

# Introduction

This book explores what values, dreams, and aspirations urbanites between twenty and forty-five years of age maintain who choose to relocate to rural areas in Japan. I present empirical data obtained from multisited fieldwork across Japan, examining how individuals position themselves in their new surroundings and engage with their environments in their pursuit of a personally more meaningful private and professional life.

I start with a simple proposition: being on the move has become a “way of life” (Urry 2002: 265) for many younger individuals in Japan, and the simultaneity of sedentary and mobile elements (Ralph and Staeheli 2011: 581) shapes people’s lives. The situation in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, a town that was devastated by the Great East Japan Earthquake, is commensurate with these claims: coworking spaces equipped with broadband wireless internet open to everyone, designer-style collective housing, former disaster volunteers turned entrepreneurs, temporary part-time workers, corporate refugees, multiple dwellers dividing their time between Tokyo and Ishinomaki, and short-term visitors who are still employed conventionally side by side in the “Reconstruction Bar” (Fukkō Bar). The emergence of shared office space, collective housing, and urban-style deli takeout in Kamiyama, Tokushima Prefecture, has also recently caught the attention of media. In addition, “*ijū* [rural relocation] concierges,” that is, staff employed by local governments whose task is to provide advice to individuals interested in moving to a rural town, have recently appeared across Japan.

In other words, rather than nostalgia-evoking rice paddy fields, the rural tends to be represented through more fuzzy images these days. In popular lifestyle magazines, articles about organic farming seem to have been replaced with information about sleek IT venture entrepreneurs

in rural areas who make use of the best of both worlds. Some rural towns such as Kamiyama in Tokushima Prefecture have also tried to sell themselves as perfect working environments for IT employees. Last but not least, the rural has increasingly been constituted in association with subjective well-being and happiness. References to “marginal villages” (Ōno 2008), that is, remote villages that are not sustainable any more due to more than half of the residents being over sixty-five years of age, have begun to be replaced by terms like “communities of hope” (chapter 3), “creative depopulation” (Ōminami in Matsunaga 2015), or “happy depopulated area” (*kōfuku na kasochi*; Sashide 2016: 116).

Many interviewees kept moving to other places over the course of my fieldwork. Against the background of the increased complexity of modern living (McIntyre 2006: 14), Japan is clearly changing in terms of lifestyles and values. “Ongoing semi-permanent moves of varying duration,” as Duncan, Cohen, and Thulemark define “lifestyle mobilities” (2013: 4), have become ubiquitous. Yet, narratives reveal that in their renegotiation of work-life balance, individuals are rearranging their everyday lives between persistent conventional understandings of work ethic, life courses, and sense of obligation and their personal aspirations to live more self-determined, diverse, and sustainable lives that make sense to them. Migrants find themselves between creating a “new rural” and being caught up in conventional views of the countryside as “second-class,” trying business ideas before moving into Tokyo. A female migrant aged forty shared her parents’ concern about a return to her home prefecture after attending university and working in the capital for twenty years, asking her what had gone wrong in her career in Tokyo. Many lifestyle migrants are very clear about their reasons for leaving urban lifestyles behind and have ideas of what they would like to do in the future, but they seem to struggle for ways to implement these ideas. Hence, while rural areas hold hope and constitute experimental grounds for many, I have also encountered numerous individuals who talked about their quest for something meaningful and were not certain they would find a purpose in life. I argue that the flip side of hope and aspiration is risk and insecurity; mobility embodies both freedom and challenge, creativity and precariousness, with the lines between these poles being fuzzy more often than not. Many interviewees spoke about the sense of fulfillment they derive from creating their own work in accordance with circumstances they deem appropriate and having control of their own time. However, many also mention the challenges and pressures that come with “freedom.”

This condition of being caught between hope and constraint, aspiration and resignation, these poles of the “ethics of probability” and “possibility,” as Arjun Appadurai calls it when he describes contemporary migration (2013: 295), is a recurring feature in settlers’ narratives. Appadurai argues that the ethics of probability is salient “in the modern regimes of diagnosis, counting and accounting,” while the ethics of possibility is intricately related to hope, aspiration, and perspective as it “expands the field of the imagination.”

My argument is that in the case of Japan, the line between these apparently dichotomous poles is not as clean-cut as Appadurai suggested. Governmental actors in Japan increasingly like to refer to the paradigm of possibility with regard to rural areas. On the one hand, at the “macro” level, local governments’ initiatives are often the result of the pressure to show that they are taking measures to fight depopulation, regardless of most locals being aware that these measures will not make a great difference in the long term. This also ties in with Bridget Love’s cogent argument that recent initiatives by diverse actors to revive localities in remote rural areas are nothing but attempts to “convert legacies of marginalization into celebrations of cultural diversity as a way of shifting responsibility for the future of the deplete countryside onto its inhabitants” (2013: 112).

Against this background of increasing despair over the impossibility of turning around the ticking demographic time bomb of aging, depopulation, and lack of offspring in rural areas and sustained attempts at decentralization, programs such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication’s volunteers for cooperation in community revitalization (*chiiki okoshi kyōryokutai*) have resulted in a palpable rise in urban youth residing in rural areas. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, in 2009, the initial year of the system, 89 volunteers were dispatched across Japan; in 2016, this number has increased to 3,978 ([http://www.soumu.go.jp/main\\_sosiki/jichi\\_gyousei/c-gyousei/02gyosei08\\_03000066.html](http://www.soumu.go.jp/main_sosiki/jichi_gyousei/c-gyousei/02gyosei08_03000066.html)). As a result of this influx, a partial shift in perspective and thinking has occurred with regard to what rural areas have to offer. Recently, Ishiba Shigeru, Japan’s minister in charge of regional revitalization (*chihō sōsei tantō daijin*), since September 2014 argued in the 2015 winter issue of the magazine *Turns* that previously the conventional idea was to move to Tokyo from rural areas to fulfill one’s dream and then move back to one’s original home after retirement. Now, the idea that has recently been gaining ground is for people to move to rural areas to fulfill their dreams. Furthermore, Minister Ishiba, himself originally

from Tottori Prefecture, the least populated prefecture in a remote part of Western Japan facing the Japanese Sea, explains that the individuals who will change rural areas will change Japan, arguing that in Japan's history, change of the governmental regime always originated in rural areas, referring to the Meiji Reform as an example (*Turns* 2015: 10). The minister predicts that twenty-first-century Japan will be shaped by the regions; Ishiba's statement clearly shows the shifting position of rural areas in Japan's governmental discourse and the high priority it ascribes to the paradigm of possibility, quite in contrast to Appadurai's polarized structure of government as probability and civil sector as possibility. Simultaneously, Ishiba's position could also be interpreted as in accordance with the neoliberal stance of elegantly handing over responsibility for the viability of remote hamlets to local actors (and those who identify themselves with them).

This brings us to the lingering sense of precariousness due to neoliberal working conditions that have been on the increase in Japan and globally. Lifelong employment is only available for a quarter of university graduates, as opposed to more than half in 1991 (Chiavacci and Hommerich 2017: 9). The Lehman Brothers stock collapse showed that lifelong employment does not mean secure employment for life. Numerous migrant narratives are characterized by a sense of "just getting by" financially, being too busy holding several jobs at once so that individuals have no time to reflect on their lives and what they actually aspire to. Almost every interviewee mentioned their quest for "happiness," "a sense of satisfaction," and "self-realization" at some point in interviews and during participant observation, yet many seemed at a loss how to find it or implement it and many did not seem to have a clue what they are actually looking for.

Chapter 1 provides an outline of recent discourses of the role rural areas can and should play in the world and, specifically, in Japan. Starting out with more theoretical reflections on the variety of meanings attributed to "the rural" as a "category of thought" (Mormont 1990: 40), this chapter is concerned with disentangling the production and reproduction of the "rural" as an idea, both generally and in the case of Japan. Recent terms such as "radical rural spatiality" (Halfacree 2007), "creative depopulation" (Ōminami in Matsunaga 2015), downshifting, and "small-scale happiness" (Furuichi 2011) and an increasing interest in flexible modes of working and living, such as, for example, Bauman-esque notions of "living in a manner that involves living for oneself"

(Nishimura 2009) and “a lifestyle that does not opt for employment” (Mori 2011) will be examined. Such discourses show the ongoing shift from a negative perception of rural areas as backwaters of civilization to fields of experimentation and diverse lifestyles. This chapter critically discusses the shift in the Japanese discourse from the countryside as a “repository of nostalgia-laden cultural heritage” (Schnell 2005) to more diverse perceptions of rural areas, with urban-rural linkages as the key to recent attempts to pursue more sustainable lifestyles. While the demographic statistics suggest that it is impossible to stop the trend of depopulation as such, some “hamlets at their limits” (*genkai shūraku*, a term coined by sociologist Ōno Akira in the 1990s) have made efforts to buck the trend by introducing measures to attract highly qualified individuals. This chapter aims to outline the heterogeneity of societal representations of the countryside in Japan beyond the threefold narrative on the rural as “pre-modernity,” “productivist,” and “rural renaissance” (da Silva et al. 2016: 79), introducing a fourth narrative in the Japanese discourse, that is, rurality as experimental ground for pioneers. Narratives will also show, however, that the true heterogeneity of rural regions (Marsden 1999: 505) and the dispositional heterogeneity of our thinking (Bell 2007: 410) have redefined “the rural” as rurality is perceived as “a problem, a resource, a region of growth and a victim” all at once (Nilsson and Lundgren 2015: 88–91, cited in Kuhmonen, Kuhmonen, and Luoto 2016: 89).

Also building on insights from the theory of lifestyle migration and lifestyle mobilities as well, chapter 2 will analyze the forms and modes of urban-to-rural migration in contemporary Japan, highlighting the perspectives of female migrants in post-growth Japan. Interviews and participant observation with a range of female settlers in their twenties, thirties, and forties illustrate the ongoing negotiations of women trying to assert change yet finding themselves exposed to systemic constraints. The individuals portrayed also show that these self-initiated migrants do not necessarily make a commitment to rural lifestyle by moving to the countryside. Instead, they tend to maintain urban modes of working and living despite their aspiration to a better quality of life. This diversification of approaches to life in the countryside adds to the potential of rural living and its appeal to a wide variety of individuals, not only in conventional terms of the countryside providing relaxation but also as a place for innovative ways to solve persistent societal issues. This chapter provides empirical proof that in contrast to previous studies of lifestyle migration (Nagatomo 2014; Sato 2001) that presented individuals

pursuing transnational trajectories in order to slow down and opt out of the work life, this generation of lifestyle migrants is struggling to combine professional careers, family, leisure, and self-realization.

Chapter 3 depicts the increasing shift from a focus on economic growth and material affluence to more emphasis on subjective well-being, work-life balance, and social capital. This is evident in the emergence of coworking spaces, TED-like events, shared houses, and similar facilities geared toward a more relaxed lifestyle and the exchange of information and networking among like-minded peers. I contend that over the past few years, urbanites in their twenties and thirties have taken numerous initiatives across Japan by turning to barter, sharing, and networking that point to a distinct move toward post-growth Japan. Yet, the empirical data discussed in this chapter shows that contemporary youth and middle-aged migrants approach life in the countryside as a natural extension and evolution of their previous lives rather than as a radical break in the sense of the conventional idea of relocation to the rural idyll. At the same time, ideas such as self-development, self-growth beyond material wealth, and pursuit of an individualized lifestyle in Giddens's sense of a "project of the self" (1991) are clearly evident in personal narratives, individual spatial practices, as well as migrants' representations of the rural.

Chapter 4, entitled "Between Agency and Anomie, Possibility and Probability: Lifestyle Migrants and the Neoliberal Moment," examines the emphasis of Japanese migrant youth on the here and now against the background of an increasingly insecure job market. Korpela argues that lifestyle migration "suits the neoliberal agenda" (2014: 229). Drawing on Beck's notion of "living your own life" (2003) and viewing lifestyle mobility as a "fluid and dynamic process" (Duncan, Cohen, and Thulemark 2013), my argument is that in their pursuit of "small-scale happiness" and self-realization, individuals live in the moment in order to grapple strategically with insecurity and risk. This chapter provides empirical evidence both for migrants' agency, that is, efforts toward greater self-determination, and systemic constraints. In the vein of Nikolas Rose's contention that "the human is neither an actor essentially possessed of agency, nor a possessive product or puppet of cultural forces; agency is produced in the course of practices under a whole variety of more or less onerous, explicit, punitive, or seductive, disciplinary or passional constraints and relations of force" (1998: 189) and Rob Stones's theory of the conceptual separation of structures and agency with the assumption of an analytical dualism but an ontological duality (2005: 189), I examine how individ-

uals are caught between their aspiration to live a more self-determined life and the pressures of inadvertently reproducing systemic values such as following a relatively rigid life course and the challenges of making a livelihood in rural areas with limited job prospects. Case studies from Hokkaido, Shimane, and Niigata prefectures indicate that resistance to societal mainstream values often coalesces into co-optation of conventional thinking and modes of working.

Chapter 5, entitled “Convergence of Work and Leisure: Blessing or Plight?,” critically depicts the increasing convergence of work and leisure in the lives of migrants (Klien 2016) and assesses both positive and negative implications of work-life balance of individuals who identify with their work to the extent of total engagement/immersion. Drawing on previous research about the destabilization of the binary divide between work and leisure by Duncan, Cohen, and Thulemark (2013), I investigate the search of mobile youth for more self-determination and, ultimately, control over their lives, but I show how they often end up becoming immersed in work as the lines between work and leisure blur in their quest for the eventual achievement of a better quality of life.

Chapter 6, entitled “Liminal Belonging and Moratorium Migration: Lifestyle Migrants between Limbo and Purpose of Life,” introduces case studies from Shimane (Ama Town), Tokushima (Kamiyama Town), and Niigata prefectures (Iketani hamlet) with the aim of examining how settlers relate to the communities to which they have relocated. Specifically, the notions of liminal belonging and moratorium migration will be discussed. This section highlights the complex, shifting position of settlers within the communities, as well as their relations with other (nonlocal) settlers.

Chapter 7 examines the experiences of social entrepreneurs in former disaster zones, for example, tsunami-stricken Miyagi Prefecture (Ishinomaki and Oshika Peninsula) and Tokushima Prefecture, who are making efforts to combine a contribution to the community by creating jobs for locals with making a livelihood and experimenting with novel modes of working and living. Cases presented include revitalization projects that entail the collaboration of local and nonlocal stakeholders such as Ishinomaki Laboratory, the Ocica and Hamagurido project, and others.

Despite the focus of contemporary youth on downsizing and introversion, they aspire to making a social contribution that has a wider impact beyond their immediate environment, as also argued by Furuichi (2015: 96). One section of this chapter examines the coexistence of individualism and collectivism in mobile youth that is salient in individual narratives

and practices. Another section deals with mobility and marginality, that is, how mobile entrepreneurs conceptualize their subjectivities both theoretically and practically with regard to the community to which they have relocated, which tends to take the “sedentary lifestyle” for granted. This chapter yields insights into the transformative effects of these activities on the individuals involved, on the communities they have relocated to, and on Japan altogether. This chapter explores the inherent paradoxes of post-growth Japan as up and coming social entrepreneurs aspire to having more control of their time and lives yet struggle to achieve professional success. Despite the outstanding importance notions like “purpose in life,” “quality of life,” and “happiness” seem to carry for interviewees as discursive concepts, many entrepreneurs are ultimately so immersed in their work that little time is left in their tight schedules for reflection and leisure.

The conclusion, entitled “Deconstructing Japan’s Rural-Urban Divide,” ties together various threads that run through this monograph. It sums up the findings of the book by wrapping up the diverse cases of urban migrants in the countryside and teasing out characteristics in their trajectories. Discussion of the empirical data presented illustrates that the reality of contemporary Japan cannot be envisaged as an urban-rural divide anymore. The discussion in this conclusion thus confirms that Gkartzios’s notion of “urban-rural continuum” (2013: 160) also applies to Japan. Here, the ethnographic cases of migrants presented in this monograph are placed in the wider context of demographic trends and interpreted as a phenomenon that embodies a gradual but comprehensive value and paradigm shift in contemporary Japanese society.

### Drops in the Ocean or the Beginning of Formative Change?

If we contextualize these urbanite migrants in Japan’s countryside in the wider demographic picture, they may be considered as drops in the ocean given the overall trend of depopulation and aging that rural regions inevitably face across Japan. So why do these few individuals matter? These migrants may be negligible in quantitative terms, yet their decision to leave urban areas shows that Japan has come of age from its postwar model of lifestyle employment geared toward fulfilling the dream of eventually purchasing their own houses in suburbs of urban areas. Contemporary youth have not only started to move from urban areas,

but they have also abandoned conventional unified lifestyles in cramped apartments with grueling daily work routines in favor of lifestyles that entail facets of shared economy and challenge the neoliberal emphasis on material gain and achievement: they do so by opting for cohousing and coworking spaces in remote villages.

As Gordon Mathews points out, Japan is still replete with a number of inflexible structural features that seem likely to create unhappiness in a significant number of its members, but change is nevertheless happening as “Japanese society as a whole seems notably more individualistic and accepting of individual difference than 30 and 40 years ago” (2017: 230–231). In a similar vein, the vignettes of my interviewees illustrate that, for them, migration is a “project of the self,” to borrow Anthony Giddens’s term, that is, mobility and their choice of lifestyle profoundly affects and shapes their sense of self (1991). The lifestyle migrants examined here embody features of the “new rural development paradigm” as opposed to the “modernization paradigm” since rural areas have emerged to be associated with endogenous development, bottom-up innovation, social capital (instead of financial capital), sustainable development, small-scale niche industries, and local embeddedness (Woods 2011: 140).

### Deconstructing Rural Japan

This book is about mobility primarily based on lifestyle concerns in contemporary Japan, but the narratives, experiences, and trajectories of migrants depicted throughout the volume are relevant beyond Japan for the following reasons.

First, activities of the individuals who have relocated from urban to rural areas show that the widespread professional networks of individuals connect them to places well beyond the bounded place to which they have relocated. Many lead lifestyles that entail commuting between two places, one rural and one urban. The majority of interviewees engage in lifestyles that entail the consumption of goods that are not available at their chosen site of living but ordered through the internet. Many maintain social contacts through visits or social media that result in frequent exchange with partners in areas other than the one they have relocated to. Hence, one of the aims of this book is to rethink rurality as a theoretical concept on the basis of abundant empirical data and examine the position of rural areas in general.

Second, the modes of living and working that migrants' everyday lives contain suggest "post-growth" values of relevance to other countries that will eventually face the same fate of depopulation, aging, and economic stagnation that are typically salient in postindustrial societies. Features of the sharing economy—networks of similarly minded peers forming ersatz families; downsizing; small-scale happiness; a coexistence of societal engagement; and withdrawal, agency, and subjection—are recurring themes in all post-growth societies and thus make the empirical data presented here pertinent beyond Japan. Another reason why I argue that these migrants matter in the larger societal context of Japan and beyond is the aspect of creative depopulation. Ōminami Shinya, founder of the NPO Green Valley in Kamiyama Town, Tokushima Prefecture, has coined the term "creative depopulation." Kamiyama has become famous for its revitalization policy of attracting a small (160 individuals in 2016) but growing number of visionary migrants from diverse areas including IT, design, architecture, fine arts, food revitalization, and so on, with the idea being that though depopulation is inevitable, as a town, residents can try to cope with depopulation while still maintaining the attractiveness of Kamiyama as a vibrant place. Compact towns, close-knit networks of locals and other migrants, and face-to-face chats all offer professional opportunities apart from emotional benefits, especially for young entrepreneurs.

Third, the complexity of human experiences categorized as "lifestyle migration" and mobility depicted throughout this book suggests that there is no type; rather, the diversity and fuzziness of narratives and practices indicate that like any other postindustrial society Japan is a "complex society" with a distributive culture (Barth 1989)—one more reason that makes the findings relevant beyond the context of Japan. Distributive takes on culture perceive culture "as complex knowledge systems unevenly appropriated in social and political time and space" (Shore 1996: 209). Many interviewees had spent considerable time studying, living, or working abroad or in other locations in Japan. This raises the question concerning what is specifically "Japanese" about them. I would like to claim that the emergence of an increasingly transnational and translocal generation of Japanese individuals as documented in this book requires us to rethink the relevance of local and national categorizations as bounded entities, as is often the case in previous research. The limitations of approaching Japan as a monolithic entity have recently been impressively highlighted by Guarné and Hansen (2018). Similarly, rather than focusing on the

aspect of culture or nation, I am more interested in the relevance of the societal phenomena described in this monograph for other post-growth societies that will face similar issues in the near future. The distinctly translocal and transnational lifestyles of the individuals depicted in this book also raises the question of a “sense of belonging” (*ibasho*).

In conventional discourse, a sense of belonging, and the concept of “home” used to be wedded to a clearly bounded physical place. However, settlers’ trajectories, everyday lives, and narratives suggest that many seem more comfortable with the idea of a home that they can put into a pocket and move on, that is, a mobile sense of belonging, a mindset that resembles Lise Gunderson’s statement that “home is where you are; home is the moment you are in” (2008: 27). For many, work continues to be the most important factor shaping their decision of where to move. Networks are extremely important as individuals in postproductivist Japan are increasingly concerned with a sense of *waku waku*, that is, a positive sense of excitement, inspiration, and drive that comes with engaging in work perceived as personally meaningful and societally important. Many interviewees observe that their decision to relocate resulted from existing professional networks.

Fourth, the findings presented in this book draw on extensive fieldwork in Shimane, Tokushima, Niigata, Iwate, and Miyagi prefectures and Hokkaido conducted between 2009 and 2017. Fieldwork consisted of participant observation at multiple sites across Japan and included attending a variety of events targeted at lifestyle migrants such as information events in Tokyo about life in certain regions, migration turns in the regions, group interviews and individual interviews with migrants, as well as hanging out with migrants in diverse settings. I also interviewed individuals who had decided to return to their original urban environment after realizing that rural living did not match their expectations.

Data for this study derive from semi-structured interviews with 118 respondents who had either migrated from urban areas to rural areas or were dividing their time between the rural and urban areas. Thirty-five of the interviewees were female, eighty-three were male. No special attempt was made to consider gender balance; rather, the result reflects the overall dominance of males in lifestyle migrants. Conducted between 2009 and 2017, these interviews lasted between one and four hours. In most cases, I sent the questions I hoped to discuss to my interviewees in advance; in some cases, however, the focus of the interview shifted to different directions. I interviewed migrants in their homes, places of work,

in public places such as local government buildings, restaurants, cafés, outdoors, and via Skype. In a few cases, I conducted group interviews or interviews with couples. With twenty-four collaborators I conducted multiple interviews at different sites.

Follow-up fieldwork in regions like Shimane also made the changing position of rural areas within Japan evident by the fact that when I went there for the first time, back in 2008, most of my interviewees were early-career radical dropouts from elite companies with highly individualist visions that few could relate to, especially in the local community. In 2017, increasingly, successful midcareer salarymen choose to relocate to rural areas to engage in professional activities relating to *machizukuri* (placemaking, revitalization) in cooperation with local municipalities, something that did not happen previously. I have also interviewed male corporate employees working in IT with no interest in rural lifestyles who found themselves living in the countryside as they were initially dispatched by their urban companies to work there for a limited period but then ended up liking it so much that they extended rural life. In other words, living in the countryside has gained more recognition as a valid career option, and hence, communities of migrants have also emerged, with both merits and demerits for the migrants themselves. This growing professional interest in rural areas is also reflected in the increasing numbers of inquiries that the Tokyo-based Furusato Kaiki Shien Center (literally, Center for Supporting a Return to One's Home Region), a nonprofit organization that provides advice on life in rural areas, has received since 2008 from individuals in their thirties and forties. Back in 2008, only 12 percent of inquiries were from individuals in their thirties, while now they account for 28.7 percent. Back in 2008, 14.4 percent were people in their forties; now they account for 22.6 percent. In other words, rural areas seem to hold increasing appeal for relatively young and midcareer professionals (Yoneda 2017: 27).

Nine years ago when I started my ethnographic research for this project, I mostly interviewed individuals in their late twenties or early thirties who aspired to diverse versions of “chilled-out” life, better work-life balance, and sustainable lifestyles; now, increasingly, my interview partners are highly driven entrepreneurs with an interest in collaborating with local communities catering to an urban market or drawing on and appropriating rural elements to fit into their global lifestyles and networks. But I have also interviewed a broad spectrum of individuals concerned with healthy eating and sustainable lifestyles in general and

entrepreneurs bringing a leisure-oriented mindset with a highly focused sense of business together. In addition to migrants per se, I have met with numerous representatives of local government responsible for in-migration policies, members of NGOs, and local citizens to discuss their views of in-migrants in their communities.

In retrospect, I feel that my own background as a European living in northern Japan made it easy for me to achieve rapport with my research subjects for this long-term project. On the one hand, I got the impression that my own migrant status facilitated interviews (in comparison to other research projects I had engaged in simultaneously). I also suspect that in line with Hertog's observation, being a non-Japanese researcher helped informants to open up about intimate issues (Hertog 2009: 17). Given the fact that many of my interviewees had experience living or working abroad, in some cases especially with female lifestyle migrants, it seemed natural to start the interview in an eerily familiar way as if the interviewee and I had met before. This applies particularly to discussing issues such as gender and work, where I expressed my heartfelt empathy during our conversation, which helped to promote an atmosphere of casual rapport and amicability.

## Mobility and Methodology

Latour has compellingly argued that "movements and displacements are first, forms and sites come second" (2005: 300). Not only does mobility play a crucial role in the lives of my interviewees, but as a researcher undertaking this project, movement has also impacted the research methodology in sometimes unforeseeable ways. In addition to "real" fieldwork in the field, I engaged in "virtual" fieldwork through social media. For example, members of a collective house featured in chapter 3 asked me to join and contribute to an Advent calendar—an internet forum in which on each day between December 1 and 25, someone related to the collective would contribute an essay. This was a great way of learning more about and engaging with other members of the collective house whom I had not met when I was there last year beyond the means of conventional fieldwork. And, of course, social media such as Facebook and Instagram do have some benefits since they afford extended insights into interviewees' everyday lives and activities after leaving the (spatial) field. As mentioned earlier, I also conducted some interviews on Skype.

Many scholars in the field of lifestyle migration and mobility have elaborated their interpretations of mobility by inscribing them with ontological meanings for settlers as it allows them to pursue professional options that were not available to them in their previous places of living. Yet, what remains a lacuna in my opinion is mobility as a means to play for time, hedge their bets, mobility as a period of grace—a moratorium so to speak. I draw on psychoanalyst Okonogi Keigo's term *moratorium ningen* (literally, moratorium being; Okonogi 1978) from the 1970s, which incorporated Erik Erikson's "identity diffusion syndrome," denoting individuals who arbitrarily chose to evade their obligations and responsibilities to society.

In a similar vein, many settlers portrayed throughout this ethnography have degrees from top universities and possess valuable working experience yet are at a loss as to how to proceed with their lives in the sense of a committed societal engagement beyond mere work for monetary incentives. Rural living comes as a viable option for them to rethink their work and lives and gain time to carve out niches that allow them to find what they want. These settlers have embarked on their quest, yet many seem unsure what they are actually looking for. Angela McRobbie has previously described forms of a "mobility, which does not quite know where it is going" (2016: 90). Numerous settlers described throughout this volume may have a larger vision but seem uncertain how to translate it into a reality that relates directly to their everyday lives. We have tended to take it for granted that mobility is movement imbued with meaning (Cresswell 2001, 2006) and that movement is a means for individuals seeking to render their lives more meaningful. What if it were not? What if settlers were "haunted" and externally shaped by the ubiquitous discourse about the quest for subjective well-being and happiness yet did not partake in this quest at a deeper emotional level? I hope that the findings presented in the following chapters illustrate that multisited ethnography with its immersive methodology is appropriate for capturing these moments of moratorium and exemption.

Moratorium migration fuses the previously contradictory elements of "lifestyle" and "precariat" into a fuzzy gray zone where work, lifestyle, leisure, self-realization, and precariousness all blend into one.

Finally, and indeed related to the latter post-growth fuzziness, the inherent focus on the moment and lack of medium- and long-term planning is another striking feature evident in many migrant narratives. The overwhelming majority of migrants' trajectories are characterized by

postconsumption lifestyles, the eminent focus of individuals on living (and working) in the moment that I have analyzed in previous research (Klien 2017) and that could be categorized as a feature conventionally ascribed to neoliberalist emphasis on ephemerality (Harvey 2005) and precariousness—the other side of freedom, flexibility, and creative dynamism. Bloch has referred to this mix of aspiration and despair as the “ontology of Not Yet Being” (1986: 11). Harvey talks of “spaces of hope” (2000) yet also elaborates on the “romanticism of endlessly open projects” (2000: 174). Similarly, Berlant has coined the intriguing term “cruel optimism” (2011) when she explored individuals’ fantasies about realizing “the good life” in the neoliberal context of individual responsibility and achievement. It is this gray zone where aspiration and resignation coexist rather uneasily in which individuals attempt to create something new and find themselves entrapped in existing systemic constraints that this book examines ethnographically.

The coexistence of contradictory features in one and the same fragmented experience of a single individual may ultimately be what is the essential trait of post-growth Japan and what is bound to emerge in other postindustrial societies in the near future. Perhaps the remark by a female lifestyle migrant aged thirty originally from Chiba Prefecture who now lives on Itoshima Island illustrates the concurrence of disparate themes in a nutshell: “Personally, I think that if we manage to acquire skills to live without relying on capitalism, establish a community we can rely on and find ways of earning cash living in this way, we can solve most of the issues that we are faced with today” (Isa 2017: 122).

As argued by Rosenberger drawing on Foucault, the resistance shown by migrants to values favored by postwar mainstream life and their ensuing attempts to live according to their own values is never completely outside of the generally accepted truths and power dynamics of the times but is always present in a society (Rosenberger 2014: 107; Foucault 1980b). Such nascent confluence of resistance to and appropriation of mainstream societal values, possibility and probability, aspiration and subjection, societal engagement and withdrawal, regeneration and stagnation is key to the fuzzy experiences of mobile subjects grappling to negotiate their lives in shifting contemporary Japan. Self-monitoring patterns of behavior like posting on social media about one’s professional activities as a freelancer in rural Japan go hand in hand with emotional withdrawal; vision and precariousness coexist uneasily. On the one hand, urbanites in rural areas express high satisfaction with their daily lives; yet, the other side of the

coin is that they are living in permanent limbo, with many on the cusp of finding their purpose in life without actually having a precise idea of what it could be. Evidently, being in flux can also be perceived positively as having potential for self-growth and productive development. In this sense, migratory moves need to be approached more as ongoing processes rather than given points and fixed decisions, as has previously been argued by Cohen, Duncan, and Thulemark (2013).

The moments of stalling, withdrawal, disenchantment and dislocation, uneasy limbo and vibrant spirit of challenge when being torn between diverging directions that moratorium migrants experience are the focus of this ethnographic study and, I would claim, the essence of post-growth Japan.