among the migrants there was some awareness of their relative privilege. The tale was about an individual who had been negotiating a donation of emergency services equipment from the United States that would be a significant upgrade to what was locally available. However, he terminated the negotiations because it became clear that the local emergency services were not prepared to alter their working practices, a necessary requirement—in his opinion—for the new equipment to be put into use. As this last example illustrates, such philanthropic activities may be sites where global power inequalities are rendered sharply and uncomfortably visible.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we reveal how work is a practice, shaped by habitus, enabled by resources, and linked to the production of a better way of life. This innovates lifestyle migration research—which is so often focused on consumption— by viewing work and volunteering as creative in the practice of lifestyle. Although clearly powerful and resourceful agents of their own destinies, these migrants shape their lives in the context of conjuncturally specific external structures (or learning how to go on in new surroundings and communities of practice). In doing so, differences between Panama and Malaysia, related to context, historical structures, resources and diversity of the migrants, and opportunities and constraints are revealed. Recall that while Malaysia was formally colonised, Panama was not, and this is somewhat reflected in the nature of occupations they choose. For the North Americans in Boquete there is very much a shift towards postretirement life, whereas those in Malaysia have often been corporate expatriates before, and are finding ways to experience the good life, perhaps supported by secure pensions or high wages. Those in Panama are responding to what is locally meaningful, adapting rather than imposing their skills or experiences onto the setting (coffee, food, botanicals, art), while those in Malaysia seem more likely to reproduce colonial relations in their work and volunteering. Those in Panama, who have often moved directly from the United States, are much more likely to be engaged in geoarbitrage than those in Malaysia. Furthermore, it must be remembered that the research in Malaysia was undertaken mainly in Penang and also in Kuala Lumpur. These are what might be referred to as global cities, while Boquete is not, and this different geography brings with it different possibilities and opportunities. There are no corporate expats in Boquete, for example, and in Penang we see little opportunity to work on the land or to liaise with locals in any other way than through employment of help in the home, via the international associations, or by volunteering. The structural context of constraints and opportunities thus interacts with the habitus and conjuncturally specific internal and external structures to produce diverse outcomes and sedimentation (O'Reilly 2017) that reproduce inequalities in different ways.

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