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# **Debating Migration and Citizenship in a Transnational World: 'Highly Skilled' Singaporeans in London**

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements  
for the degree of PhD University of London, 2007

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## ABSTRACT

Accelerating globalisation and contemporary transnational migration impact the way that citizenship is given meaning and practised by both states and citizens. Based on a study of the Singaporean state and highly skilled Singaporeans in London, this thesis advances an argument that transnational migration opens up new avenues to think through citizenship as a distinct spatial and socio-political formation. My thesis investigates, first, the manner in which Singaporean transnational migration informs existing understandings of highly skilled migration; and second, the dynamics of the relationship between transnational migration and citizenship. I utilise discourse analysis, ethnography and in-depth interviews with Singaporean policymakers, London-based Singaporean community associations and individual Singaporean transmigrants to carry out my study.

This thesis develops the scholarship on middling transnationalism by drawing attention to the fluidity of migration strategies and the institutional factors that motivate 'highly skilled' Singaporean migration to London. My research findings also contribute to geographical perspectives on transnational migration and citizenship in several ways. I introduce the concept of 'emotional citizenship' through narratives of place-based belonging. However, I also argue that identity politics disrupt notions of a coherent Singaporean identity and transnational community. I further propose that mobility creates spaces of contradiction in the way that citizenly 'rights and responsibilities' are relationally constructed by the Singaporean state and its citizens. Finally, I focus on Singaporean transnational families to highlight the spatial significance of the 'Asian' extended family in relation to citizenship issues. This analysis foregrounds the mutually constituting relationship between the emotional, political and social-cultural aspects of citizenship.

Whilst this thesis presents empirical reflections and policy implications that are specific to the Singaporean case study, my findings also contribute to broader theoretical formulations of transnational migration and citizenship (trans)formations.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CPF	Central Provident Fund
CRE	Commission for Racial Equality
DINK	'Double-income, no kids'
EEA	European Economic Area
EU	European Union
HSMP	Highly Skilled Migrant Programme
IND	Immigration and Nationality Directorate
IPS	International Passenger Survey
MBA	Masters in Business Administration
MCYS	Ministry of Community, Youth and Sports
MHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MINDEF	Ministry of Defence
MOM	Ministry of Manpower
NS	National service
OB	'Out-of-bounds'
OPSI	Office of Public Service Information
OSU	Overseas Singaporean Unit
PAP	People's Action Party
PR	Permanent resident (or permanent residency)
SIF	Singapore International Foundation
SBG	Singapore Business Group
SGS	Singapore Golf Society
SPN	Singapore-Professionals Network
SUKA	Singapore-UK Association
SYPUK	Singapore-Young Professionals Network
TNC	Transnational corporation
UK	United Kingdom
WHV	Working holidaymaker visa

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# 1

## Introduction and research objectives

---

Accentuated transnational migration flows and processes have important implications for the way that citizenship is conceptualised and practised in the contemporary world. Geographers have traditionally been interested in the processes and formations of both transnational migration and citizenship. Given the practical and theoretical challenges to conventional conceptions of citizenship arising from accelerating transnational mobility, it is even more critical for geographers to study the intersection of these two phenomena today. This is because the sustained cross-border movement of people complicates the premise that membership and the rights and duties (or obligations) associated with citizenship should be conditioned on territorial definitions of a national community. Based on an empirical study of the Singaporean nation-state, this thesis examines the ways in which transnational migration and citizenship (trans)formations mutually constitute one another.

The nation-state of Singapore is both a recipient as well as a source of migration flows. While managing the inflow of new migrants, Singapore also faces a new set of challenges arising from the outflow of Singaporean citizens to different parts of the world. Some of these Singaporeans spend prolonged periods of time outside Singapore and develop emotional ties in the countries where they have studied, worked and lived. The Singaporean state expresses deep concern over the extent to which citizens living abroad continue to feel a sense of belonging towards Singapore, and whether they would still fulfil their duties and obligations to the country. Overseas Singaporeans tend to be highly skilled individuals with internationalised networks and they fit the profile of

citizens whom the Singaporean state is most concerned to retain in the interest of the country. As the number of overseas Singaporeans increases, the Singaporean state has concomitantly begun to reach out more proactively towards the overseas citizenry through extraterritorial initiatives and policies. The attitudes of overseas Singaporeans towards the state's growing interest in them are, however, open to question. How do overseas Singaporeans regard their Singaporean citizenship during their transmigrancy? In what ways are the existing cleavages within Singaporean society transported into transmigrancy? Is the social contract between state and citizen strengthening or unravelling in view of the miles separating the country of origin from the internationally mobile citizen?

My research on the concept and practice of Singapore citizenship in relation to transnational migration arises out of both personal and academic interest. Being an involved citizen of the Singaporean state, which is often regarded within and outside of Singapore as being governed by a group of paternalistic and controlling political leaders, I have often had to field difficult questions from curious persons about the legitimacy and sustainability of political governance in Singapore. This thesis provides a productive way for me to think through the issues that are at the heart of political governance in Singapore. Furthermore, as an overseas Singaporean now, I feel the tug of my heartstrings pulling me towards the familiar sights and sounds of Singapore in which my social and kinship networks are based. Nonetheless, I am also drawn by the lure of the unknown and the adventures that await me in the unexplored

terrains on which I have yet to set foot. To me, this thesis represents a way to come to terms with the countervailing pulls of ‘heart’ and ‘wing’ (Yeoh and Willis, 1999).

Empirically, the case-study of Singapore presents an opportunity to study the complexities of migration flows and processes. As a young city-state that is deeply embedded in globalising flows, the immigration of foreigners into Singapore coupled with the emigration of Singaporeans create a situation in which the concept and practices of citizenship can be interrogated under relatively compact and intense conditions. The transnational flow of Singaporeans towards London offers a particularly valuable field for the consideration of highly skilled migration flows between two global cities since most Singaporeans who work and live in London have high levels of education or skills. In addition, comparing Singapore and the United Kingdom (UK) bring into perspective the postcolonial connections and different citizenship traditions in these two countries.

An exploration of these empirical issues generates important theoretical reflection with respect to transnational migration and citizenship studies. Within the scholarship on transnational migration, there is a growing clarion call to move beyond analyses of the transnational elite and low-paid labour migrants to consider examples of ‘middling’ transnationalism (Conradson and Latham, 2005a:229; Smith, 2005). Although the Singaporean transmigrants in my study possessed high levels of education and/or skills, they did not

necessarily take up occupations in the ‘transnational elite’ category. Instead they capitalised upon a range of migration strategies to live in London and tend to occupy middle socio-economic statuses there. This may be out of personal choice or due to circumstances beyond their control. Their experiences of transnational migration provide useful insights into the world of middling transnational actors, such as with respect to migration strategies, trajectories and motivations.

The empirical example of Singapore, given the multi-faceted nature of migration in the city-state, also sheds research perspectives on the changing forms of citizenship governance and accompanying citizen negotiations in a transnational world. Isin and Turner (2002:2) suggest that what it means to be a citizen can be understood in terms of the extent (inclusion and exclusion), content (rights and responsibilities) and depth (thickness or thinness) of citizenship. In this thesis, I am interested to examine these dimensions of citizenship. My examination of citizenship is also inflected by feminist and cultural understandings that regard citizenship as much more than simply the formal relationship between an individual and the state. I regard citizenship as a ‘total relationship, inflected by identity, social positioning, cultural assumptions, institutional practices and a sense of belonging’ (Webner and Yuval-Davis, 1999:4).

Thus, the objective of this thesis is to gain political-economic and social-cultural insights on the ways in which transnational migration and the



constituent parts of citizenship shape one another. In this way, my thesis responds to Marston's (2004) call to 'explore the ways [in which] cultural questions relating to identity and meaning-making are fundamentally connected to political questions about power and the adjudicating role of the state' (ibid, 1).

In this thesis, I pay attention to the 'everyday' dimensions of both transnational mobility and citizenship (Conradson and Latham, 2005a; Desforges *et al*, 2005). Perspectives on the 'everyday' provide a useful counterbalance to accounts that valorise unfettered global mobilities and assertions that we are past the nation-state framework in this global day and age. Exploring the 'everyday' also illuminates the way that mobility and citizenship as a concept and practice are given meaning through the attitudes and actions of social actors. Teasing out the taken-for-granted dimensions of transnational migration and citizenship is a useful way to study the ideological and institutional structures that enable or constrain the agency of migrants, and at the same time, consider whether the agency of migrants conforms to or resists those structural conditions.

By focusing on the 'everyday', I also draw attention to the embodiment of migrant actors in acknowledging the emotions invoked in migration and citizenship attitudes, decisions and practices (Staeheli, 2004). This is done by recognising the world of emotions as a way of knowing, being and doing (Anderson and Smith, 2001). My interest in this thesis is to consider the ways

in which emotional intensities underpin social systems and structures as forms of reification (or destabilisation) (Ahmed, 2004) in relation to transnational migration and citizenship.

To capture a sense of the ‘everyday’ as well to gain a discursive understanding of the ways in which migrants account for and rationalise their actions, I employed a triangulation of research methods. First, I carried out the discourse analysis of relevant government speeches, policies and legislation; past parliamentary debates; and media reports. Second, I conducted an intensive and sustained ethnographic study of the Singaporean community in London over a period of twenty-four months. Third, I used in-depth interviews with three groups of social actors to inform my empirical analysis. I interviewed forty-three Singaporean transmigrants living in London; representatives of London-based Singaporean community associations; and Singaporean policymakers who are in-charge of labour migration and citizenship issues (based in London and Singapore). Through these ‘grounded’ methods, my research findings and theoretical reflections augment transnationalism scholarship. They also provide a useful counterbalance to the mostly philosophical and normative approaches that characterise the field of citizenship studies (Desforges *et al*, 2005).

Based on the empirical study of Singapore, I have two overarching research aims in this thesis and an accompanying set of questions for each aim:

- 1) To examine the ways in which Singaporean transnational migration in London informs existing understandings of highly skilled migration.

- a. How do the migration strategies, trajectories and motivations of Singaporean transnational migration shed light on the British and Singaporean migration and citizenship regimes?
- 2) To explore the dynamics of the mutually constituting relationship between transnational migration and citizenship.
- a. What is the meaning of citizenship in terms of membership to the Singaporean community during transmigrancy?
  - b. What is the impact of transnational migration on the rights, duties and obligations associated with Singapore citizenship?
  - c. What factors influence the depth of citizenship ties felt by the Singaporean transmigrants in my study?

The next chapter is set out in two parts. First, I present the literature framework of this thesis, and second, I lay out the Singaporean context informing my study and research analysis. My literature framework merges three branches of theoretical debates, namely on transnationalism, highly skilled transnational migration and citizenship. I begin with a review of the scholarship on transnationalism since these debates will underpin my analyses throughout this thesis. I argue that transnationalism perspectives add insights that conventional migration theories lack in terms of paying attention to the multiple ties of attachment felt by contemporary migrants. I also foreground the relevance of transnationalism perspectives to my own work on Singaporean transmigrants in London.

Following that, I turn my attention to the literature on highly skilled transnational migration. I suggest that the existing corpus of work linking highly skilled transnational migration only with the transnational elite limits its analytical scope. Instead, I advocate a wider optic that considers the experiences of migrants who may possess high levels of education or skills, but embark on migration trajectories transgressing categorisation under the transnational elite experience. Lastly, I consider the ways in which citizenship has been conceptualised in both normative and ‘grounded’ research. I specify the debates elucidating the manner in which citizenship, as a concept and social reality, is shaped by transnational flows and processes. The overarching argument in my literature framework draws attention to the need to ‘ground’ both highly skilled transnational migration and citizenship scholarship by focusing on the ‘everyday’ and the emotional aspects of these experiences as lived reality.

In the second part of Chapter Two, I turn to the case study of Singapore. I move from the pre-independence to the post-independence stages of nation-building in Singapore to examine selective aspects of nationhood and citizenship. I will pay particular attention to the historical conditions under which the idea of Singapore citizenship emerged, emphasising that the post-independence nation-building project was an outcome of those historical factors. The arguments advanced here tie up with the theoretical arguments in the earlier part of Chapter Two stressing the historical and spatial specificities of transnationalism and citizenship practices. The intermeshing themes of

culture, (geo)politics, economy and society teased out in relation to the post-independence nation-building project also resonate with my later analysis of the narratives shared by the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. Finally, I elucidate the contemporary challenges faced by the Singaporean state in fostering a sustained sense of citizenship amongst Singaporeans as a result of transnational mobility. I show that these issues generate key questions on the relationship between citizenship and transnational migration for my thesis.

In Chapter Three, I present the research design of this thesis. I begin by setting out the reasons for choosing London as my primary research site to study the relationship between transnational migration and citizenship, with respect to the Singaporean case study. I argue that productive insights can be drawn from studying transnational mobility between Singapore and London. First, the similarities in migration and citizenship management (*vis-à-vis* economic goals) employed by these two global cities are relevant for understanding the way that global capitalism ties up with international mobility and national citizenship. Second, Singapore and London (or the United Kingdom since London is part of a larger national entity) present intriguing contrasts in terms of the differentiated ways that the political cultures in these two contexts have evolved despite the intertwined legacy of colonial pasts.

Following that, I spell out the methodologies that I utilised to inform my research. I provide information on the way that I carried out discourse analysis, ethnography and in-depth interviews (including the profile of my interview

sample). In addition, I propose that the above methods produced useful information individually, but they also complement each other by providing mutually informing insights. I then elucidate aspects of the fieldwork dynamics to illustrate this argument and to highlight the way that using discourse analysis, ethnography and interviewing techniques helped in the empirical analysis and theory-building for this thesis.

Chapter Four sets out to address my first research objective to understand the ways in which my case study of Singaporean transnational migration informs and reframes the existing scholarship on highly skilled transnational migration. In this chapter, I begin by providing an insight into the immigration and citizenship regime in the UK; and I go on to give an overview of the migration profile of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study in terms of their visa categories. This chapter then focuses on the manner in which the Singaporean transmigrants in my study engaged with the British state's framing of immigration and citizenship through their strategies for migration. The chapter also examines their personal interactions with Singaporean society by considering their motivations for leaving Singapore.

I make two main arguments in this chapter. First, through the migration strategies and trajectories of my respondents, I valorise the range of highly skilled migration experiences that extend beyond the transnational elite category. Second, I emphasise the importance of considering the reasons for migration other than career progression and financial incentives. My analysis

takes into account the desire for self-development through an overseas experience (Conradson and Latham, 2005b) and factors in the institutional and societal contexts that propel Singaporean transnational migration. In this way, this chapter develops understandings of middling transnationalism with respect to highly skilled migration.

In the subsequent three chapters, I address my second research objective on citizenship (trans)formations in relation to transnational migration. My goal in these three chapters is to consider the manner in which Singapore citizenship is relationally constructed by the state and by internationally mobile Singaporeans. My main inquiry in Chapter Five focuses on the way that membership of the national community takes on specific meanings during experiences of transnational migration. I begin Chapter Five with a critical examination of the discourses, legislation and policies used by the Singaporean state to shape the experiences of its overseas citizenry. This section provides a broad overview of the way that Singapore citizenship is constructed and projected extraterritorially by the Singaporean state.

In the rest of Chapter Five, I investigate the understandings, attitudes and dispositions of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study toward Singapore citizenship in order to ‘ground’ the concept and practice of citizenship. I argue that they foreground the emotional aspects of citizenship in terms of belonging, identity and community. Therefore I propose the concept of ‘emotional citizenship’. Nonetheless, I also underscore that my respondents embodied



mixed attitudes towards the Singaporean state and the community of overseas Singaporeans in London. I argue that the concept of transnational communities should be problematised in view of my research findings demonstrating the fragmentation of the overseas Singaporean community in London based on the interplay of identity politics. Instead I support the idea of ‘transnational social formations’ (Guarnizo, 1998:73) as a more productive way to understand the processes and outcomes of transnational migration.

Chapter Six continues the focus on citizenship by scrutinising the political contents enshrined in Singapore citizenship in terms of rights and responsibilities. This chapter addresses my research question concerned with the impact of transnational migration on the rights, duties and obligations associated with citizenship. It first lays out the way that the Singaporean state constructs ideals of rights and responsibilities in order to exert an extraterritorial technology of rule over internationally mobile citizens. In this discussion, I argue that the Singaporean state emphasises the issue of citizenly ‘responsibilities’ more than the subject of ‘rights’.

Following that, in the remainder of Chapter Six, I examine the theme of rights and responsibilities from the perspective of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. My analysis in relation to the rights discourse spells out the ways in which national-level rights were still important to my respondents. In addition, I examine the extraterritorial expressions of rights that they expected from the Singaporean state. I argue that both sets of attitudes work to reify the power of

the nation-state to define and confer rights. However, I also demonstrate that transnational migration creates some possibilities for challenging state definitions of rights. Then I turn my attention to the way that the idea of ‘responsibilities’ in relation to citizenship was interpreted by my respondents. I contend that even though they enacted their responsibilities as overseas Singaporean citizens as a way of being, transnational migration also generated opportunities allowing them to transgress state-defined versions of ‘responsibilities’. In sum, this chapter advances the overall argument that whilst citizen practices of ‘rights and responsibilities’ reify the power of the state, transnational migration gives space to alternative interpretations of the political aspects of citizenship.

Chapter Seven answers my final research question on the ‘depth’ of citizenship. The chapter focuses on the reasons why holding Singapore citizenship was important to the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. In particular, my argument highlights the impact of the extended family unit as a factor rooting internationally mobile citizens to the Singaporean nation-state. I build my case by looking at the way that the ‘Asian’ family, as a unit of social organisation, is interlinked with state-sponsored discourses of nationhood and citizenship. Then based on the narratives of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study, I bring to the forefront the way that their familial considerations – particularly in relation to the extended family – factored into subsequent migration and citizenship decisions.

I argue that the decisions relating to movement and citizenship cannot be abstracted from practical constraints, emotional considerations and the social-cultural contexts based on kinship networks and obligations. Besides that, the rationalities of citizenship exercised through political regulations also work to curtail the citizenship choices of Singaporean transmigrants. However, these political regulations have contradicting effects on the formation of transnational family structures. The discussions in this chapter also demonstrate the way that the emotional, social-cultural and political aspects of citizenship should be regarded as mutually constituting parts.

In Chapter Eight, I bring my thesis to a close by reiterating the key arguments made in the earlier chapters. I emphasise the way my study of highly skilled Singaporean transmigrants in London advances the theoretical and methodological scholarship on transnational migration and citizenship. I also highlight two accompanying themes that I develop in this thesis, namely on gender and the politics of cosmopolitanism. I furthermore consider the methodological contributions of my study and the specific ways that geographical concepts of mobility, space, place and scale featured in my study. Then I contemplate three possible scenarios of citizenship development in Singapore and I make some relevant policy recommendations based on my research findings. Lastly, I consider the ‘absences’ in my research and the directions in which this research can be developed in the future.

# 2

## **Literature framework: Theoretical debates and case study background**

---

## **1 Introduction**

This chapter lays out the literature framework and the case study background of my research in two main parts. In the first part, I identify the theoretical debates on transnationalism, highly skilled transnational migration and citizenship that I used to frame my study. In the latter part of the chapter, I present the background of nation-building, citizenship and transnational migration in Singapore on which my research of highly skilled transnational migration and citizenship (trans)formations is based.

Throughout this thesis, I use the scholarship on transnationalism to understand the ways in which my respondents, Singaporean transmigrants in London, narrated their feelings, dispositions and attitudes towards the host (UK) and sending countries (Singapore). The emphasis in transnationalism scholarship on the multiple ties of attachment experienced by transmigrants, and the importance of studying the sending and receiving contexts as one field of analysis, are particularly suitable for understanding the narratives of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. Hence, I begin this chapter by examining the intellectual debates on transnationalism and underscoring that the field has been and remains an important tool for understanding contemporary migration despite past and recent criticisms of the scholarship. In this section, I also foreground the specific ways in which I use transnationalism perspectives to inform my study.

The next section focuses on studies of highly skilled migration, particularly the way in which it is situated within transnationalism studies. I trace the origins of interest in highly skilled migration and highlight the distinctive contributions made by transnationalism scholarship to this arena of study in the last decade. However, I also draw attention to an emerging counter-scholarship that identifies the limits of existing literature on highly skilled transnational migration. This counter-scholarship focuses on forms of ‘middling transnationalism’ (Conradson and Latham, 2005a:229) and brings to the forefront the experiences of highly skilled migrants who do not belong to the transnational elite or low-paid labour categories. This debate sets the stage for understanding the diverse migration experiences of the highly skilled Singaporeans transmigrants in my study. I then suggest that my study makes a distinctive contribution to the scholarship on middling transnationalism in the way that it highlights the influence of institutional and societal contexts as triggers for transnational mobility.

In Section Three, I discuss the concept and practice of citizenship. I explicate the idea that citizenship is a political-legal and social-cultural concept that is being transformed in specific ways as a result of transnational flows, processes and practices. I also advocate, first, the importance of engaging in empirical research to understand the everyday ways in which citizenship unfolds on the ground, particularly in a transnational world. I further consider the growing number of initiatives by sending states to retain links (and in some cases, re-establish) with their overseas citizens. Second, I underline the need to consider

Section Six illuminates the ongoing countervailing pulls of globalisation, transnational migration and nation-building faced by the Singaporean state. I raise questions regarding the contradictions challenging ideals and practices of national citizenship as a result of efforts by the Singaporean state to create a niche for itself in the global economy. In the concluding section, I reiterate the significance of the theoretical debates and empirical issues for my study of Singaporean transnational migration and citizenship trans(formations). I also restate my research objectives in light of the preceding discussions.

## **2 Debating transnationalism**

Over the years, research on international migration has covered a broad spectrum of persons who undertake cross-border moves for reasons such as to work, to flee political persecution and/or for family reunification reasons. However, the growing volume of international migration and the changing characteristics of immigrant communities arguably necessitate new tools of analysis that are more attuned with contemporary developments.

Transnationalism studies began in the early 1990s as a critique of conventional migration theories that heuristically assumed a linear progression of movement and change. For example, Levitt and Nyberg-Sørensen (2004:2) argue that previous migration research regarded migrants as individuals who either depart from the country of origin (as emigrants) or arrive in a new country setting (as immigrants), thereby transplanting themselves from one set of social relations to another over space and time. In other words, migrants were seen to be able



to maintain involvement in only one community at a time. Transnationalism theorists argue instead that sending and receiving societies should be understood as constituting a single field of analysis, given the multiple attachments and multi-stranded social relations experienced by migrants towards their societies of origin and settlement (Basch *et al*, 1994:6).

Theorisations of transnationalism are analytically different from conventional migration theories in several ways (Levitt and Nyberg-Sørensen, 2004:3). First, transnationalism studies begin with the understanding that migrants must be studied within transnational social fields that may or may not overlap with national boundaries. Second, this optic moves the analysis beyond those who actually migrate to those who do not necessarily move, but remain connected to migrants through networks of social relations that transcend borders. Third, locating migrants within transnational social fields makes it clear that their incorporation into a new state and enduring transnational attachments to their countries of origin are not binary opposites. Instead, these migrants sustain enduring ties between two or more nation-states.

Such persons, whose identities and practices are configured by hegemonic social categories (such as ‘race’ and ethnicity) that are deeply embedded in the nation-building processes of two or more nation-states, are often referred to as ‘transnational migrants’ (or transmigrants) (Basch *et al*, 1994:34). In the context of this study, the above perspectives from transnationalism scholarship on migration patterns, processes and outcomes are particularly useful for

understanding the discourses, narratives and practices of Singaporean transnational migration.

Traditional migration perspectives tend to assume that immigrants would eventually conform to the norms of the societies in which they have settled (Kivisto, 2001; Miller, 2005). Hence migration scholars, such as Kivisto (2001), contest the claims within transnationalism studies positing that immigrants responded differently towards labour migration and cultural incorporation in the past compared to contemporary times (Basch *et al*, 1994). Kivisto (*ibid*) argues, for example, that most immigrants seek incorporation into their host societies rather than resist it and immigrants in the past, like those in the present, have remained involved in the homeland in different ways. He also argues that return migration is not a new phenomenon. As such, he debates the usefulness of transnationalism as new concept and suggests instead that transnationalism should be regarded as a variant of assimilation<sup>1</sup>.

Contrary to Kivisto's reading of transnationalism as a field of study, proponents of transnationalism hardly claim that transnational practices did not exist prior to the popular dissemination of the term. Charting the history of the connections between nation-state building and migration, Wimmer and Glick

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<sup>1</sup> Kivisto (2001:570-571) distinguishes assimilation theory from amalgamation (the melting-pot model). He accords importance to acculturation, which acknowledges that ethnic retention may persist over several generations. In his understanding of assimilation, he emphasises that the society in which immigrants assimilate is not fixed and given, but fluid and subject to change in view of immigration.

Schiller (2002) demonstrate that transnational social practices have existed as cross-border relationships since the 1870s when intense nation-state building processes took off in early modern Europe. I suggest that Kivisto's endorsement of assimilation theory should be called into question instead because of the descriptive assumptions on which it is based. First, Kivisto assumes that new versions of assimilation are prepared to consider the impact of immigration on the host society's cultural life and social institutions. Second, he suggests that immigrants spend most of their day-to-day lives in one place, and over time the issues and concerns of that place take precedence over those in the homeland. Third, he assumes the inclusion of immigrants in the receiving states through citizenship or new modes of political identity.

I contend that research based on ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews debunks Kivisto's arguments in at least two ways. First, assimilative procedures and processes are contingent on the receiving state and society's welcome to newcomers, which varies from place to place. The work by Ehrkamp (2005) on Turkish immigrants in Germany and Nagel and Staeheli's (2005) study of Arab immigrants in the US indicate that migrants experience exclusions based on ethnicity, language and other social axes of identity. Second, these and many other studies (Basch *et al*, 1994; Guarnizo, 1998; Fouron and Glick Schiller, 2001; Levitt, 2001; Ho, 2002; Goldring, 2003; Waters, 2003; Secor, 2004) show that advances in communications, information technology and travel enable migrants to continue to occupy multiple positionings towards the societies in which they are socially

embedded. Such studies not only underscore the relevance of transnationalism perspectives but also the importance of carrying out ‘grounded’ research – as I do in my study of Singaporean transnationalism – to understand the processes and outcomes of transnational mobility<sup>2</sup>.

Since its inception, the field of transnationalism has also undergone vigorous internal debate. In a special issue of *Ethnic and Racial Studies* on transnationalism, Portes *et al* (1999:218) assert that the highly fragmented field lacks a ‘well-defined theoretical framework and analytical rigour’. The jumble of works falling into the category ‘transnationalism’ led Portes *et al* (*ibid*) to draw up a list of ‘conceptual guidelines’ seeking to ‘turn the concept of transnationalism into a clearly defined and measurable object of research’. Though well-intentioned, the feasibility of such a move was critically examined by Crang *et al* (2003:444) who caution against “‘grounding the concept” in an overly fixed and static set of definitions’.

In contrast to Portes *et al* (1999), Jackson *et al*’s (2004) more recent exposition on transnationalism (or ‘transnationality’ as they prefer to term the phenomena) advocates the study of other cultural practices and social processes, in addition to the existing research on migration flows and diasporic populations. One of their criticisms about the grounding of transnationalism in migration studies

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<sup>2</sup> In the remainder of this thesis, I use the term ‘Singaporean transmigrant’ to emphasise the socially and culturally embedded identities of my respondents, and the way that they experience their ‘multi-positionality’ (Smith, 2005:237) as migrant subjects situated in two or more nation-states.

and concepts of diasporas<sup>3</sup> is that within this scholarship, the focus on ‘bounded communities [fails] to break sufficiently from more conventional, and in particular, national, geographic imaginaries’ (Crang *et al*, 2003:445). Rather than throwing the baby out with the bath water, I advocate that transnational migration studies can, and indeed should, circumvent this analytical pitfall so as to maintain their relevance and ability to contribute to theoretical understandings and policymaking initiatives.

I argue that what Crang *et al* (*ibid*) point out as a drawback of transnational migration studies is an outcome of methodological nationalism – defined by Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) as the assumption that the nation-state is the natural social and political form of the modern world. This is even though from the outset, one of the early tenets of transnationalism studies had been to discard methodological nationalism. Wimmer and Glick Schiller (*ibid*) point out three modes of methodological nationalism that continue to trouble

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<sup>3</sup> Although the scholarship on diasporas resonate in particular ways with my study, this will not be the primary focus of my thesis. Diasporas, by conventional understanding, are associated with forced displacement as a result of political, economic or social-cultural oppression (see Cohen, 1997). The conditions under which the Singaporeans in my study migrated, although related to political, economic and social-cultural reasons, are differently nuanced in ways that will be explicated in my thesis later. In addition, groups typically categorised as diasporas tend to have a longer historical association of dispersion and repeated waves of migration. In contrast, Singapore was officially created as a nation-state only in 1965 and with it, the building of a ‘Singaporean’ identity. The widespread dispersion of ‘Singaporeans to overseas destinations is a fairly recent phenomenon. The term, ‘Singapore diaspora’, has been used in political rhetoric in Singapore (Goh, 2001) but this can be interpreted as a calculated move to evoke ideas of homeland and the associated feelings of nostalgia, patriotism and nationalism. As such, for the purposes of this study, I find that the scholarship on transnationalism is a more suitable intellectual terrain to situate my empirical analysis.

transnationalism scholarship today: failing to interrogate the national framing of states and societies in the modern age; naturalising national discourses, agendas, loyalties and histories; and imposing territorial limitations.

The ability to recognise these modes of methodological nationalism, however, alerts future transnationalism scholars to the ways of circumventing this analytical snare. In my study of Singaporean transnational migration and citizenship formations, I am therefore cognisant of the need to problematise instead of taking as natural, the ‘dynamics of interconnection, nostalgia and memory and identity within a particular population [in relation] to a particular homeland’ (ibid, 324). Second, my understanding of Singaporean transnational migration and citizenship formations endeavours to be sensitive to the differentiations of ‘class, gender, generation, region, religion, and political and economic circumstance of migration within the same migrating “nationality”, even within a single transnational city’ (Smith, 2005:239).

Within transnationalism scholarship there are also debates over the most appropriate scale of analysis. Portes *et al* (1999:218) point out that the tendency to use ‘disparate units of analysis (i.e. individuals, groups, organisations and local states) and mix levels of abstraction’ is a threat to the viability of the field. These arguments were reiterated by Vertovec (1999:456) in his contribution in the same volume. He states that a pressing issue for the study of transnationalism is ‘the question of the appropriate level of analysis and the connection between scales’. Portes *et al* (1999:220) further suggest that

work on transnational migration should begin with individuals because ‘other units, such as communities, economic enterprises, political parties, etc, [would] come into play at subsequent and more complex stages of enquiry’.

However, I argue that this approach advocated by Portes *et al* (ibid) gives undue primacy to individual actors over other social processes that are equally important in the mutual constitution of social life. Instead, the approach that I take in this thesis endeavours to be agency-oriented while giving equal emphasis to the ways in which ‘sociocultural and political-economic forces articulate with the politics of everyday life at local, national and transnational scales throughout the world’ (M. Smith, 2001:5). The synthesis of the various scales of analyses should be further accompanied by an awareness of the ways in which they transverse one another to produce unique social-cultural and political-economic outcomes in different time-spaces. Geography with its comparative emphasis on space, place, mobility and scale is especially well-g geared to contribute to such analyses seeking to make sense of the way in which meta-narratives such as globalisation and transnationalism are articulated on an everyday basis and in turn sustained by these articulations.

Recent concerns about the ‘limits of the (trans)nation(al)’ (Harney and Baldassar, forthcoming:2) have triggered fresh debates seeking to re-centre the idea of ‘migrancy’ – defined as ‘the state or condition of being a migrant’ (ibid) – within transnationalism studies. This is with the goal of renewing focus towards three features in the scholarship: paying attention to changes over

time; de-centring the nation; and lastly, re-centring the state (ibid, 5). In their review of the transnational migration literature, Harney and Baldassar argue that existing work on this subject has provided substantial reconsideration of space, but less towards time. In their view, the concept of ‘migrancy’ forces consideration of time or the trajectory of migrant experiences.

Harney and Baldassar also point to the paradox in which transnationalism theorists both affirm and problematise the nation by privileging the ‘national’. They suggest that focusing on migrancy would instead illuminate the way that discourses about the nation are ‘refracted, destabilised and made new through local sites linked with global networks and translocal processes’ (ibid, 7). Finally, Harney and Baldassar problematise the neglect of the role played by both sending and receiving states in considerations of migration. They argue that by focusing on migrancy instead, scholars would address the impact of the state actions on migrants and the negotiation of power relations between state and migrant.

However, this call for migrancy can be seen as a rehash of old debates. For example, in reference to the call for a consideration of time, Smith (2001 and 2005) has already repeatedly attended to the need for historical and spatial specificity in transnationalism studies. Nonetheless, the reminder by Harney and Baldassar (forthcoming) to be conscious of time-space specificities is welcome, because it reiterates the importance of considering the ways in which migration trajectories and experiences are amenable to change over time and



space. This aspect has, up till now, not been adequately explored in the existing transnationalism literature with respect to highly skilled migration (for an exception, see Beaverstock, 2005), which still tends to capture only snapshots of migrant experiences. Hence, one of the things that I am interested to explore in this thesis pertains to the ways in which changing migration trajectories are experienced by the Singaporean transmigrants in my study.

Aside from that, although Harney and Baldassar (*ibid*) rightly point out that transnationalism theorists both affirm and problematise the national (see earlier discussion on methodological nationalism), I contend that their proposal to separate the nation and the state as units of analysis is deeply problematic. While it is imperative to recognise the constructed ways in which the ‘nation’ has been mobilised to affirm statehood and vice-versa, incising the two as separate units of analysis draws a false distinction between these conjoined categories. I suggest that the more productive way forward would be to consider the ways in which the categories of state and nation are socially constructed, and further inflected by other units and scales of social organisation (such as the neighbourhood, locality and community) and axes of identity (such as ‘race’, ethnicity, gender and sexuality).

Alongside this, transnationalism studies could just as fruitfully incorporate perspectives on receiving and sending states as related fields of study by redirecting the focus from place to mobility – in other words, examining the movements involved in sustaining cross-border relationships (Levitt and

Nyberg-Sørensen, 2004:3). Bearing these pointers in mind, this thesis pays special attention to the brokering role played by the Singaporean state alongside other social actors, scales and processes to mediate experiences of transnational migration and citizenship.

The field of transnationalism has expanded in recent years to encompass subjects as diverse as capital, labour, corporations, inter-governmental and non-governmental activities, as well as cultural flows and products. Nonetheless, a sustained feature in the literature on transnationalism pertains to the migration of groups and individuals across time and space, emphasising the ‘multiple ties and interactions [that link] people or institutions across the borders of nation-states’ (Vertovec, 1999:447). The above arguments underscore the resilience of transnationalism as a conceptual tool and field of study, and its relevance to my study. These debates also raise specific themes that underpin this thesis as I carry out my empirical analysis of Singaporean transnational migration and citizenship.

First, what are the context-specific ways in which national imaginaries and statist discourses need to be interrogated so as to destabilise hegemonic interpretations of place, territoriality and power? Second, in what ways do the scalar interactions and intersections between social actors enact and give meaning to both individual subject interpretations as well as meta-narratives of globalisation and transnationalism? Third, what are the new theoretical insights that can be obtained by turning our attention towards the migration trajectories

that take place over both space and time?

### **3 Problematising ‘highly skilled’ transnational migration**

Research on highly skilled migration started in the mid-1960s, arising out of concern for the ‘brain drain’ from developing to developed countries. However, it was only from the 1980s onwards that this spectrum of migration came to be incorporated more fully into the study of international migration (Koser and Salt, 1997:285). Mainstream migration theory posits that highly skilled migration arises out of demand and supply conditions in the global economy.

On the demand side are theorisations focusing on the changing organisation of production, including an international division of labour and the links between trade, finance and labour that trigger inter- and intra-firm international labour exchanges. On the supply side, the movement and recruitment of highly skilled labour may be initiated by overseas nationals who wish to capitalise on educational, training and work opportunities in the host country (Koser and Salt, 1997:289; Iredale, 2001:16-20). The geography of highly skilled labour exchanges is known to be highly uneven as it converges in a few global cities where high-level professional and specialist jobs are concentrated (Sassen, 1991, cited in Beaverstock and Boardwell, 2000:279). The convergence of international labour in those sites also facilitates the transfer of knowledge and contributes to the further production of ‘global cities’ (Findlay *et al*, 1996; Beaverstock, 2005), and by implication, their less-‘global’ peripheries.

Earlier work on transnationalism focused on the experiences of low-paid labour (though not necessarily low-skilled) migration moving from low-income to high-income economies (Guarnizo, 1998; Itzigsohn, 2000). This focus, however, generates a set of questions and concerns that are specific to this category of migration. Levitt and Nyberg-Sørensen (2004), for example, highlight the remittances and development nexus arising out of migration from economically less advanced countries. Although concerns about the marginalised and impoverished spectrum of migration are important, attention should also be given to the group of purportedly better-off migrants who face a set of different – but no less significant – difficulties, needs and concerns during migration.

The growing volume and impact of highly skilled migration furthermore underscores the importance of studying this spectrum of migration. Despite the high costs of deploying staff on foreign work assignments, expatriate postings remain a resilient business strategy for companies with international operations (*The Economist*, 22 June 2006). This sees companies, as well as states, in competition for the highly skilled migrant labour required to compete in the global economy. In states, usually with developed economies, in which skilled shortages of labour are recognised, a proactive approach is being taken to attract such migrant labour from both developed and developing economies. Flynn (2005:476) argues that immigration policy in the UK has been shaped by the need to facilitate such movement in response to business interests and to

drive the UK economy's competitive edge in global markets. The situation is similar in Singapore wherein policies welcoming highly skilled foreigners are constructed by the Singaporean state as an imperative for the sustained economic progress of Singapore in the global economy. The ways in which migrants engage with these framings of migration will be addressed in this thesis.

Although analyses of highly skilled migration have entered mainstream migration theory, theories of transnational migration approach highly skilled migration in more analytically nuanced ways (Conradson and Latham, 2005a:227). Recently there has been a plethora of studies on the transnational elite, such as inter-company transferees, international managers and professionals (Beaverstock, 2002 and 2005); capital-bearing business investors (Mitchell, 1997a; Ong, 1999; Waters, 2003; Nonini, 2004); and accompanying expatriate wives (Yeoh and Khoo, 1998; Yeoh and Willis, 1999 and 2005a; Willis and Yeoh, 2000; Thang *et al*, 2002). The interest in highly skilled migration of this nature precipitated a shift from focusing on institutional mechanisms (which is more characteristic of migration theories) to the 'individual experience' in transnationalism scholarship (Kong, 1999a and 1999b; Beaverstock, 2002:526).

Some transnationalism theorists emphasise the multiple, circular journeys undertaken by transmigrants, with concomitant implications for their decisions on settlement, return and citizenship (Mak, 1997; Ong, 1999; Waters, 2003;

Nonini, 2004). Studies of highly skilled transnational migration often highlight the multi-positionality of transmigrants in terms of their orientation towards their countries of origin and settlement (Nagel and Staeheli, 2004; Secor, 2004; Ehrkamp, 2005; Nagel, 2005). These studies furthermore focus on the ways in which migration flows and experiences take place in historically mediated contexts (Smith, 2005), and are embodied in socially and culturally embedded ways (Beaverstock, 2005; Scott, 2004; Yeoh and Willis, 2005b). By valorising the emplaced corporealities of movement, these studies underscore the continued significance of place and locality while eschewing narratives of a frictionless world (Conradson and Latham, 2005a).

In addition, studies employing a transnationalism approach are apt to valorise the agency of transmigrants to effect change at various levels. Mitchell (2004a and 2004b), for example, highlights the urban politics that arise from the relocation of Hong Kong transnationals to Vancouver when they challenge the society's hegemonic definitions of 'race' and class, resulting in a reworking of liberalism discourse. In these ways, transnationalism theorists also contribute towards demystifying the belief of cosmopolitanism<sup>4</sup> in favour of

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<sup>4</sup> The ideas revolving around the belief of 'cosmopolitanism' can be broadly grouped into two inter-related categories: cosmopolitanism as a lifestyle and as political philosophy. The cosmopolitan lifestyle is embodied by persons who do not claim to be immersed in the secure framework of any single culture to which, in some deep sense, they belong. These persons, known as 'cosmopolitans', tend to show an acquaintance with, and the ability to incorporate, the manners, habits, languages and social customs of different cultures. As a political philosophy, cosmopolitanism connotes the political ideal of a polity constructed on a world scale, rather than on any territorially-limited

'cosmopolitics' (Robbins, 1998a:9). The politics of cosmopolitanism recognise the power relations and ideologies naturalised along class, ethnic/cultural and gender lines (Clifford 1997; Robbins 1998b), and even the symbolism that juxtaposes a more sophisticated West against the denigrated Other (Morley 2000:231). Yeoh's (2004) discursive analysis of the 'cosmopolitanism' project in Singapore, for instance, points out the superficiality of state pronouncements and the systematic and social marginalisation of low-paid migrant workers relative to Singaporean workers and highly skilled foreigners. The ideas from transnationalism scholarship on multiple and circular journeys, social and spatial embeddedness, individual agency and cosmopolitics will emerge as important themes in my study of Singaporean transmigrants in London.

Within the highly skilled migration scholarship, there is a body of literature that specifically examines gender as an axis of discrimination during migration. Iredale (2005:156) points out that the interpretation of skills in new migration contexts tends to disadvantage women. As a result, during partner-led migration decisions, women are often relegated to the reproductive realm (Yeoh and Khoo, 1998; Willis and Yeoh, 2000; Yeoh and Willis, 2005b) or undergo a process of de-skilling in the productive sphere. Some women even undertake re-training in order to qualify for equivalent paid work in the new host society (Kofman and Raghuram, 2005).

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basis, and to which, the interests of humanity as a whole take precedence over narrowly-defined agendas (Waldron, 2000:228).

In her work on highly qualified Asian Indian women in the United States, Purkayastha (2005) elucidates the manner in which these women are cumulatively disadvantaged during migration. She traces factors such as restrictive migration policies for women migrating with their partners (e.g. visa restrictions to work); the devaluation of their professional and academic credentials; the need to establish new professional networks; and other gendered and racialised power relations within the household, the workplace and community that impede women from finding paid work corresponding with their qualifications. Purkayastha (ibid) adds that focusing on the migration of highly qualified individuals alone would fail to convey the complex ways in which women are disadvantaged. In my study, I am interested to explore the way that gendered identities shape the experiences of work and migration, and the manner in which geographically distinct immigration regulations constitute migration outcomes.

Although gender and the interplay of other social identities influence the experience of highly skilled migration, a more fundamental problem underlying studies of highly skilled migration is that definitions of the highly skilled are still imprecise. Iredale (2001:8) argues that a highly skilled worker is normally defined as an individual with a university degree or extensive/equivalent experience in a given field. Nevertheless, as Koser and Salt (1997:287) contest, there is no simple way to define 'who' is a highly-skilled migrant in terms of skills, qualification, experience or the length of stay.



The term 'expatriate' is used to describe a highly skilled individual who is employed by a foreign country or sent by employers to work overseas (Yeoh and Khoo, 1998:160), but it fails to capture the spectrum of highly skilled migrants who do not work in such occupations.

In fact, highly skilled migrants may not be in full-time employment in sectors classified as 'highly skilled', or they may be employed in occupations that are not categorically classified as 'highly skilled'. For example, it is not uncommon for migrant Filipino domestic workers to possess tertiary-level qualifications but still perform low-paid work in the household (Parreñas, 2001). This observation prompts a reconsideration of the limited scholarship and existing terminology available to describe the breadth and variety of 'highly skilled' migrant experiences.

One recent attempt to broaden this focus within transnationalism scholarship is Conradson and Latham's (2005a:229) idea of 'middling transnationalism'. In this conceptualisation, they advocate the importance of studying the transnational practices of persons who make up the transnational ecumene, but do not necessarily belong to the categories of the transnational elite or the developing-world migrants. Refining this new lexicon, Smith (2005:8) defines 'middling transnational actors' as those who '[occupy] more or less middle class or status positions' in both their countries of origin and their host destinations. Some examples of middling transnationals include skilled workers, young people on 'gap years' or study exchange programmes, and

persons taking career sabbaticals overseas (Conradson and Latham, 2005a). In addition, in a study of Chinese-Indonesian businessmen living in Australia, Nonini (2004:43) categorises this group of migrants as ‘middling transnationalists’. He argues that the Indonesian businessmen in his study only had modest funds and whilst their migration was capital-linked, it was not capital-driven. This therefore distinguishes them from the wealthy corporate owners and managers and technocrats in transnational corporations.

Given the recent emergence of scholarship on middling transnationalism, there remains much to be studied in terms of: who should be regarded as middling transnationals? Why did they migrate? What do they do in their migration destinations? What do they plan to do in the future? Conradson and Latham’s (2005b) study of young New Zealanders who gave up their well-paid professional jobs to move to London in order to cultivate the ‘self’ gives us some insight into the world of middling transnationals in terms of their motivations for migration and their friendship networks. My thesis contributes to this nascent scholarship on middling transnationalism by highlighting the migration strategies and trajectories of highly skilled Singaporean transmigrants in London that classify them as middling transnationals, rather than members of the transnational elite. I also study their migration motivations, and in doing so, I advance the literature beyond considerations of the individual ‘self’ to consider institutional and societal factors that mediate the migration decision.

Alongside this attentiveness to forms of middling transnationalism, Conradson and Latham (2005a and 2005b) also signal the need to pay attention to the everyday practices of transnational mobility. As Smith (2005:243) argues, these studies of everyday practices of mobilities and citizenship underline the ‘importance of mediated power relations [that are] fraught with the discourses and practices of diverse power brokers other than transmigrants themselves’. The growing emphasis on the ways in which abstract macro-scale regulatory structures and phenomena are produced through seemingly nondescript norms, values and routines is important. However, it is worth noting that the current interest in the ‘everyday’ is not new within geography.

For example, Rankin (2003), Dyck (2005) and Dyck and McLaren (2004) argue that feminist geographers have long attempted to represent the ‘materiality “of the everyday” (Dyck, 2005:234) through their work on the routine and taken-for-granted activity in homes, neighbourhoods and communities. Such work by feminist geographers focuses on the ways in which the ‘local’ is constituted by wider scalar processes of power whilst simultaneously supporting, structuring and even challenging those bastions of power (Marston, 2000; Marston and Mitchell, 2004). Nonetheless, the recent turn towards the everyday dimensions of transnational mobility is arguably symptomatic of a wider shift within certain sub-fields of human geography towards the need to understand and theorise globalisation in terms of the everyday practices and interpretations in local communities. It is with respect to this interest in the everyday worlds of social and political life that I situate

my study of Singaporean transnational mobility and citizenship (trans)formations.

The above debates on highly skilled transnational migration raise several areas of theoretical enquiry, which my study of Singaporean transnational migration seeks to answer. First, how do the everyday encounters and concerns of ‘highly skilled’ migrants inform theories of transnational migration? Second, what forms of middling transnationalism are evident in my study and how does this work to further theorisations of middling transnationalism with respect to highly skilled migration? Third, what are the gendered dynamics in Singaporean ‘highly skilled’ transnational migration that make a distinctive contribution to the feminist scholarship on migration and work?

#### **4 Theorising citizenship in a transnational world**

Citizenship is often defined in terms of a bundle of rights and duties relating to an individual’s membership in a political community. The question that arises is: in what ways are these aspects of citizenship being reconfigured in view of transnational migration? The essence of the nation-state, according to Castles and Davidson (2000:2) is the institution of citizenship, which supposes ‘the integration of all the inhabitants of a territory into the political community and their political equality as citizens’. The state<sup>5</sup> as a political entity based around

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<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of this thesis I use the term ‘state’ to refer to the political unit that exercises rule over the people under its direct and indirect territorial and political

a defined territory (within which state institutions have power to implement policies) is distinct from the nation, which refers to the idea of a people with a shared heritage, values and culture (Willis *et al*, 2004:2). Yet when these terms are put together, the term nation-state literally refers to a territory where a ‘national community’ is presumed to exist, even if this subsumes other ethnic, gender or religious affiliations.

As the foundation of the nation-state, citizenship enacts territorial and social closure by restricting entry, residency and other rights to those identified as ‘insiders’ while simultaneously refusing such access to ‘outsiders’ who do not share in the social membership of the nation-state (Brubaker, 1992:21-34). Thus Isin and Turner (2002:2) suggest that what it means to be a citizen can be understood in terms of the extent (inclusion and exclusion), content (rights and responsibilities) and depth (thickness or thinness) of citizenship. However, the concept of citizenship is not a stable or given fact. Instead in this thesis, I understand citizenship to be a ‘non-static, and non-linear social, political, cultural, economic, and legal construction’ (Marston and Mitchell, 2004:95). This approach also advocates consideration of the citizenship formations that arise out of the shifting negotiations taking place between the state and citizens, often against the backdrop of capitalist development.

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jurisdiction. Nonetheless, I am cognisant that the ‘state’ is not a monolithic entity that enacts a unified agenda. Instead the state is made up of ‘a series of diverse interests and bodies that are often themselves in conflict’ (Mountz, 2004:325).

In addition, as Painter and Philo (1995:113-115) suggest, our conception of citizenship should encompass a political side, which relates more to ‘the individual’s position vis-à-vis an overarching political body’, and a social-cultural side pertaining to ‘questions about who is accepted as a worthy, valuable and responsible member of an everyday community of living and working’. Furthermore, they emphasise that social and cultural relations (with regard to history, culture, ethnicity, language and religion) contributing to a sense of national identity, are intrinsic to the political relationship between citizenship and space. Citizenship is therefore both a legal formula conferring formal state membership (in terms of rights and obligations) as well as a social and cultural fact (in terms of who belongs) (Painter and Philo, 1995; Isin, 2002). However, as this thesis makes clear, the emotional intensities underpinning citizenship work in ways that mutually constitute both the political-legal and social-cultural aspects of citizenship too.

The contemporary global flows of financial exchanges and population moves set against the emergence of new levels of supranational and local governance pose new challenges to the practice of national citizenship. Several scholars have argued that new forms of citizenship are emerging in response to the shifting terrains of the state-citizen relationship as a result of accentuated transnational mobility. At one end of the spectrum are theorists such as Brubaker (1992) and Miller (2000 and 2005) who regard national citizenship as the norm and believe that immigrant non-citizenship would eventually conform to that model through processes of assimilation or acculturation. At the other

extreme, Soysal (1994) argues for a form of post-national citizenship where citizenship is reconfigured from a particularistic form based on nationhood to a more universalistic form based on personhood.

Situated in-between these viewpoints are scholars like Kymlicka (1995) and Joppke (1999a and 1999b) who support the continued relevance of citizenship while acknowledging its malleability and ability to accommodate immigrants and cultural pluralism. Bauböck (1994), on the other hand, conceptualises citizenship as ‘transnational’, wherein citizenship membership is extended beyond national and territorial boundaries, but the power to grant citizenship rights remains in the hands of the state (e.g. dual citizenship). Similarly, Kofman (2005:454-455) argues that although postnationalism may co-exist with the state, the state is re-asserting its role as the protector of national identity and social cohesion. One of the ways that the state seeks to achieve this objective is to spell out the terms of inclusion and exclusion from the national polity by controlling and managing migration and population diversity more closely. It is the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion through migration management that I wish to examine in this thesis with respect to both the British and Singaporean migration and citizenship regimes.

While theoretical models of citizenship are important for advancing the way we think about citizenship in a transnational world, researchers looking into the social practices of citizenship (Leitner and Ehrkamp, forthcoming:11) point to the contingent and contested nature of citizenship as lived by transnational

individuals (Marston and Mitchell, 2004). Mitchell (1997a) shows, for example, that Hong Kong immigrants to Canada have to negotiate cultural membership expectations in their new host community (based on different tastes, norms, conventions and codes of behaviour) even after fulfilling the formal immigration criteria. Nonini (2004) similarly describes the way that Chinese-Indonesian businessmen moving to Australia – which has a relatively liberal immigration and citizenship regime – face problems fulfilling the business requirements needed to renew their immigrant status because of language and cultural difficulties. These businessmen thus resort to deceptive practices<sup>6</sup> to circumvent immigration rules or commute between Indonesia and Australia for work to sustain their livelihoods while their family members remain in Australia (which is considered a safer and better place).

These studies underscore the ways in which, as a matter of everyday life, geographical and social milieus influence the extent to which new immigrants come to accept and be accepted as members of their host communities. Just as the everyday worlds of transnational mobility have come to be re-centred in geographical research, the everyday practices of citizenship are also becoming an important subject of inquiry for geographers. This thesis uses the case study of Singaporean transnational migration and citizenship to examine the manner

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<sup>6</sup> For example, these Indonesian businessmen invest in businesses that appear to be import-export firms so as to comply with the Australian immigration requirements, but in reality, the business only engages in a small amount of import and export trade through connections in Jakarta. Instead the business mostly handles goods on behalf of other companies in Australia.



in which the seemingly nondescript articulations of citizenship give or retract substance from ideological powers.

Several scholars highlight the ways in which fluidity of identity is accentuated in a transnational world. Identity, in these studies, is regarded as socially constructed, contested and constantly balancing global patterns and local conditions (Mitchell, 1997a; Yeoh and Willis, 1998 and 1999; Kong, 1999a and 1999b; Dyck and McLaren, 2004; Nagel and Staeheli, 2005). Recent scholarship on Singaporean transnational migration in China has explicated the ways in which national, ethnic and social identities are constructed and reconstructed by the Singaporean state and by Singaporean transmigrants in Beijing (Kong, 1999a and 1999b) and in Shanghai, Suzhou and Wuxi (Yeoh and Willis, 1998, 1999 and 2005b). These scholars posit that the economic imperatives of global competitiveness propel the Singaporean state to capitalise upon the majority Chinese ethnic identity of the Singaporean nation-state to gain a competitive edge when investing in China. However, at the same time, the Singaporean state strives to maintain the construction of a national identity amidst its globalising efforts.

Research on Singaporean transmigrants in China has, in turn, revealed that they often experience complex feelings towards their ethnic identity, national identity and transnational identities. Kong (1999a) argues that the Singaporean transmigrants in her study affirm their national identification with Singapore when exposed to a foreign environment. However, they also exploit their

Chinese identity for business advantage in China and acknowledge their hybrid identities as both Chinese and Singaporean (Kong, 1999b). Yeoh and Willis (1998 and 2005b) produced similar findings in the separate study that they carried out. However, they add that in some instances, the Singaporean transmigrants in their study deliberately differentiated themselves from the China-born Chinese who were regarded as ‘devoid of cultural and moral values’ (ibid, 1998:16).

The work of Yeoh and Willis (1999) furthermore demonstrates that gendered identities and relations were utilised by the Singaporean state to shore up Singaporean nationalism. In turn, Singaporean transmigrants themselves imbibed the gendered constructions in ways that reinforced gendered narratives of the home and nation (Yeoh and Willis, ibid). These findings resonate with my research in two ways. First, my thesis examines the intertwining axes of identity politics that are evident in my London-based study, and second, I am interested in understanding the way that gendered ideologies are affirmed or reworked by the Singaporean transmigrants in my study.

While the findings based on Singaporean transnationalism in China are important for furthering theorisations about identity, nationalism and transnationalism, I argue that the impact of mobility on the rights and obligations of citizenship based in the sending country should not be neglected. Since the 1990s there has been a shift towards a contractual model of citizenship in which duties and obligations of citizenship are emphasised rather

than the expanding set of rights that previously characterised citizenship discourse and policy (Kofman, 2005). Although this argument made by Kofman (ibid) was with reference to immigrant-receiving countries, the same can be said of sending countries where more and more demands are being imposed on overseas citizens both materially and discursively.

In the past, the economic benefits for national development to be reaped from migrant remittances were the primary reason why sending states showed interest in their emigrants. Now sending states increasingly recognise the other advantages of retaining links with the overseas citizenry. Emigrants are encouraged, for example, to channel their remittances towards investment and development in their countries of origin – often through hometown associations based in the host countries (Levitt and de la Dehesa, 2003).

Besides that, the migrant community acts a means of enabling sending states to lobby foreign governments for political favours, whilst for some national politicians and political parties, the votes of overseas citizens are counted upon to boost their political legitimacy (Itzigsohn, 2000). Using the example of Mexico, Smith (2003) furthermore argues that state power brokers use the ‘family’ as a discourse to channel migrant remittances into state-sponsored projects and ideologies that promote traditional extended family structures and specific family, cultural and social values. In these ways, corporeal subjects moving outside of the national territory are governed by sending state practices (Mitchell, 2004a:18; Silvey, 2004) as well as subject to state regulations in the

host context.

The difficulties of fitting into the new host community are important reasons why some transmigrants continue to feel strong ties of attachment and belonging to their homeland (Secor, 2004; Ehrkamp, 2005). However, initiatives by sending states to retain contact with their overseas citizens should also be taken into account to explain why migrants feel tied to their homeland. Some sending state initiatives to win over emigrants include explicitly constructing the migrant as an asset to the nation; setting up state agencies to promote the formation of migrant associations and to develop collaborative projects in the homeland with groups of transmigrants; nurturing an extraterritorial form of national identity by encouraging and disseminating the work of nationalistic artists, writers and musicians; and extending dual citizenship to overseas nationals (Itzigsohn, 2000; Goldring, 2003; Smith, 2003; Aguilar, 2004).

However, sending countries face growing pressure from their overseas citizens to expand the set of rights accorded to them even though they are living elsewhere (Smith, 2003). This may take the form of dual nationality<sup>7</sup> or dual citizenship allowances, overseas voting rights and even the right to stand for

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<sup>7</sup> Nationality refers to the formal legal status of state membership whereas citizenship delineates the character of a member's rights and duties within the national polity. Dual nationality allows individuals to hold memberships in two (or more) states but it does not necessarily guarantee access to all the rights and benefits of national citizenship, such as voting or holding political office (Levitt and de la Dehesa, 2003:594).

political elections in the country of origin (Levitt and de la Dehesa, 2003; Smith and Bakker, 2005). These rights have been extended by countries such as Mexico (Smith, 2003), the Dominican Republic (Guarnizo, 1998), Haiti and El Salvador (Itzigsohn, 2000), which all have large populations of overseas citizens. Such extraterritorial initiatives are beginning to take shape in the Singaporean case-study, which I will explicate and consider in my study alongside the response of Singaporean transmigrants to these state initiatives. Besides that, this thesis also pays close attention to the negotiations that take place between the state and its citizens with respect to the social contract on rights, duties and obligations.

There are a number of studies based on receiving country contexts which argue that transnational migrants seek citizenship status in a country other than their own as a form of political security, to enhance their international mobility or to accumulate economic and cultural capital for themselves and their families (Ong, 1999; Waters, 2003; Nonini, 2004; Leitner and Ehrkamp, forthcoming). The seminal work of Aihwa Ong (1999:112) on ‘flexible citizenship’ highlights ‘the strategies and effects of mobile managers, technocrats, and professionals seeking to both circumvent and benefit from different nation-state regimes by selecting different sites for investments, work, and family relocations’. In this conceptualisation of citizenship, capital investments vis-à-vis the geographical dispersal of the family unit in different countries become the key mechanisms that enable the accumulation of various residency and citizenship rights.

Miller (2002:14) argues that practices of flexible citizenship result in ‘a strategic-making do [sic] that seeks access to as many rights as possible while falling prey to as few responsibilities as possible’. What this perspective glosses over, however, is that these moves are often taken ‘for the sake of the family’ (Yeoh *et al*, 2002:1), even if at substantial economic and emotional costs to the lead transmigrant and the family members (Mitchell, 1997a; Waters, 2003; Nonini, 2004). Just as family considerations act as a triggering factor for some migrants to consider moving to a foreign country in the first place, this thesis demonstrates that the family can similarly function as a reason for others to repatriate due to the bind of emotional ties.

Feminist geographers have long valorised the importance of recognising the role of emotions in academic research and policy concerns. An exemplar of this would be the earlier work on women’s fear of crime in public spaces (Pain, 1997; Yeoh and Yeow, 1997). The recent surge of interest to engage with the study of emotions within wider human geography has seen a flowering of work on topics as diverse as the representations of emotions through mediums such as music and dance; family life; healthcare and care work concerns (both in the home and workplace); community inclusions and exclusions; urban life and city spaces; identity and nationalism; and even of the research process itself (see Bondi *et al*, 2004; Davidson and Milligan, 2004).

Anderson and Smith (2001:7) argue that it is imperative to consider emotions

as ways of knowing, being and doing because the human world is constructed and lived through the emotions. The intersubjectivity of emotions often structures social relations (Davidson and Milligan, 2004) and thereby underpins the social structures that operationalise social life (Ahmed, 2004). Yet notwithstanding the current ‘emotional turn’ (Bondi *et al.*, 2004:1) in geography, the role that emotions play in constituting what we understand as ‘citizenship’ has thus far not been explicitly considered (with the exception of identity and nationalism).

The study of emotions with respect to citizenship is deserving of attention given the almost ubiquitous status of citizenship as an identity and practice today. The political and social-cultural faces of citizenship are widely recognised in academic debates and public discourses. However, that is still only a partial picture. Denying the emotional intensities that underlie citizenship contributes to the reification of the artificial distinctions between public/private life and the state/citizen relationship. Thus far the study of emotions usually focuses on the explicitly emotional moments in life because it is at those particular times that the power of emotions cannot be ignored (Anderson and Smith, 2001). In my study, I attempt to make sense of the feelings expressed by Singaporean transmigrants towards the often taken-for-granted concept and practice of citizenship by considering not only what they say, but also how they feel about citizenship and the way they verbalise their thoughts and emotions on the subject.

In this thesis, I approach the emotional aspects of citizenship in three ways. First, I utilise the discourses of ‘belonging’ to foreground the emotional underpinnings of citizenship. Second, I consider the emotional intensities underpinning the political aspects of citizenship. Third, I utilise the transnational family as a unit of emotional affiliation that is scaled upwards towards the nation-state to demonstrate the mutually constituting relationship between the social-cultural, emotional and political aspects of citizenship. My thesis focus on emotions complements the emerging interest in the emotional dimensions of transnational migration (Yeoh *et al*, 2002; Waters, 2003; Nonini, 2004; Secor, 2004; Ehrkamp, 2005; Yeoh, 2005) whilst using the insights gained from the emerging research in this field to examine the concept and practice of citizenship in that light. My thesis connects individualised accounts of emotions to the broader structural, institutional and ideological factors that shape experiences of transnational migration and citizenship (trans)formations.

This discussion theorising citizenship in a transnational world uses transnationalism perspectives to consider the simultaneous expansion and contraction of citizenship. To conclude, there are three key theoretical debates in this section. First, how is membership of a nation-state defined in view of the multiple attachments, belongings and identities experienced by transnational migrants? Second, in what ways are the ideas of rights and duties reconfigured from a nation-bound framework to an extraterritorial expression of citizenship? Third, what is the role played by emotions in the constitution of citizenship as a concept and practice? My empirical study of Singaporean



transmigrants in London seeks to answer these conceptual questions. Before coming to that, however, I establish the context of Singapore citizenship and nationhood below.

## **5 Singapore citizenship in the pre-independence decades**

This section elucidates the historical context and factors preceding the formation of Singapore citizenship in 1957 and then up till 1965 when Singapore gained formal political independence. I argue that the idea and subsequent practice of Singapore citizenship was the product of a set of historically mediated practices that arose out of its colonial and immigrant origins. I build my case by first providing an abbreviated chronology of the development of Singapore citizenship. Then I draw attention to the competing nationalisms based on class, ethnicity and political affiliations that gave rise to Singapore citizenship. Lastly, I foreground an argument that the extent (inclusion and exclusion), content (rights and responsibilities) and depth (thickness or thinness) of Singapore citizenship have been a subject of debate right from the start.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, naturalisation was an important tool for building up loyalty among the immigrant groups in colonial Singapore. Under British governance, the 1948 British Subjects Bill and the British Nationality Act (passed in that same year) ruled that all persons born in Singapore were British subjects and citizens of the Commonwealth. It was only when Singapore gained greater political independence in 1957 that a separate

Singapore citizenship was created (acquired through birth, descent, naturalisation or registration). Even when the 1958 State of Singapore Act amended the 1948 British Nationality Act and gave Singapore citizenship international recognition, a citizen of Singapore at that time was still automatically a British subject and Commonwealth citizen. In 1960, the passage of Ordinance No. 41 required persons who voluntarily claimed and exercised rights under the law of any foreign citizenship to terminate their Singaporean citizenship (Teo and Liew, 2004).

When Singapore became a part of the newly declared Federation of Malaysia in 1963, those born in Singapore and Malaysia were no longer allowed to hold British citizenship (although they remained Commonwealth citizens). The 1957 Singapore Citizenship Ordinance was also repealed and replaced by the Constitution of the State of Singapore: this set the requirements for the acquisition of citizenship. During that time, Singapore citizenship could be acquired if the potential citizen was enrolled or naturalised under the Constitution of Malaysia, but this provision became defunct when Singapore declared formal political independence in 1965 (Teo and Liew, *ibid*). The conditions and regulations for Singapore Citizenship are now spelled out in the Singapore Constitution (Attorney General's Chambers, 2006a), which came into effect in 1965.

Narratives of the history of Singapore usually begin in 1965, the year that Singapore gained formal independence following its separation from the

Federation of Malaya. These depictions tend to focus on the People's Action Party<sup>8</sup> and its leader, Lee Kuan Yew, who is also popularly recognised as the founding father of modern Singapore. Over the years, such depictions have shaped the meanings of Singaporean identity and Singapore citizenship. I postulate, however, that from its inception and through later developments, the idea of a citizenship of Singapore has had significant implications for mobility, identity and nationality.

Bunnell (forthcoming) shows in his study of former Malay sailors who settled in Liverpool during the 1940s and 1950s that the political consciousness of Malay nationalism emerged decades before the formal creation of the Federation of Malaya in 1957. Likewise, beginning Singapore's history only with the election of the People's Action Party in 1959, or when Singapore gained full independence in 1965 (the birth of a national identity), precludes consideration of the fermentation stage of political consciousness prior to the formation of the 'nation'. I suggest that the forging of political consciousness began before 1965; instead what was required for the formation of a specifically Singaporean identity – a consciousness of self as citizen – began at

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<sup>8</sup> Throughout this thesis, I use the term, 'Singaporean state' to refer to the state institutions that govern the country. However in the Singapore case, the state is often conflated with the idea of the 'government', which is actually the arm of the state that makes executive national decisions. This reflects the political history of Singapore in which the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) has been at the helm of governance since the country's first compulsory elections in 1959. Where I use the term, 'PAP government', I am referring specifically to the inter-party politics that characterise political governance, but which are often elided in the Singaporean context because of the hegemony of the PAP.

least as early as 1957. A brief look at the competing nationalisms that struggled for prominence in the years leading up to and after 1957 shed light on the way that Singapore citizenship took shape.

According to Hill and Lian (1995), the fiercest political struggles that took place from 1943 to 1948 were between the respective factions supporting Malayan nationalism and Malay nationalism. Eventually, the British proposal for an inclusive Malayan Union Citizenship was rejected in favour of the 1948 Federation of Malaya Agreement, which formalised the special position of the Malays while offering non-Malays citizenship on restrictive terms. Singapore was excluded from this proposal because of its Chinese majority population which would have upset the ethnic balance in Malaya. The Chinese population were also disinclined to take up Malayan citizenship because they thought that it meant rejecting their Chinese nationality. Following that, the 1955 elections that were a step towards self-governance in Singapore saw the two left-wing, anti-colonial and socialist parties – the Singapore Labour Front and the People's Action Party (formed in 1954) – successfully elected to form the government and opposition faction respectively.

It was in the wake of these events that the creation of a Singapore citizenship was mooted so as to incorporate the various interests represented in Singapore and Malaya during that period of time. The Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce was one of the most vociferous groups advocating the economic, political and cultural rights of the Chinese population in Singapore. There was,

however, again the need to accommodate Malay nationalists who feared the preponderance of Chinese influence over the peninsula. The compromise that was finally reached took the form of the 1957 Singapore Citizenship Ordinance. The competing nationalisms represented in this struggle over the content and extent of Singapore citizenship underscores the fragility of Singapore citizenship as a political construct.

Introducing the Singapore Citizenship Bill during the Legislative Assembly debate in 1957, Chief Minister Lim Yew Hock (from the Singapore Labour Front) said:

Nations are not created from the top and then citizens fitted into the nation. The nation is a group of individual citizens whose drive and loyalty create the feeling of nationality, the feeling of being a distinct and distinctive group. It is in the heart and from the heart of each individual citizen that grows the vital and fertile seed of a nation. (*Hansard Report*, 11 September 1957, column 2540)

In the above quotation, Lim asserts that intrinsic to the institution of self-governance and the installation of Singapore citizenship were ideas of nationhood, group solidarity and national identity. Thus citizenship was not merely a formal status but also created the terms for inclusion and exclusion (Brubaker, 1992).

Lim went on to state why it was essential for Singapore citizenship to be given legal definition:

Citizenship not only gives political rights but also responsibilities, and it must be clear on whom these responsibilities fall and on whom the state can call for the services which the community requires. As therefore the citizens create and control political power, their qualifications must be clearly defined, but this is more than a matter of legal definition... *The legal forms must be given the*

*warmth and vitality of human emotions, but there can be none of the associations of a homeland, of belonging to Singapore, until there is clear definition of who are at home in Singapore. And it is equally clear that those who become our citizens and make this their home should declare their clear loyalty to Singapore. (ibid, column 2452; emphasis mine)*

Before the Second World War, the majority of the population in Singapore were immigrants who had not come with the intention to stay, but they subsequently made Singapore their adopted country. In his speech, Lim noted that Singapore citizenship was beneficial to this group of people who had taken on a Malayan outlook and ‘were reluctant to become citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies, which apart from its legal difficulties, appeared to give up one non-Malayan nationality for another’ (*Hansard Report*, 11 September 1957, column 2544).

The mixed histories, geographies and social-political affiliations of the migrants converging in Singapore created subsequent debates over the desirable residency period required of those seeking citizenship, and whether persons that were already citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies should be required to register for citizenship again to signify their allegiance to Singapore (*The Straits Times*, 12 September 1957; 17 October 1957). At that time, the emphasis was on making the immigrants who had settled there feel a sense of belonging towards Singapore. However, it was also stressed that whilst citizenship grants rights (in terms of political accountability from elected leaders), it also demands that citizens fulfil their responsibilities (by declaring their loyalty). It is clear that from the outset, even before the birth of an identifiable national community (‘the self which will govern’), the vision was

that Singapore citizenship would consist of mutually constituting emotional, social-cultural and political-legal dimensions. These ideals continue to resonate in the way that Singapore citizenship is represented in political and popular discourses today.

In 1959, the People’s Action Party (PAP) came into power in Singapore during the Legislative Assembly elections in which voting was first made compulsory. The PAP has retained its ruling grip upon the governance of Singapore since then and the party is largely treated as synonymous with the Singaporean state. In 1963, the country was incorporated into the Federation of Malaya (Malaysia). For twenty-three months, Singapore and Malaysia operated in an uneasy alliance. During this time, the question of citizenship was a difficult one. The PAP’s vision of a ‘Malaysian Malaysia’ (espousing multiculturalism) clashed with the Malay political elite’s ideal of *bangsa Melayu*<sup>9</sup> that justified the special ethnic and political positions of the Malay population.

The Malaysian constitution introduced two types of citizenship under the Federation so as to manage economic, ethnic and political tensions between the Malay-majority in the peninsula and the Chinese-majority in Singapore. Singapore citizenship sought to be liberal and inclusive – it viewed citizenship as a means of encouraging and building up a new loyalty and identity –

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<sup>9</sup> ‘*Bangsa Melayu*’ refers to the idea of the Malay ‘race’, which the political elite in Malaysia believed should be the basis of a Malaysian nation.

whereas Malaysian citizenship placed restrictions on the eligibility of non-Malays and was meant to exclude non-Malays from political privilege. However, such distinctions only impeded the development of a common nationality. The resulting tensions at both the elite and grassroots levels heightened and eventually culminated in the 1964 ethnic riots in Singapore, which then saw Singapore's political separation from Malaysia (Hill and Lian, 1995).

This section makes clear that, first, Singapore citizenship was the outcome of negotiations between competing representations based on nationalism, class, 'race', ethnicity and other interests. My thesis demonstrates that these competing representations take on new forms in the struggle over the meaning of Singapore citizenship today. Second, this section demonstrates that the ideals of belonging, national identity, rights and responsibilities have been reiterated from the outset since the creation of Singapore citizenship. This thesis explicating the manner in which Singapore citizenship is being reconfigured as a result of Singaporean transnational migration can therefore be seen as a continuation of those debates.



## **6 Building a nation of immigrants in the post-independence decades**

Singapore's political separation from Malaysia entrenched control in the hands of the PAP ruling elite who immediately set about exercising their economic, ideological and political power (Hill and Lian, 1995:22). The years following formal independence saw Singapore proceed at full-speed with economic and nation-building processes. Viewing the nation as a social construct (Jackson and Penrose, 1993:7-9), Chua (1995:102) argues that the terms, 'Singapore' and 'Singaporean' are 'results of discursive practices [...] which are "called into existence" by statements that circulate in different discourses, in different spheres of social practices'. In the sections that follow, I spell out the ways in which the PAP government utilised discourses, legislation, policies and practices to create the 'Singaporean' nation-state and the idea and practice of Singapore citizenship.

### **6.1 'Race', ethnicity and culture**

One of the key tenets of nation-building in Singapore is the idea of multiculturalism. Historical events and the practicality of governing a national community made up of disparate communal groups made it necessary to create a shared sense of membership and allegiance to a national community, even if on tenuous grounds. However, as Jackson and Penrose (1993:5) point out, the idea of 'race' is not a biological given; instead 'race' (or ethnicity) should be examined in view of the geographical and historical conditions and processes under which it came into being. Jackson and Penrose (ibid) posit that 'race'

also often lends power to the social construct of the ‘nation’ by legitimising inclusion and exclusion, and granting entitlements through citizenship (ibid, 9).

The past political events preceding the formal independence of Singapore created in the consciousness of the Singaporean ruling elite an awareness of the inflammatory potential of ethnic divisions. Therefore, the ideology of multiculturalism was enshrined in the Singapore Constitution, which accords political equality to the four founding ‘races’ – Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian (classified as ‘Other’). The salience of managing ethnic and cultural harmony for national survival permeates aspects of government policy ranging from the regulation of provision of public housing provision by ethnic quotas (Chua, 1995:124), to enforcing a bilingual education policy and in terms of ensuring minority political representation. Cultural nationalism in Singapore is treated watchfully by the political elite who tend to interpret political questions based on specific interests of an ethnic group as ‘racial chauvinism’ (Chua, 1995:107). However, I argue that the multiculturalism policy in Singapore has simultaneously depoliticised and politicised ethnic issues in the nation-state.

The multiculturalism project in Singapore seeks to ‘create a generation of Singaporeans who feel as Singaporeans first [...] and then, secondarily, as descendents of those who came from China, from India or from the Malay archipelago’ (Yong, 2004:51). Hence, the bilingualism policy in schools requires students, first, to master the English language as the lingua franca, and second, to learn their mother tongue so as to preserve their cultural identities.

However, by the 1990s, this attempt to respect cultural boundaries came under scrutiny because of government proposals that encouraged Special Assistant Plan<sup>10</sup> (SAP) schools to explicitly promote the learning of the Chinese language and culture. The goal was to provide the cultural ballast that would guard against the negative influences of Westernisation. The government also promoted a set of shared ‘Asian values’ based on Confucianism as ‘shared values’ for all Singaporeans (Chua, 1995:121; George, 2003:160).

Those moves triggered deep suspicion amongst the other ethnic groups in Singapore towards what they perceived as an assertion of Chinese hegemony. Besides that, lingering ‘racial’ stereotypes continue to condition ethnic relations in contemporary Singapore. For example, the economic and educational underachievement of the Malay community in Singapore is often written off as a ‘racial’ and cultural deficit (Barr and Low, 2005). The socio-economic marginalisation of the Malays is further reinforced by periodic statements made by prominent Singaporean politicians who question their national loyalty. These observations suggest that while seeking to ameliorate cultural differences through selective policies, the Singaporean state simultaneously accentuates differences that run counter to the ideal of a universal citizenship. One of the issues this thesis explores is the ways in which

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<sup>10</sup> Many of these schools started off as Chinese-language medium schools from the pre-independence days. They were then private initiatives by rich Chinese businessmen and intellectuals, founded as a means to preserve Chinese identity and the Chinese language. These schools were gradually incorporated as national schools by the PAP government when it came into power so as to manage the educational syllabi and to ameliorate communist influences.

cultural tensions and contradictions of nationhood are played out extraterritorially during the transmigrancy of Singaporean citizens.

## **6.2 National sovereignty and compulsory military conscription**

For the Singaporean political elite, maintaining post-independence ethnic harmony was also an imperative because of external geopolitical reasons. The PAP government treads a guarded line on domestic ethnic relations so as not to antagonise the Malay population in Malaysia – which feels that the Malay minority in independent Singapore faces institutionalised discrimination. The PAP government has also been careful to assure the surrounding Muslim nation-states that Singapore, with its Chinese-majority population, is not at risk of becoming a pawn of communist China. The geopolitical situation of Singapore thus legitimises another key pillar of its nation-building project – the institution of military conscription (known as national service in popular parlance) to protect its territorial sovereignty.

National service (NS) was partially introduced in Singapore in 1967. At the time of its inception, national service was thought to have been made necessary by the British government's expected withdrawal of its troops from Singapore in the late 1960s. Today, compulsory national service in Singapore is mandated by the 1970 Enlistment Act (Attorney General's Chambers, 2006b). All eligible male Singaporeans (Singaporean citizens and second-generation permanent residents) serve between two to two-and-a-half years of active service upon reaching eighteen years old (although this may be temporarily

deferred within reason). Singaporean national servicemen are also liable for annual reservist duties until the age of forty. Young Singaporean males approaching the age of national service or in full-time national service are required to obtain an exit permit to travel outside of Singapore.

Those in breach of their national service requirements are liable for a fine of up to \$10,000 and/or to imprisonment for up to three years. The penalties were increased in January 2006 in the wake of controversy arising from the return of a famous Singapore-born pianist, Melvyn Tan, who had defaulted on his national service obligations for almost thirty years. Now Singaporean males are also not allowed to renounce their Singaporean citizenship until completion of at least two years of national service duty – unless they migrated from Singapore at an early age and have not enjoyed significant socio-economic benefits of citizenship (*The Straits Times*, 17 January 2006).

National service is thus construed as integral to the state-citizen relationship in the Singapore context: it affirms the commitment of the individual to the nation-state; protects state sovereignty; and builds social bonds amongst an otherwise fragmented citizenry of immigrant stock. In this way, military service acts as a citizenship-making strategy and a technology of rule exercised by the Singaporean state. However, as this thesis makes clear, transnational migration allows for strategies of equivocation when overseas male Singaporeans utilise their absence from Singapore as an opportunity to fully or partially evade their national service duties.

### **6.3 Economic imperatives and societal discipline**

Economic survival has always weighed heavily on the minds of the political elite in Singapore. Merger with Malaysia in 1963 had been prompted in part by the fact that Singapore has no natural resources of its own or a viable domestic market to rely on. When the merger with Malaysia failed, the PAP government's economic strategy was to focus on export-oriented trade and attract foreign direct investment to enable rapid industrialisation instead. Maintaining ethnic harmony and socio-political stability was, and still is, in no small part linked to this desire to make Singapore an attractive destination for foreign investors. These economic imperatives were operationalised through a dogma of social control legitimised by the ruling elite as pragmatic nation-building solutions (Chua, 1995:59).

However, the political elite satisfy the social needs of Singaporeans by way of social safety nets, such as the Central Provident Fund (CPF). The CPF is a government-aided savings plan for Singaporean workers who pay a set amount of their monthly salary into this compulsory scheme (for Singaporean citizens). The accumulated sum earns interest under government custody and the total savings may be withdrawn upon retirement for old age provision. Before that, Singaporean citizens may use allocated parts of their savings to pay for public housing, their children's tertiary education in local institutions and healthcare costs. In this way, the CPF acts as a tool for the Singaporean state to socialise Singaporean citizens into providing for their own social needs.

With the Singaporean state's fixation on economic growth and global competitiveness, education as investment in human capital has always featured prominently in its national strategy. Initially, a mass education system was put in place to raise basic literacy rates and to train Singaporeans in the skills needed for the newly industrialising economy. An implicit logic in the Singaporean education system is the principle of meritocracy. The implementation of meritocracy, however, sees Singaporean students, from the age of nine onwards, categorised into educational streams based on examination results at various stages of their educational lives. These periodic assessments have been a source of stress for students and parents alike. Scholarly achievements are celebrated in Singapore society whereas social stigma is attached to individuals who fail to keep up and are relegated to either vocational or technical education that later regulates their entry into the labour market.

The need to maintain Singapore's competitiveness globally has in this way trickled down to the societal psyche and everyday life-worlds of Singaporeans. The individual and combined intensities of economic imperatives, social expectations and societal discipline create an impetus for some Singaporeans to leave for temporary work reasons to improve their human capital quotient or to permanently build a new life elsewhere. In this thesis, I tease out the various reasons for Singaporean migration so as to build up a better understanding of transnational mobility and its citizenship implications.

#### 6.4 '(A)political' Singapore

Since dissolution of the union with Malaysia in 1965 and the purging of the internal communist threat in Singapore, the PAP government has gradually entrenched its political dominance. This was achieved over the years through a series of political, legislative and social reforms at the institutional, policy and grassroots levels. The party furthermore exercises state control over the Singaporean media by regulating media ownership and freedom in Singapore (George, 2003). Political and electoral processes also favour the incumbent party and its nominated candidates for political office<sup>11</sup>. The political dominance of the PAP is reflected in the weak opposition presence in Singapore's political scene.

The difficulty of recruiting members into the opposition must be viewed in light of the way the PAP deals with its political opponents. The PAP government has used various legislative measures (such as the Internal Security Act that allows for detention without trial) to remove potential political threats. Another political tactic used by the PAP is to resort to litigation, notably by

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<sup>11</sup> For example, the presidential elections (initiated in 1992) are regulated by stringent criteria put in place by the ruling party, thereby limiting the number of contenders for the post. Another deterrent to discourage the growth of a viable political opposition is the Group Representative Constituency (GRC) scheme in which political parties have to slate a group of candidates in one constituency – including a representative from one of the minority groups. The electorate in that constituency then votes for the entire slate of party candidates rather than individual candidates. The inability to slate a minority representative under the GRC scheme automatically renders the opposition ineligible to contest those seats in the general elections.



bringing up libel suits against members of the political opposition. The ensuing legal battles run up hefty costs and fines for those found guilty and according to Singaporean law, persons declared bankrupt are barred from standing for political elections for five years

The feeble political contestation during the general elections, therefore, creates what is popularly known in Singapore as ‘walkover constituencies’ wherein the ruling party’s candidate wins the parliamentary seat by default because of a lack of effective competition. Over the years, the lack of actual participation in the voting process has created general public apathy towards politics in Singapore that, arguably, erodes political accountability too. At the same time, the ruling party’s practice of bringing up defamation suits against political opponents generates a climate of fear to speak up about political issues in public even amongst the general populace. This mindset filters down to even the most banal conversation in which there is a practice of ‘self-censorship’ towards anything that could be construed as being ‘political’ in nature. The impact of such a political climate on the citizen psyche has yet to be fully explored, despite frequent allusions to it as one of the foremost reasons why highly skilled and educated young Singaporeans are leaving the country. This thesis contributes to this debate by considering the references to Singaporean political governance in Singapore that emerged from the narratives of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study.

My discussion in this section drew together themes on society and culture, the

economy, and other domestic and external political concerns in order to consider the ways in which these themes constitute Singapore citizenship as both a concept and practice. My key argument is that these themes, emerging out of specific historical and geographical conditions, continue to resonate in the development of Singapore citizenship today.

## 7 ‘Globalising’ Singapore

In this age of advanced capitalism and accelerating globalisation, staying on top of global competition has become an even more urgent goal for the political elite in Singapore. Their strategy to achieve this is three-pronged. First, it involves pitching Singapore as a world-class destination to foreign businesses and individuals equipped with the desired skills and knowledge that would give Singapore a competitive edge. The ‘Foreign Talent Strategy’ refers to government efforts to draw foreign professionals, investors and entrepreneurs (popularly termed ‘foreign talent’) to Singapore.

This policy initiative is premised on the belief that foreign talent is needed to create jobs and strengthen the country’s competitiveness in view of Singapore’s small and ageing local population (*The Straits Times*, 8 November 2001; 9 November 2001). Foreigners can also fill gaps where locals lack the required skills, enabling the economy to adapt to fast changing economic and technological trends. These skilled foreigners are also offered a route to citizenship in Singapore through permanent residency. The ‘Foreign Talent Strategy’ has, however, created much resentment in some sectors of the

Singaporean population, especially amongst the middle-class and well-educated who feel threatened by the job competition and marginalised by what is perceived as the privileging of foreigners over Singaporean citizens (Ho, 2006).

Second, the Singaporean state encourages Singaporean businesses to invest internationally; in recent years, Singaporean investors have been prompted by government initiatives to develop business links with China and India in particular. The rationale of the political elite is that Singaporean businesses and Singaporeans have an added advantage working in these countries because of the shared ancestry and cultural similarities (Goh, 2002). The work of Yeoh and Willis (1998 and 2005b:278) on Singaporean transmigrants in China, however, reveals the ‘finely-tuned politics of difference which [...] trouble Singaporean Chinese who [...] stress difference despite shared ancestry’. In addition, earlier research I carried out on the attitudes of Singaporeans (in Singapore) towards the new immigrants who have come from China and South Asia (India and Bangladesh) to work in Singapore indicate that there is a similar politics of differentiation based on nationality. Despite the historical connections because of migrancy, Singaporeans have evolved over the years of nation-building to embody considerably different mindsets, customs and norms from their contemporaries in India and China (Ho, 2006).

Third, alongside the internationalisation of Singaporean businesses, the Singaporean state encourages Singaporeans to study or work overseas for a

period of time to accrue the knowledge, skills and competencies that could help Singapore to develop as an internationally-competitive and cosmopolitan-style city-state. However, while promoting an overseas experience to citizens, the ruling elite expresses simultaneous concern about whether such Singaporeans will eventually return to Singapore or put down new roots elsewhere. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the production of global cities is seen to be tied to the convergence of highly skilled international labour in those sites (Findlay *et al*, 1996; Beaverstock, 2005). Thus the return migration of overseas Singaporeans is highly valued by the Singaporean state.

A growing outflow of Singaporeans who failed to return prompted the former Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, to comment in the 2002 National Day Rally Speech that:

Fair weather Singaporeans will run away whenever the country runs into stormy weather. I call them 'quitters'. Fortunately, 'quitters' are in the minority. The majority of Singaporeans are 'stayers'. 'Stayers are committed to Singapore. Rain or shine, they will be with Singapore... 'Stayers' include Singaporeans who are overseas, but feel for Singapore. They will come back when needed, because their hearts are here. The Singapore nation is not just those of us living here, but also the thousands of loyal Singaporeans who live around the world. (Goh, 2002)

In the light of the increasing numbers of Singaporeans who move overseas and eventually either apply for permanent residency in another country or a foreign citizenship, the Singaporean political leaders express worry about the reproduction of the Singaporean population, the regeneration of the Singaporean workforce and a gap in future leadership. According to a quantitative survey carried out in Singapore in 2002, one in four Singaporeans – mainly from the highly educated spectrum and occupying high-level

occupations – have considered taking up residency or citizenship in another country (Tan, 2005).

It is in the context of Singapore's internationalisation vis-à-vis the management of its domestic affairs that 'the puzzle of migrating Singaporeans' (*Today*, 2 February 2006) needs to be considered. These migrating Singaporeans tend to be young, middle-class, university-educated individuals who fall into the spectrum of the population that the Singaporean state is most interested to retain. Their motivations for leaving are unclear and there is speculation over whether these Singaporeans are leaving because of the lure of a less stressful lifestyle in countries such as Australia and Canada, or because of the competition from and privileging of foreign talent (by government policy and employers), such that Singaporean citizens begin to feel that their sense of ownership over Singapore is lacking.

The Singaporean state's outlook towards globalisation and internationalisation reveals further contradictions and tensions when viewed alongside the management of its domestic affairs. The economic liberalisation and cultural openness that the Singaporean state advocates have not been accompanied by civil or political liberalisation despite rhetoric and overtures promising to bring it about. During the 2006 general elections, for instance, the PAP government extended censorship laws to ban podcasts and videocasts that carried political content. This is even though political websites were already subject to registration regulations required under the Parliamentary Elections Act (revised

in 2001) (*Today*, 20 February 2006). ‘Race’ also continues to be a thorny issue in contemporary Singapore. The discussion of issues to do with ‘race’ and politics, for example, is often swept under the carpet or even when brought into the open, as I will discuss later, risk raising the hackles of the PAP government.

In the view of some spectrums of the Singaporean population and foreign political observers, the freedom of expression in Singapore is curtailed under a paternalistic and strong-handed government. It is open to question whether overseas Singaporeans are purely economic migrants or if dissatisfaction with Singaporean political governance factored into their migration decision. Thus, one of the concerns of this thesis is to investigate the multifaceted and multilayered motivations for Singaporean migration through the narratives of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. I then connect their individualised stories into the broader context of globalisation, nation-building and citizenship trans(formations) in a transnational world. In addition, I link this examination with the Singaporean state’s efforts to maintain the relevance and attractiveness of Singapore citizenship to overseas Singaporeans.

In recent years, the Singaporean state has begun a series of initiatives aimed at reaching out to the group of overseas Singaporeans. These initiatives include bureaucratic reforms, such as setting up a government agency, called Contact Singapore, under the ministry in charge of labour affairs so as to promote Singapore as a working destination to foreigners and to keep in touch with

overseas Singaporeans. Contact Singapore has offices in various parts of the world. In 2006, another government agency, the Overseas Singaporean Unit, was established to focus more explicitly on relating to the group of Singaporean citizens living abroad and to help them to find work either in Singapore or with Singaporean companies in other parts of the world (*Today*, 14 March 2006).

In addition, the Singaporean state instituted changes to the country's citizenship policies to acknowledge the ties that overseas Singaporean citizens and their descendents maintain with Singapore despite their emigrant status. Previously, Singaporean citizens by descent – children born to Singaporean parents abroad – were not allowed to pass on Singapore citizenship to their overseas-born children. The Constitution of Singapore was amended in 2004 to lift this limitation on the transfer of citizenship by descent. According to the Home Affairs Minister, Wong Kan Seng, the change was to recognise that Singaporeans have become more internationally mobile (*The Straits Times*, 12 March 2004). The second change to the constitution was to grant citizenship by descent to babies born overseas to Singaporean mothers. Previously, this right had been given only to overseas Singaporean fathers. Home Affairs Minister Wong Kan Seng (*ibid*) added that this amendment acknowledges the fact that more Singaporean women are marrying foreigners and starting families abroad, but the Singaporean state 'want[s] them and their children to remain connected to Singapore'.

The above citizenship changes mark the reversal from a more conservative stance in the past. The former Home Affairs Minister, Shanmugam Jayakumar, for example, had previously admonished Singaporeans who migrated in the early 1950s and 1960s as those who want to return ‘after [contributing] nothing to the welfare of the state’ (*Reuters News Agency*, 31 August 1985). The changes making it easier to pass citizenship from parent to child also emphasise that the Singaporean state values the familial lineage of citizenship. At the same time, the granting of citizenship rights to children born to overseas Singaporean women was lauded by a number of parliamentarians during the legislative debate as a sign of greater gender parity in Singapore (*Hansard Report*, 19 April 2004). However, these government initiatives – although addressing some of the unique issues faced by overseas Singaporeans – also throw up some new questions about the content and extent of citizenship for this particular group of citizens.

For example, when the redistribution of government surpluses through a special financial package for Singaporean citizens was announced by the government in 2006, a member of the public wrote to the newspapers questioning whether overseas Singaporeans should have a right to this financial payout (*Today*, 14 April 2006). This is presumably because given their absence from Singapore overseas Singaporeans would have made limited contributions to the government surpluses that were being disbursed. This incident raises important questions regarding the content, extent and depth of citizenship that this thesis seeks to address.



I indicated in this section the mix of factors behind Singaporean transnational migration and the countervailing pressures that arise in relation to the nation-building project and citizenship (trans)formations. The reasons for Singaporean transnational migration are multifaceted and complexly intertwined with considerations of the historical, economic, social, cultural and (geo)political aspects of Singaporean society, which have not yet been systematically studied. The implications of the changes made to Singapore citizenship for overseas Singaporeans also deserve to be more carefully scrutinised so as to create a better understanding of such citizenship (trans)formations.

Other than these areas for consideration, the role of the Singaporean state as both a motivator and disciplinarian of Singaporean transnational migration will also be examined in this thesis. Alongside this, I study the response of Singaporean transmigrants towards state-led initiatives to maintain the relevance and attractiveness of Singapore citizenship for them. I endeavour to bring together these threads of enquiry to piece a coherent picture of Singaporean transnational migration and citizenship (trans)formations in relation to broader theoretical debates.

## **8 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I signalled the convergence of highly skilled migration and citizenship as fields of inquiry underpinned by transnationalism perspectives. I began by considering the broader analytical contributions that transnationalism scholarship brings to migration studies, before homing in on studies of highly skilled migration. In particular, I noted the emergence of a counter-scholarship championing the need to broaden the empirical and theoretical optic beyond transnational elite and low-paid labour migration. Drawing inspiration from the scholarship on middling transnationalism, this thesis foregrounds the importance of considering the experiences of highly skilled individuals who do not belong to the transnational elite category. I argue that my research makes a distinctive contribution to the scholarship on middling transnationalism in the way that it will consider, first, the changing migration strategies and trajectories that Singaporean transmigrants in London undertake; and second, the institutional and societal contexts motivating their migration.

In my discussion on citizenship, I focused attention on the initiatives of sending states to retain contact with their overseas citizenry as well as the demands made by overseas citizens for special privileges of citizenship. These developments generate questions on the ways in which transnational migration changes notions of membership, rights, duties and obligations in relation to citizenship. In the discussion, I also underscored an ongoing neglect of the emotional content of citizenship even though the emotions structure the

meaning of citizenship. As such, in this thesis, I foreground the importance of studying the mutually constituting relationship between the emotional, political-legal and social-cultural aspects of citizenship – particularly an everyday practice. In summary, my key argument is: whilst citizenship regulates the experience of highly skilled transnational migration, transnational migration also inflects on the concept and everyday practice of citizenship.

The second half of this chapter considered the historical and contemporary formations of citizenship in Singapore. My argument is that the colonial and immigrant background of pre-independence Singapore modulated and helped to legitimise the state policies that were implemented after independence. I also put emphasis on the way that ideals of belonging, national identity, rights and duties have been encapsulated in the concept of Singapore citizenship from the outset. The remainder of the chapter then elucidated the cultural, economic, social and (geo)political aspects of nation-building in post-independent Singapore, and their implications on contemporary Singaporean transnational migration and citizenship (trans)formations.

Mobility challenges national citizenship – the traditional means by which states control mobility – in two ways. First, by the presence of non-citizens, particularly unauthorised migrants; and second, by the absence of mobile citizens ‘whose mobility conflicts with the expectations of the national citizens by not residing in a fixed abode and not identifying with a place-based community’ (Desforges *et al*, 2005:442). My argument is that the implications

of these challenges for Singapore are three-fold: the Singaporean state not only has to retain its niche in the global economy by welcoming foreigners who can contribute to Singapore's economic prosperity, but it also has to alleviate the suspicions of Singaporean citizens towards the newcomers. Lastly, the Singaporean state also needs to consider ways to maintain its relevance and attractiveness to Singaporean citizens who now have more options than before to take up residency and even citizenship elsewhere.

Through the empirical example of Singapore, this thesis endeavours to generate new theoretical understandings towards the relationship between transnational migration and citizenship. Once again, my research aims are: first, to examine the ways in which Singaporean transnational migration in London informs existing understandings of highly skilled migration. Second, through this thesis, I seek to explore the dynamics of the mutually constituting relationship between transnational migration and citizenship.

# 3

## **Research design: Study context and methodologies**

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## **1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I first aim to explain why I chose London as my study site to research Singaporean transnational migration and citizenship (trans)formations. My second objective is to establish my choice of research methods for this project. Following on from that, I also provide some insights into the ensuing fieldwork dynamics that helped to inform the analysis of my research findings. Concerning my first aim, I build my case around the significance of the shared global city reputations of Singapore and London, which attract highly skilled migrants who help to ‘reproduce’ these global cities. I also draw attention to the comparisons and contrasts that can be obtained from studying the citizenship traditions and postcolonial connections in these two sites. Therefore, I argue that the empirical perspectives from this study help to inform theory-building in both transnational migration and citizenship scholarship. My thesis seeks to unearth the social processes at work in transnational migration and citizenship and my choice of research methods was closely tied to this endeavour.

This leads to the second aim of the chapter, which is to argue why my choice of research methods – namely, discourse analysis, ethnography and in-depth interviews – were the most suitable for the purposes of this study. My decision to employ qualitative techniques was undoubtedly a political choice, reflecting my personal inclinations towards seeing the world as being made up of ‘an assemblage of competing social constructions, representations and performances’ (S. Smith, 2001:25). I begin this discussion on methods with

discourse analysis for two reasons. The first one is that discourse analysis was the starting point of my research. Before I could fully implement the other two research strategies, I had to construct an understanding of Singaporean transnational migration and the ensuing debates over citizenship. The other and more important reason is because of my interest in uncovering the way meta-narratives structure the social lives of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study, and in turn, their engagements with those narratives.

My discussion then moves on to the way that ethnographic fieldwork featured in my study. Ethnography forms the backdrop of my research project, again, for two reasons. As an overseas Singaporean studying her community in London, inevitably, participant observation (or observant participation) became second nature to me. Moreover, my participation in the activities of the overseas Singaporean community provided me with access to the third prong of my research strategy – interview opportunities with ‘gatekeepers’ and individual Singaporean transmigrants in London. These interviews formed an integral part of my fieldwork and comprise a substantial proportion of my empirical analysis in this thesis because of my interest in the human dimensions of transnational migration and citizenship (trans)formations. As such, I devote considerable space in this chapter towards elucidating the composition and process of the interviews.

Other than these two aims, this chapter also makes clear some of the methodological issues that I encountered during the post-fieldwork process. I

identify the difficulties of coding, analysing and writing about the verbal and non-verbal nuances that I encountered during fieldwork. However, I also suggest that using a combination of discourse analysis, ethnographic methods and in-depth interviews enabled me to overcome these difficulties, and produced a fuller understanding of the way that Singapore citizenship was experienced by the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. This in turn contributed to theory-building on the relationship between transnational migration and citizenship.

## **2 Justification for study**

My empirical study focuses on the flows, processes and outcomes of human mobility between two global cities, namely Singapore and London. It is widely recognised that migration is central to debates on the global city (Friedmann and Wolff, 1982; Sassen, 1991 and 2002; Beaverstock and Boardwell, 2000). What is particularly distinctive about global cities like Singapore and London is the way that migrant labour flows in and out of these sites. Migration is seen as a globalisation process producing and reproducing the global city and new geographies of migration (Findlay *et al*, 1996; Beaverstock, 2005). However, migration also creates degrees of insiders and outsiders, and this is often formalised through the institution of citizenship that grants a set of rights and entitlements to some and not others (Brubaker, 1992). These theoretical debates provide the setting to study the migration of Singaporean citizens from Singapore to London.



The people flows between London and Singapore provide a fertile case study for studying transnational migration and citizenship. Both Singapore and the UK have in place a system of managed migration to regulate human mobility so as to achieve goals set out by their respective governments. On the one hand, the regulation of migration is said to be necessary to ensure that national welfare systems are not exploited by individuals who do not belong to and are not welcomed by the national body. On the other hand, both countries capitalise upon desirable migrant labour to enhance their global competitiveness.

In the UK and Singapore, the route to citizenship is often made easier for professionals and capital-bearing immigrants whereas barriers to citizenship are put in place for low-waged migrants through skills, assets and residency criteria. Singapore has the unusual experience, through being a city-state, of having governance decisions made at only one level by the national government. As for London, although there are several levels of governance decision-making in the UK, London is the centre of political authority and the economic powerhouse of the country. These similarities provide substantive reason to conduct a comparative study of Singapore and London.

There are about 100 000 to 150 000 Singaporeans studying, working and living abroad relative to its domestic population of approximately three million

citizens<sup>1</sup> (*The Straits Times*, 7 March 2004; *Today*, 14 March 2006). Although the largest population of overseas Singaporeans are found in Australia, the United States and China (including Hong Kong), the UK – especially London – is a popular destination. It is estimated that there are about 10 000 Singaporeans in the UK (Migration Research Unit and Home Office, personal communication in 2004). The Singaporean newspaper, *The Straits Times* (7 March 2004), reported that from May to March 2004, forty-nine Singaporeans were granted British residency status and 217 Singaporeans had cleared immigration with the intention to settle down in the UK. The report also stressed that the number of Singaporeans seeking residence overseas is significant in relation to Singapore's small population of only three million citizens.

London possibly has the largest concentration of overseas Singaporeans in any given locality. The reputation of London as a pre-eminent financial and services hub, its cluster of higher education institutions and its cosmopolitan character present educational, economic, social and cultural motivations for Singaporeans to move to London to live, work and study. In addition, the colonial history linking Singapore and the UK means that it is relatively easier for Singaporeans to move to the UK because of the similarities between the educational systems in the two countries; the common use of the English

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<sup>1</sup> This population figure was based on statistics in 2004. The Singaporean population, according to the Singapore Department of Statistics (2005), now consists of approximately three and a half million people.

language; and the availability of visa concessions such as the Working Holidaymaker Visa. The concentration of Singaporeans in London is reflected in the number of organised Singaporean groups in the city. Other than the various student societies, there are at least four other Singapore-focused community associations. They are the Singapore-UK Association (SUKA), Singapore Professionals Network (SPN – previously known as the Singapore Young Professionals-UK), Singapore Business Group (SBG) and Singapore Golf Society (SGS).

Given the Singaporean state's exhortations for Singaporeans to transform Singapore into a global city with a cosmopolitan character, the profile of Singaporeans in London also corresponds to the prototype of Singaporeans with whom the Singaporean state aspires to maintain ties during their transmigration. They possess the qualifications, skills, experience, networks and mindsets that the Singaporean state believes would catapult Singapore into the upper echelons of the global city hierarchy (Goh, 2001). The circulating migration of Singaporean transmigrants is regarded as key for the production and reproduction of Singapore as a global city.

As such, the Singaporean state established a government agency, called Contact Singapore, to specifically promote Singapore as a working destination for highly skilled foreigners and overseas business investors, and to keep in touch with overseas Singaporeans. Although there are Contact Singapore offices scattered in Australia, China and other parts of the world, the London

office is the coordinating arm for its operations in Europe and North America. The Singaporean state also chose London to launch a new initiative called the Overseas Singaporean Unit (OSU) whose primary function is to organise social networking events for overseas Singaporeans, and to provide information for Singaporeans abroad who wish to return to Singapore to work, or to find work with a Singaporean company in other parts of the world (*Today*, 14 March 2006). The centrality of London in the Singaporean state's strategy to keep in touch with overseas Singaporeans attests to the significance of London as a site of global city migration in connection with Singapore. Studying Singaporean transmigrants in London would therefore shed important insights on global city exchanges of human capital and the links between sending and receiving countries.

In addition, the colonial history linking Singapore and the UK generates unique perspectives on the postcolonial connections that the two countries sustain up till today. As the former imperial metropolitan centre, the prestige of London drew migrating Singaporeans even before Singapore formally came into being. Many arrived for educational reasons – several of the first generation political leaders, such as Lee Kuan Yew, were educated in London and they brought back lessons from their experiences that later influenced their political governance over the development of modern-day Singapore. The present prime minister, Lee Hsien Loong, and his predecessor, Goh Chok Tong, were both educated in the UK as well.

Today, London continues to draw Singaporean students seeking an overseas education because of the compatibility in educational syllabi between the two countries. The UK has also sought to attract Singaporeans to fill skills shortages in selected professions such as nursing and teaching (Migration Research Unit, personal communication in 2004). In addition, the postcolonial ties provide another route for migration through the working holidaymakers visa scheme under which young Commonwealth citizens are allowed to remain in the UK for up to two years to work as casual labour alongside their holiday agenda. Hence, looking at the migration of Singaporeans to London provides an opportunity to consider the way that colonial and postcolonial discourses are produced and reproduced in contradictory ways.

However, although Singapore was a former British colony, the way it has evolved signals both continuities and discontinuities from the UK in terms of political and citizenship traditions and practices. For example, governance in the UK is said to be characterised by pragmatism (Joppke, 1999a:103); the same has been observed of the Singaporean governing elite (Chua, 1995:57), many of whom were educated in the UK during the colonial and early postcolonial era. Both countries also subscribe to an ethos of multiculturalism in the contemporary period in order to manage their rainbow-coloured national fabrics. However, in other ways, Singapore has already departed politically and socially from the liberal-leaning philosophies of its former colonial master. This has been examined earlier in Chapter Two. Therefore juxtaposing the different political, societal and citizenship traditions between the two countries

generates a useful political intervention on non-homogenous trajectories of development.

This section argued that studying the mobility of Singaporeans from Singapore to London produces useful empirical and theoretical insights for both the fields of highly skilled transnational migration and citizenship studies. The pursuit of highly skilled migrants through preferential migration schemes and citizenship incentives illuminates the relationship between capitalist priorities and nation-building goals in the broader country contexts. Besides that, comparing their social-cultural and political differences that emerged through historical evolution helps bolster our understandings of the temporal and spatial specificities of citizenship trajectories.

### **3 Fieldwork process**

In their study of transnational elite mobility and the UK banking sector, Beaverstock and Boardwell (2000:281) argue that using qualitative mixed methods to study migration is a particularly productive approach to gain insights into migration experiences. They used statistics obtained from data sources such as the International Passenger Survey (IPS) and complemented this information with in-depth interviews. Qualitative methods such as these have become an accepted and popular technique that geographers use to understand a range of migration motivations, processes and outcomes (Beaverstock, 2002 and 2005; Clarke, 2004 and 2005; Conradson and Latham, 2005b). As Desforges *et al* (2005:447) argue, qualitative methods carried out

by geographers also make important methodological and conceptual contributions towards understanding citizenship as it ‘unfolds “on the ground”’ to augment the more common philosophical-normative approaches in citizenship studies.

Thus, my study employed a mixed methods approach by triangulating discourse analysis with ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews. These qualitative methods allow me to uncover the meanings, feelings and dispositions behind the social processes and manifestations of transnational migration and citizenship. On their own, any one of these methods would shed only partial insights on the processes and practices that constitute transnational migration and citizenship, but in conjunction, they produce a richly layered picture of transnational migration and citizenship.

### **3.1 Discourse analysis**

To contextualise and gain an understanding of transnational migration and citizenship in Singapore and the UK, I undertook the textual analysis of a wide range of documents. Statistics on overall immigration and citizenship are often hard to piece together. The only source of migration data on the UK is from the International Passenger Survey (IPS), a sample survey of passengers arriving at and departing from the UK by air and sea ports. Immigrants and emigrants are defined as those intending to stay in the UK or be away for a year or more, having previously lived out of the UK (for immigrants) or in the UK (emigrants) (Salt, 2004). However, as noted by Beaverstock and Boardwell

(2000:283), IPS data should be used with discretion because of the standard errors involved during data collection and numerical analysis.

A further difficulty in conducting research on Singaporean migration relates to the proportion of Singaporeans moving to the UK relative to international immigration. Singaporean migration consists of minuscule numbers of people and so it is usually not captured in summary reports that tend to focus on broad trends. However, I managed to obtain piecemeal statistics on Singaporean migration to the UK through personal contacts in the Migration Research Unit (within University College London), which compiles immigration information on behalf of the British Home Office for the production of official migration reports. Although I also tried to contact the Research Development and Statistics Office of the Home Office for statistics on UK citizenship applications by Singaporeans, my queries were unsuccessful. It is also difficult to obtain records on Singaporean emigration and those who have relinquished their Singaporean citizenship, particularly in terms of destination countries. This is in part because of the political sensitivity of such information, but also in view of the fact that it is hard for the Singaporean authorities to keep track of the countries to which overseas Singaporeans have migrated (personal interview with Singaporean policymaker, 2005).

To rectify these research gaps, I examined media reports and information on migration and citizenship legislation and policies in both UK and Singapore. My media sources from Singapore include *The Straits Times*, *Today* and



*Channel News Asia* while those from the UK include the *Guardian* and the *BBC*. In light of the Singaporean state's control over the provision of media information in Singapore, I also searched for overseas newspaper reports on Singaporean migration and citizenship. I looked up policy and legislation discourses in the UK from official government websites, such as the Office of Public Service Information (OPSI) (<http://www.opsi.gov.uk>) and the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) (<http://www.ind.gov.uk>). In addition, the website, *Workpermit.com*, which functions as a UK immigration consultancy portal, was particularly helpful for keeping track of changes and developments in UK immigration law and policies.

As for the Singaporean discourses, I obtained updates and information on Singaporean migration and citizenship issues from the Singaporean government e-portal, *Singov* (<http://www.gov.sg>), and from the websites of the Singaporean ministries managing labour, migration and citizenship issues<sup>2</sup>. *Singov* also provided access to government speeches from the electronic database of the National Archives of Singapore. The National Day Rally speeches were especially relevant to my research as the annual rally serves as a platform for the national leaders to outline the most important national issues to Singaporeans in their speeches, and in a way, these provide the blueprint for

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<sup>2</sup> These include the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) (<http://www.mom.gov.sg>), Ministry of Community, Youth and Sports (MCYS) (<http://www.mcys.gov.sg>), Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) (<http://www.mha.gov.sg>) and the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) (<http://www.mindef.gov.sg>) amongst others.

Singapore's development over the course of the year. Migration issues have featured prominently in these speeches during the past five years.

In addition, I was particularly interested to examine the evolution of migration and citizenship legislation in Singapore thus I studied relevant Singaporean parliamentary debates dating from 1957 (when Singapore citizenship was created) until the present. I obtained access to this set of discourses from the parliamentary digital archive, *Hansard*, contained in the electronic repository of Singaporean legal records called *Lawnet* (<http://www.lwb.lawnet.com.sg>).

While it is useful to consider the legal, policy and popular discourses on migration and citizenship, at the same time, it is important to examine how people engage with these discourses. I complemented the discourse analysis component of my study with two other fieldwork strategies that underline the human dimensions of transnational migration and citizenship. I conducted ethnography and in-depth interviews with individual Singaporean transmigrants, selected Singaporean government agencies and London-based overseas Singaporean community associations.

### **3.2 Ethnography**

I undertook ethnography as part of my fieldwork strategy in order to study the everyday worlds of both transnational migration and citizenship. The importance of studying the 'everyday' practices inherent within transnational mobility has been signalled by Conradson and Latham (2005a and 2005b).

They note that studying the everyday dimensions of transnational mobility valorises ‘the everyday texture of the globalising places we inhabit [and] how inevitably emplaced forms of sociality – such as kinship, friendship and national identity – are being reworked and re-imagined through such movement and mobility’ (Conradson and Latham, 2005a:228). Conradson and Latham (ibid) add that investigating the life-worlds of mobile individuals provides a useful counter viewpoint to the tendency to exaggerate a somehow frictionless world in some writings on globalisation (ibid, 229).

Incidentally, this attentiveness to the ‘everyday’ has also been stressed by Desforges *et al* (2005:447) with regard to studies on citizenship. They highlight the methodological ‘difficulties in articulating the everyday world of citizenship’, but stress that ‘the practices of citizenship as they are enacted in everyday life in a variety of contexts [...] are central to the theorisation of citizenship’. Therefore I employed ethnography in my study, which involves living and working within a community, as one approach towards understanding the everyday textures of transnational mobility as well as the everyday practices of citizenship in order to advance theorisations in both of these fields.

As an overseas Singaporean studying Singaporean transnationalism in London, I have the unusual experience of being an ‘insider’ who is deeply embedded in my study context. As an ‘insider’, I have the advantage of context-specific knowledge gained over a long period of time and the ability to gain access to

social networks for my study<sup>3</sup>. For the purposes of my study, I participated in both formal and informal Singapore-focused social events. I took part in formal socials, such as dinners, receptions and other networking activities organised by the Singapore High Commission in London, Contact Singapore, Singapore-UK Association and Singapore Young Professionals Network. I also went to special screenings of Singaporean films, the Singapore Food and Cultural Fest (at Oriental City) (Figure 1 and Figure 2), the London Malay Festival (Figure 3 and Figure 4), the Singapore Food Fest (at Covent Garden) (Figure 5 and Figure 6), and other cultural events organised by the Singaporean state and private initiatives under the umbrella of Singapore Season (from February to April 2005)<sup>4</sup>. In addition, I attended the National University of Singapore Centennial Dinner as part of the alumni network in London.

Besides these occasions, given my personal social networks – including having lived with two Singaporeans and one British person during two of the three years that I have been in London – I have found myself sometimes on a ‘round-the-clock’ watch engaging in ‘observant participation’ (Thrift, 2000 in S.

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<sup>3</sup> I am, however, aware of the debates arising from the insider/outsider boundary within the academy, including whether ‘experiential “sameness” is used to provide authority to an account on the basis that this sameness endows the researcher with greater understanding of the researched’s reality’ (Mohammed, 2001:104). I also acknowledge that even as an insider, my knowledges are partial and situated in terms of the other fractures of Singaporean identity, such as gender, ‘race’, class, and marital and socio-professional statuses.

<sup>4</sup> The Singapore Season was organised by the National Arts Council in Singapore in conjunction with Singaporean arts groups and companies to showcase Singaporean culture and Singaporean artistic talents in London. The events were held in a number of well-known venues associated with the arts, including the Institute of Contemporary Arts, Covent Garden, Wigmore Hall and the Barbican.

Smith, 2001:35). This puts me in a unique position to study the ‘everyday’ experience of transnationalism, as advocated by recent scholarship on the subject (M. Smith, 2001:98; Ley, 2004; Clarke, 2005; Conradson and Latham, 2005a; Yeoh and Willis, 2005b). The ‘everyday’ encounters in these instances include house and dinner parties (Figure 7); celebrations to commemorate festivals, birthdays, weddings, engagements and baby arrivals; shopping expeditions and food ‘excursions’ (Figure 8); and hanging out at the pubs and parks in London.

During the events, I conducted informal interviews and recorded my observations, recollections and reflections of these events and conversations in a research diary, which I subsequently coded and used to inform my fieldwork analysis and thesis writing. The research encounters made me aware of the way that technologies of transnationalism – such as telephone or internet calls, emails, internet messaging, video conferencing, digital media streaming and travels to Singapore and elsewhere – are essential to the social-cultural and political production of transnational practices and identity.



**Figure 1 Singapore Food and Cultural Fest at Oriental City**

*Source: Personal fieldwork, 2004*



**Figure 2 Promotion of Singaporean food mixes at Oriental City**

*Source: Personal fieldwork, 2004*



**Figure 3 London Malay Festival at the Horticultural Hall, Victoria**

*Source: Personal fieldwork, 2005*



**Figure 4 Stalls at the London Malay Festival**

*Source: Personal fieldwork, 2005*

**Figure 5 Singapore Food Fest at Covent Garden**

*Source: Personal fieldwork, 2005*



**Figure 6 Indian *roti prata* demonstration at the Singapore Food Fest**

*Source: Personal fieldwork, 2005*





**Figure 7** A ‘house party’ with Singaporeans and non-Singaporeans

*Source: Tan Shzr Ee, 2005*



**Figure 8** An excursion to the Asian ‘foodcourt’ in Oriental City

*Source: Personal fieldwork, 2004*

The seeming banality of those research moments, however, translated into complex and intense social relationships that I had to manage over the course of my research. One such issue was the way my research impinged on my social identity during the course of my study. As I recorded in my research diary after a social event attended by a mixture of new and old Singaporean friends:

The other thing that stood out through this ‘research moment’ (as I like to term it) is the vulnerability of my ‘insider’ position. Friend A did not take too kindly (on my behalf) when Friend B’s (whom I had interviewed earlier) greeting to me upon his arrival was, ‘Oh, you’re doing your Singaporean thing again’. I felt obligated to respond to the quizzical looks of the new friends around me in view of what Friend B said. I had mixed feelings about what he said. Friend A later told me that he felt I had to be careful about being typecast as, ‘Oh, there is Elaine doing her kind of thing again’. I am aware that my work eats into who I am: when Friend C visited London (from Singapore) he enthusiastically introduced his friends to me as people whom I should interview for my research. In such situations, I find myself in a quandary because my work has become my social identity. (Research diary, 23 April 2005)

The above excerpt illustrates that the power relations in research are shifting and fluid: as much as I wanted to manage and optimise my research process, in dynamic social situations this was sometimes directly and indirectly validated or challenged by the people around me. As a part of the Singaporean transnational community, it often proved to be difficult to differentiate my research and social identities. The two had become intertwined, particularly in the way I was viewed by the people around me.

At the same time, my positionality confronted me with a tricky ethical issue. On a number of social situations, I found myself intensively questioned by other Singaporeans who expressed curiosity about the identities and opinions of those whom I had interviewed within our shared social circles. Although

some respondents appeared nonchalant about their identities being made known to the public, others were clearly uncomfortable with the prospect. In these awkward social settings, I would reiterate to those around me that I had promised to protect the anonymity of my respondents and then deftly change the topic of conversation.

During the course of ethnographic fieldwork, I realised that as much as I was studying the people around me, I was being ‘studied’ by some of them too. This came out most clearly when a friend, who was a Singaporean journalist, used a pseudonym in reference to me in her newspaper column ruminating about her friendship circles in London. I had, by some twist of events, become the subject of study instead. On other occasions, I found myself being recruited for various activities organised by the Singaporean associations in London, including selling raffle tickets (for SUKA), taking part in a mentoring programme for younger Singaporean students (for SPN), and being asked to provide insights on Singaporean transnationalism for the Contact Singapore office in London. In these ways, I realise that I am both a conduit providing information to other Singaporean transmigrants on Singaporean transnationalism and a connection point for those who wish to get to know more or other likeminded Singaporeans in London. In all of these capacities, I am aware that I am a product of, as well as implicitly producing, the practices of Singaporean transnationalism that I am studying.

### **3.3 Interviews**

My immersion in the Singaporean networks through ethnography provided useful access to interviewing opportunities with three groups implicated in Singaporean transnationalism. I conducted in-depth interviews with Singaporean policymakers in both London and Singapore; with representatives from the London-based Singaporean community associations; and with individual Singaporean transmigrants in London. I chose these interview subjects so as to consider the ways in which their mutual inter-subjectivities produce the meanings, processes and outcomes of transnational migration and citizenship.

#### **3.3.1 Interviewing ‘gatekeepers’**

I conducted three sets of unstructured interviews with Singaporean policymakers involved in migration and citizenship issues in Singapore and London (henceforth government interviews). These interviews were with representatives from the Contact Singapore office in London and the three ministries managing labour, migration and citizenship affairs in Singapore. The goal of these interviews was to enable me to situate the state’s discourses and strategies towards Singaporean transnationalism. I did not record the interviews that I carried out with the policymakers so as to set them at ease about speaking their minds. However, I took down detailed notes during the interviews and recorded my reflections immediately after in my research diary. During one of these interviews, I was reminded by the policymakers that the information

shared with me was subject to the conditions of the Official Secrets Act in Singapore, and that this information should not be quoted verbatim.

The interviews with the policymakers made me realise that while I was interested to find out more about the Singaporean state's perspectives towards Singaporean transnationalism, they were also keen to know more about my research findings. The policymakers acknowledged that if they conducted a study of their own on the topics addressed in my research, some Singaporeans might feel hesitant about sharing their frank opinions compared to speaking to a neutral third party like myself (see Section 4.2). These policymakers thus expressed interest in obtaining an update of my completed research<sup>5</sup>.

I also carried out interviews with representatives from selected Singaporean community associations in London (henceforth association interviews). They were from the Singapore Professionals Network (SPN) and the Singapore-UK Association (SUKA) since these are the most well-known groupings within Singaporean circles in London. By participating in the various activities organised by these associations, I befriended some of their past and present committee members with whom I then obtained interviews. I made a digital recording of these interviews for later transcribing and analysis. During these

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<sup>5</sup> I plan to renew contact with these policymakers when I have completed my PhD for this purpose. I am, however, conscious of the need to protect the anonymity of my respondents in the process of informing policymaking in Singapore. The social dynamics of my fieldwork process, as discussed in Section 4.2, made me aware of the sensitivities of my research addressing citizenship issues in Singapore.

interviews, I was keen to find out about each organisation's history, its composition, dynamics, activities and relationship with the Singaporean state. I was also interested in the respondent's personal migration histories, experiences and motivations for joining these associations.

My participation in the associations' activities gave me access to a third group of respondents: individual Singaporean transmigrants who were active members in such community groups. However, I am aware that not all Singaporean transmigrants in London are involved in these groupings. Hence, I also capitalised upon personal friendship networks with other Singaporeans and with non-Singaporeans in London to reach out to those Singaporeans who do not normally stay in touch with the overseas Singaporean community (for various reasons that I shall explore in the following empirical chapters). From May 2004 to October 2005, I conducted forty-three interviews with Singaporean transmigrants in London.

### **3.3.2 Interviewing Singaporean transmigrants**

I chose to carry out semi-structured in-depth interviews with Singaporean transmigrants in London (henceforth in-depth interviews) instead of conducting focus group discussions since my research questions on migration and citizenship are deeply personal, probing and even political in the view of some individuals. Focus group discussions would have produced useful insights through interaction between the study participants, but the group setting might have discouraged some individuals from candidly sharing their personal

stories, feelings and opinions. I carried out my interviews as ‘conversations with a purpose’ (Burgess, 1991, cited in Orton, 2006:257), and they revolved around two themes: transnational migration and citizenship.

At the start of the interview I assured the respondents that any information they shared would be kept anonymous and that I would only use pseudonyms in my work. I also informed them that although the interviews were mainly for academic purposes, a key summary of my research findings with possible recommendations on migration and citizenship issues could be submitted to Singaporean policymakers for their future consideration. Some of the respondents welcomed the opportunity to contribute to policy input, but for others, this was not necessarily the case, for reasons that I shall explore later.

The interviews revolved around reasons for migrating, strategies for moving to London, the extent to which the respondent felt settled in London and their future migration or settlement intentions (see Appendix II). I also asked questions on what citizenship means to them, including what they think are the most important rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship. My intention was to gain an in-depth understanding of their feelings, knowledge and attitudes towards migration and citizenship. The interviews lasted for between forty-five minutes to two hours and I recorded them for later transcribing (with the exception of one interview at the respondent’s request). The interviews varied in scope and tone: they ranged from curt answers, to reticence, interest and enthusiasm, resignation, frustration and even anger. I

kept a diary with notes of my observations and reflections about the interviewing process so as to aid in my later analysis of not only the verbal, but also the non-verbal narratives contained in the conversations.

I conducted forty-three in-depth interviews with individuals that I categorise as ‘Singaporean transmigrants’<sup>6</sup> (refer to Appendix I). By that, I am referring to persons who held Singapore citizenship (38), Singaporean permanent residency (3) or who identified as ‘Singaporean’ even after relinquishing their formal affiliation with the state for personal reasons (2). There were, nonetheless, persons ‘on the margins’, such as those who obtained Singapore citizenship by naturalisation or Singaporean citizens who have lived overseas for many years. Both groups were more prone to profess mixed allegiances towards Singapore even though they held Singapore citizenship. On the other hand, there were some second generation Singaporean permanent residents who grew up in Singapore and claimed they feel a stronger sense of allegiance towards Singapore than the country in which they hold citizenship. Although I categorise the individuals in my study as Singaporean transmigrants, the complex, multiple and shifting allegiances professed by them attests to the complicating axes of identity that arise in a transnational world.

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<sup>6</sup> I conducted another three interviews with non-Singaporeans who have significant links with Singapore, such as having spent considerable time living in the country (through they may not identify themselves as ‘Singaporean’), and/or marriage to Singaporean transmigrants in London. These three interviews were important to provide some context on persons who may not be categorically identified as ‘Singaporean’, but who may have past or future linkages with the country that are significant to Singaporean transnationalism.



All of my respondents had lived in London for at least approximately a year and planned on settling for a longer period of time. I sought to interview a spectrum of persons who had lived in London for varying periods of time so as to study their range of responses towards life outside Singapore. Three quarters (34) of the Singaporean transmigrants I interviewed were in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties. Another seven were in their forties to fifties and only two were above sixty years old. This reflects the predominantly young profile of Singaporeans in London, which corresponds to the category of Singaporeans that the Singaporean state is most interested to reach out to through its networking and social activities sponsored by Contact Singapore and the Singapore Professionals Network.

I began my fieldwork with the intention to interview ‘highly skilled’ migrants (i.e. individuals in professional jobs) only, but as my study developed, I became aware of the breadth of ‘highly-skilled’ Singaporean transnational migration. Hence I decided to expand my study to the community-level to capture a broader sample that would allow me to critically examine the notion and categorisation of ‘skills’. A community-level analysis also enables me to examine the ethno-national underpinnings of transnationalism and to uncover a variety of social and cultural transnationalisms. Literacy rates in Singapore are generally high and the majority of the Singaporean population belong to the middle-class or above strata of society. Most of the Singaporeans in London

possess tertiary-level qualifications (or the skills equivalent) matching with the predominant demand for employment in the global city.

The profile of my interview sample corresponds with this pattern – only one of my older respondents did not have tertiary-level qualifications, but even then, as a chef-cum-restaurateur who had owned several Singaporean restaurants, he was arguably someone with a high level of skills in his profession. However, although almost all of my respondents were ‘highly skilled’ migrants, my study results show that not all of them should be classified as ‘transnational elites’ (Beverstock, 2002 and 2005); instead a number of them were better characterised by their middling status (Conradson and Latham, 2005a and 2005b) in London.

The majority of my respondents were of Chinese ethnicity (31 out of 43), which parallels both the ethnic composition of the Singaporeans found in London as well as the broader population profile in Singapore. Of the non-Chinese Singaporean transmigrants, five were Indian and only one was Malay. Another six may be categorised as ‘Other’ under the Singaporean state’s CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others) official classification of ethnic groups found in Singapore. In my sample, this includes those of white origin and Eurasian or other mixed ancestries. I am aware that my own ethnicity as a Chinese might have influenced the composition of my sample; hence I made a deliberate effort to seek out Singaporeans from the other ethnic groups in London. I found in particular that my sample representation lacked Malay-

Singaporeans so I asked the Singaporeans I met to put me in touch with the Malay-Singaporeans they knew. Even then, it often turned out that those whom I contacted were Singaporeans of mixed ancestry rather than ‘indigenous’ Malay-Singaporeans – because of their skin colour and the way they spoke, they had been mistaken by their friends as ‘Malay’. This research encounter is telling about the ‘racial’ stereotypes prevalent in Singaporean society, as I discussed in Chapter Two.

My personal identity as a Chinese-Singaporean also came under scrutiny during the research process in several ways. I encountered comments by Singaporeans from other ethnic groups that amplified my Chinese identity (e.g. Gladys: ‘people like you who are pure Chinese’). I also came across comments about other ethnic groups that could be interpreted as derogatory, which might not have been said in my presence if I was a non-Chinese (Nadia: ‘the Malays are hopefully improving but still they are not as hardworking as the Chinese’). These fieldwork experiences heightened my awareness of the dynamics and politics of ‘race’ and ethnicity in Singapore, which developed into an important theme in my research.

Given my interest in studying the gendered dynamics of migration, my interview sample consists of approximately equal numbers of males (22) and females (21). Of the forty-three Singaporean transmigrants, twenty-one of them were married and another twenty-one were single. The marital status of one of my respondents was not stated, for reasons that I shall explain later in this

chapter. Only four of the married Singaporean transmigrants I interviewed had children – but a number of the others also spoke about their intention and plans for parenthood. Two of the respondents had children below the age of ten while the other two respondents had adult children.

During the time when I was recruiting respondents, I found that I did not meet many Singaporean transmigrants who were parents, and when I did, it was harder to secure interviews with them than those without children. It is significant that on two of these occasions, my interview requests were politely declined by Singaporean women who cited their childcare responsibilities and busy work schedules as reasons why they could not spare the time to participate. This was in spite of my offers to go to their workplace or homes to carry out the interviews. This outcome arguably reflects the added difficulties of managing childcare and work responsibilities for women living in foreign settings and without the extra familial support that they can count on in Singapore. The issue of transnational families emerged as a significant theme in this research.

In my sample there were six couples, in which only two of the pairs were married to fellow Singaporeans. In most cases, I first got to know one partner through social settings or the recommendation of mutual friends, following which I would also request for an interview with the person's partner for my study. In three of the interviews, I spoke with the partners separately so as to create a setting in which I felt the respondents would feel at ease to express

their personal thoughts on migration and citizenship preferences (Aitkin, 2001:83). However, this method proved to be unsustainable for the other two couples because in these cases, the couples had busy schedules (as highly skilled and often mobile individuals) and expressed their preference to be interviewed with their partner so as to accommodate my request within their schedules. In another instance, the respondent brought her husband to the interview at her own initiative. It turned out that it was their shared day off from work and they wanted to spend the day together.

These fieldwork encounters provided insights into some of the issues faced by cosmopolitan couples who have busy work schedules and find it harder to spend time together. During these shared interviews, I found that the interview conversations were more dynamic. The couples would not only be ‘speaking’ to me but also to one another, for example, about their future migration, citizenship, work and family plans. The interviews became an opportunity for them to discuss these issues with each other, which gave me an insight into their decision-making processes. In doing so, it also enabled me to consider the gender role dynamics in their partnerships.

The three methods that I spelled out in this section – discourse analysis, ethnography and in-depth interviews – individually produced useful research insights. However by intermeshing them with one another, I found that my study was richer and more multi-textured than if I had limited myself to only

one or two of these methods. I discuss this in greater detail in the following section.

#### **4 Post-fieldwork reflections**

In this section, I explicate the issues that I encountered during the post-fieldwork phase. I show that during the coding, analysis and writing stages, I had difficulties capturing and conveying the nuances behind the verbal and non-verbal cues that I encountered during fieldwork. However, I also underscore that having utilised a triangulation of research methods, I was able to circumvent those difficulties by capitalising upon the complementary strengths of the methods I had selected. Thus I argue in favour of using complementary research methods to understand experiences of transnational migration and citizenship because the individual methods mutually inform one another to produce insights that are lacking in the others.

##### **4.1 Coding, analysis and writing**

Upon completion of my fieldwork stage, I manually coded my research diary observations for systematic analysis. I also transcribed the in-depth interviews with Singaporean transmigrants (including those representing the community associations) verbatim and coded the transcripts using the qualitative software analysis tool, Atlas-Ti. Unlike the research diary, which was essentially one transcript, the multiple in-depth interview transcripts were more challenging to systematically compare and contrast for analysis. Hence, I decided to employ Atlas-Ti as a tool for qualitative analysis.

I used both analytical (defined by researcher to reflect theoretical premises or conceptual issues) and in-vivo (used by respondents themselves) codes to categorise the narratives of my respondents (see Appendix III). For example, I was interested to examine the political aspects of citizenship from the outset of my research. Hence I categorised the appropriate narratives of my respondents under ‘rights’ and ‘responsibilities’ (analytical code). On the other hand, the theme of ‘transnational families’ (in-vivo code) was generated by the narratives of my respondents as familial considerations in relation to mobility was an issue that many of them raised of their own accord.

Upon completing the coding stage, I produced the quotations associated with the codes to aid in my analysis. This coding stage helped to make my approach towards grounded theory – the frames of reference used by respondents (also see Yeoh and Willis, 2005b:273) – more systematic and as Jackson (2001:202) argues, it prevents researchers from jumping to preliminary conclusions about the data collected. I then constructed a discursive repertoire based on the data collected to look for patterns and anachronisms on which I conducted my analysis.

However during this process of coding and analysis, I found that sometimes the nuances of verbal cues and body language (e.g. irony, sarcasm, pregnant pauses, hesitance, reticence, deflections and blank looks) became lost when quotations were extracted and disassociated from the original frame of

reference. This is in addition to the loss of verbal nuances and body language when conversations were transplanted from the interview context to audio recordings and finally transcribed to script. To overcome the cumulative loss of meaning, when I was writing the thesis I regularly cross-checked the quotations selected for analysis and writing with their original transcripts. This was complemented with the observations that I had recorded in my research diary from my ethnographic fieldwork and post-interview reflections.

#### **4.2 Fieldwork dynamics and observations**

This section elaborates some of the fieldwork dynamics that I encountered in order to underscore the complementary role that my three research methods played during this research. Each method provided useful and significant insights for understanding the findings gleaned from the others. I begin my discussion with a ‘puzzle’ that I encountered when I was conducting the interviews with the Singaporean transmigrants in my study.

During the interviews, I realised that some respondents had difficulty enunciating their thoughts on citizenship, even though they did not indicate similar difficulties earlier in the conversation when discussing their migration experiences. For example, on several occasions, my questions on citizenship – deliberately left open-ended to allow for a range of responses – were initially met with blank looks or hesitancy, such as in this interview:



EH: Part of the concept of citizenship is about rights and privileges. What [do you think] are some of the most important rights and privileges, if they are important at all?

Rachel: [Hesitates] I guess I don't really know... It comes with inherent rights and privileges but it is not something that is paramount in the list of things... I guess part of it is the right to take part in certain decision-making processes, but [quickly] I am not politically motivated so I don't really... [Laughs]

Such interviewing experiences were initially perplexing and frustrating to me because they appeared to 'tell' me nothing about citizenship. However, the feelings I was experiencing also suggested to me that there was something in those occurrences that was important as data even though I could not yet pin it down. The non-verbal cues of my fieldwork – such as the difficulty of enunciation, silences and reticence – began to make sense later when I reflected on the ethnographic aspects of my fieldwork strategy and the background knowledge of Singapore gained through discourse analysis.

On the one hand, the difficulties of articulating the 'everyday' world of citizenship (Desforges *et al*, 2005:447) partly had to do with the taken-for-granted nature of citizenship. Rachel reflected on this after her interview had formally ended. She said that she found it difficult to enunciate what she thought of citizenship because she had not questioned her feelings and attitudes towards it until I brought up the issue during the interview. Singapore citizenship is regarded as a status that most Singaporeans are born into and to which they hardly give a second thought, as one might also expect of citizens from other countries.

Yet, whilst the unconscious dynamics of the interviews gave some insights into the ‘hidden’ world of citizenship, I postulate that another reason why some Singaporean transmigrants found it hard to discuss citizenship was because of the political sensitivities associated with it in the Singaporean context. Citizenship is essentially a political concept since at the heart of it lies the relationship between the government and the people whom it governs, even though at the same time, it is the people who grant the government its political mandate. Given the context of Singaporean governance – a country ruled by a conservative and heavy-handed political elite (see Chapter Two) – a number of the Singaporeans I met or whom I formally interviewed were cautious about verbalising their thoughts and attitudes on citizenship. This is illustrated in the above interview excerpt by Rachel’s qualifying statement about being ‘not politically motivated’.

Although a number of my respondents gradually opened up as I created a climate of rapport and trust during the interview, a few remained wary. On a number of occasions, the respondents explicitly probed about my academic credentials and professional background at the start of the interviews. They would ask questions such as whether my research was sponsored by the Singaporean state, or whether I had previously worked in any government department in Singapore<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> My answers to such questions on my relationship to the Singaporean government were negative although I did make it clear that it is possible that at the end of my

In one particularly memorable instance, a respondent agreed to meet and converse with me about my research. He was initially amicable although probing about my research intentions and academic background. However, during the course of the conversation, he became reluctant to divulge any information about his migration history or opinions about citizenship. Despite my repeated assurances that I would keep any information shared strictly anonymous, he was resolute about not sharing any personal information and constantly deflected my questions. The respondent also refused to allow me to make an audio recording of the interview, as I usually did for other interviews.

Initially I took notes during our conversation, but then I noticed that he still seemed uneasy. Hence, I stopped the note-taking and only recorded what I remembered of our conversation after the interview ended. I left the interview feeling both bewildered and annoyed with his deliberate reticence, yet I also had a nagging feeling that something in the encounter was useful for my research. This and other similar experiences informed my analysis about the way Singaporean transmigrants perceive the political aspects of citizenship and their relationship to the Singaporean state, which I will explicate later in this thesis.

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research I would compile a summary of the key issues raised by my research on migration and citizenship to inform future policymaking in Singapore. However, I also assured my respondents that I would protect their personal identities during this process.

These challenging encounters were not limited to formal interviewing occasions but also happened during ethnographic situations. One such incident awakened me to the reason why my respondents had been reacting to my research in this manner. This took place during a social gathering where I was introduced to two overseas Singaporeans who were visiting our mutual friend in London. My other friends gathered there reminded me half in jest that I ought to interview these persons since they counted as ‘highly skilled Singaporean transmigrants’ (‘X’ and ‘Y’ were both working in Asia). I later wrote:

The response of X was interesting. He asked whether I was working for the Singaporean government. This made Friend Z roar with laughter because he remembered someone else asking me the same question during another social situation. I clarified to X that my research is independent of the Singaporean government even though, yes, they had indicated interest to know more about my research findings. Friend Z, who was Taiwanese, commented then that such a question would never be asked in Taiwan, *except perhaps twenty years ago when it was still under an authoritarian government.* (Research diary, 16 May 2005; emphasis added)

The unwitting comment made by the Taiwanese friend gave me some understanding about the unspoken reactions towards my research agenda on citizenship and governance. Ethnography – or the act of simply being around, observing the study subjects in the dynamics of their social surroundings and conversing with them spontaneously – gleaned insights that discourse analysis or interviews alone would not have provided.

Such experiences and the initial responses of my respondents towards my research influenced the way that I positioned myself in relation to their sensitivities. I endeavoured to be as honest about my research as possible

because it helps to create rapport and trust (also see Aitkin, 2001:75). Yet I also alternately positioned myself as both insider and outsider in terms of my professional, social and cultural identities as well as my political inclinations. At times I would agree with the opinions expressed but during other appropriate times, I might also play devil's advocate and express a counter-opinion in order to gauge the other party's responses. In particular, I had to be careful not to be seen as a broker for the PAP government, while at the same time, not come across as overly confrontational towards Singaporean political governance<sup>8</sup>.

Although my frankness about the possible policy dimensions of my work might have initially caused some respondents to feel more restrained, after many of the interview conversations, my respondents told me that they found it to be a helpful and empowering exercise – helpful because it clarified to them their own attitudes and dispositions towards citizenship, and empowering because I allowed and encouraged them to speak their mind about issues that they would not normally confront in the Singaporean context. To a few of them, it was also important to know that their anonymous feedback would be

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<sup>8</sup> During my formal fieldwork interviewing stage, I did not request interviews with any known political dissidents who had left Singapore under acrimonious conditions so as not to risk distancing Singaporean transmigrants who might not wish to be associated with these persons in any way. Nonetheless, my analysis of citizenship and governance in Singapore does not neglect the critical attitudes embodied by these political dissidents, which to some extent have been captured in local and overseas media coverage and wider intellectual debates.

channelled to the appropriate Singaporean policymakers to inform future decision-making<sup>9</sup>.

As described above, on a number of occasions, I encountered a wall of ‘self-censorship’ during my interviews and other interactions with Singaporean transmigrants in London. This self-censorship is expressed as a reluctance to engage in discussions on political governance and related issues in Singapore, and it is characterised as attempts by such Singaporean transmigrants to disassociate themselves from any political dissatisfaction with the PAP government and Singapore that might be construed from their narratives. For others, the reluctance to engage may instead indicate resistance to an overt state agenda that seeks to shape the national attitudes and dispositions of Singaporeans towards Singapore and Singaporean governance (see Chapter Two).

These responses signal the importance of unravelling constructions of citizenship and the complex interplay of state-citizen relationships within Singapore. Transmigrancy provides one approach towards doing that because of the dislocations encountered through migration and the distancing from the national polity that allows Singaporean transmigrants a choice whether to

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<sup>9</sup> As I noted earlier, I am conscious of the need to protect the identities of my respondents during my interactions with Singaporean policymakers in order to avoid any potential recrimination against them. The Singaporean policymakers who indicated interest to know more about my completed research findings were aware of the suspicious attitudes that some Singaporeans have towards the Singaporean state. Hence they expressed understanding towards my ethical stance as a researcher.

disengage from what makes them uncomfortable, or to engage through speech and action.

## **5 Conclusion**

This chapter elucidated the rationale, strategies and processes behind my study. My goal was to provide a clear justification for the choice of my study site and the research methods used to carry out this research. I underscore two arguments that emerged from this discussion.

First, I argue that the triangulation of research methods that I adopted – namely discourse analysis, ethnography and interviews – ensured a robust methodological framework aiding in the contextual and interpretative understandings of my research. These fieldwork techniques allowed me to acquire knowledge of the discursive contexts in which transnational migration and citizenship processes and outcomes unfold, as well as to understand the ways in which migrant subjects engage with these social practices. My research methods played complementary roles by building incremental fieldwork access and knowledge. Ethnography and discourse analysis, in particular, helped to provide information that contextualised the interpretation of non-verbal interview nuances. These methodological exchanges produced an analytical understanding of the way that a culture of ‘self-censorship’ is embodied as an everyday practice amongst Singaporean transmigrants, which in turn, impinges on their ideas of citizenship.

The second argument I forward addresses the shifting and complex positionings that take place between the researcher and the researched during the process of fieldwork. The example that I gave earlier of the projection of my research and social identities (on my part and the manner that they were projected on me) demonstrates the ways in which I am both an actor and a subject of the processes of Singaporean transnationalism and extraterritorial citizenship construction. The intersubjectivity created by these experiences has to be taken into account when carrying out post-fieldwork interpretation, empirical analysis and research writing. I explicate this in appropriate ways in the later chapters.

In summary, the above arguments make it clear that the methodological terrain on which I situate my research not only enabled me to gather empirical research data, but also contributes to theoretical advancements of the 'everyday' aspects of transnational mobility and citizenship practices. These theoretical advancements will be fleshed out in the remainder of this thesis.



# 4

## **'Highly skilled' Singaporean transnational migration: Strategies, trajectories and motivations**

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## 1 Introduction

The ongoing focus on professional and managerial moves tied to inter- or intra-company transfers within and amongst transnational corporations (Findlay *et al.*, 1996; Beaverstock and Boardwell, 2000; Beaverstock, 2000 and 2005) occludes the diverse and less glamorous patterns of highly skilled mobility (Nagel, 2005). This chapter explores the migration strategies, trajectories and motivations of Singaporean transmigrants in order to consider the way their experiences inform and reframe existing theoretical debates on highly skilled migration. My overall argument stresses that the range of migration strategies undertaken by ‘highly skilled’ migrants extend beyond those usually associated with the transnational elite category. Their migration motivations, shaped by economic and non-economic factors in the sending and receiving contexts, helped to influence their choice of migration strategies. In this way, I demonstrate that the experiences of these ‘highly skilled’ migrants also contribute to the growing scholarship on middling transnationalism (Conradson and Latham, 2005a).

My discussion begins by charting the historical evolution of immigration and citizenship laws in the UK. This section highlights the tightening regulations that characterise the British immigration and citizenship regime, as well as its racialisation over the years. I also argue that the contemporary immigration and citizenship agenda in the UK is underpinned by human capital discourses seeking to further the economic goals of the British state. Following that, I provide an overview of the visa categories to which the Singaporean

transmigrants in my study belonged. This section focuses specifically on visas because, on the one hand, they act as an important means through which Singaporeans move to work and live in the UK, sometimes even enabling Singaporean transmigrants to accrue rights to citizenship. On the other hand, the visa categories held by the Singaporean transmigrants in my study also give an insight into the way that these individuals fit into the schema of the British immigration and citizenship regime.

The third part of this chapter then brings the preceding two discussions into synthesis by focusing on the way that my respondents actually engaged with the British immigration and citizenship regime. The key point that I make here is that the ‘highly skilled’ Singaporean transmigrants in my study utilised the visa categories in ways that did not necessarily correspond with their personal skills set or the stated intentions of British immigration policies. Instead, they capitalised upon a variety of migration strategies in order to achieve their migration goals. I examine in particular the experiences of married female Singaporean transmigrants in London to illustrate more explicitly the practical and emotional issues faced by migrants who deploy shifting migration strategies and trajectories. I also draw attention to the gendered dynamics of migration that became clear in my study and its implications for feminist scholarship on gender, work and transnational migration. From these analyses I extrapolate the forms of middling transnationalism that emerged in my study.

Lastly, I turn my attention to the motivations for migration articulated by my respondents. My goal here is to problematise the existing literature that describes highly skilled migration only in terms of skills and class. I contend that it is important to take into account migrant narratives expounding self-development and self-exploration through an overseas experience. I also underscore the institutional and societal factors in the country of origin that help to shape migration decisions. In the Singaporean case-study, this is, first, with respect to the postcolonial dynamics vis-à-vis the cosmopolitanism project in Singapore. Second, I foreground the identity politics and the interlocking state-society nexus that trigger migration from Singapore to the UK. I also valorise the importance of considering migrant motivations so as to lead to a fuller understanding of their strategies and trajectories. This argument, furthermore, helps to inform my later discussion on Singaporean migration in relation to citizenship issues. My overall empirical analysis in this chapter thus, first, contributes to a refining of the literature on highly skilled migration; and second, it develops the scholarship on middling transnationalism.

## **2 The British immigration and citizenship regime**

In this section, I outline the way that the British immigration and citizenship regime evolved from a relatively open-border approach during its colonial heyday towards a managed migration approach today. I argue that the managed migration approach has been tailored to meet the human capital needs of the British state and facilitate its global economic goals. However, the discourses,

legislation and policies shaping migration management are simultaneously underpinned by racialised discourses of nationhood and citizenship.

The immigration and citizenship regime in the UK is complex because of immigration legislation and policies that grant different sets of rights to individuals with various links to the country<sup>1</sup>. Prior to the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act (1914), the UK did not have a nationality law; at that time the Act granted the status of British subject upon persons in the UK as well as those in the colonies and self-governing dominions. The British Nationality Act (1948) later enacted separate citizenships for the dominions but retained the status of British subject for persons holding such citizenships. The Act accorded British subjects equal rights of citizenship and settlement in the country. Until the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, British subjects could enter and leave the UK freely. Subsequent legislation, such as the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1968) and the Immigration Act (1971), restricted the entry and settlement of former subjects of the British Empire. These restrictions were made partly due to anxieties of the British populace over what was perceived as an overflow of migration from particular Commonwealth countries<sup>2</sup> (Joppke, 1999a:100-111).

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<sup>1</sup> These include descendants from past British diasporas; citizens from the former British colonies and the contemporary British Overseas territories; and European Economic Area (EEA) and European Union (EU) nationals.

<sup>2</sup> For example, the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1968) took away the right of entry from 200 000 East African Asians with British passports who were fleeing the Africanisation drive in post-independence Kenya. Then the Immigration Act of 1971 formalised the *de facto* rationale in previous legislation that already equated

It is significant that the bulk of the migration that came under restriction was made up of non-white immigrants from the new Commonwealth countries, thereby indicating the ethnic biases – generated by widespread public hostility towards the new settlers – of immigration and citizenship discourses in the UK at that time. This chequered history of ‘race’, immigration and citizenship still resonates in contemporary discourses of nationhood and identity (or inclusion and exclusion) in the UK. Given the fabric of mixed cultures and ethnicities that it inherited from past immigration policies, the British state today subscribes to a multiculturalism discourse to achieve political and social integration, albeit with mixed effect (Favell, 2001).

The British Nationality Act of 1981 finally formalised the notion of an exclusivist British citizenship by delineating the right of abode for those holding British citizenship and settled in the UK from those who held citizenship only in name (under the British Dependent Territories Citizenship<sup>3</sup> and British Overseas Citizenship categories). The 1981 Act also partially abolished the *jus soli* right of automatic citizenship on all persons born in the UK (Joppke, 1999a:112-113). This was followed by legislation that further

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Commonwealth citizens as aliens. This Act also introduced the patrialinear right to abode, which essentially prioritised the repatriation of white British settlers from the former Old World colonies (Joppke, 1999a:111).

<sup>3</sup> The British Dependent Territories Citizenship later became the British Overseas Territories Citizenship under the changes enshrined in the British Overseas Territories Act 2002. It accorded full British citizenship rights to persons under this category.

differentiated between categories of British citizenship<sup>4</sup> and tightened the regulations before new immigrants could successfully be regarded as British citizens<sup>5</sup>.

In addition, the membership of the UK in the European Economic Area (EEA) and the ever-expanding European Union (EU) creates an additional layer of complexities for the British state. As a member-state of these two communities, the UK is under an obligation to grant the rights to live, travel, work and invest in the country to nationals of the other member-states. However, these persons are generally not considered to be ‘settled’ in the UK unless they apply for permanent residency (also known as indefinite leave to remain). For foreign nationals from outside the EU and EEA, the UK adopts a system of ‘managed migration’ (Kofman, 2005:457) to restrict and control economic immigration through visa entry clearances. These visas are tailored for specific migration reasons: individuals who move for family reunification, students, work permit holders, business persons and investors, au pairs, overseas domestic workers, working holidaymakers and individuals with ancestry rights to abode in the UK (UKVisas, 2006).

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<sup>4</sup> A new category called ‘British Nationals Overseas’ was added under the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Act 1990 for qualifying residents of Hong Kong (OPSI, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> For example, those granted British citizenship from 2005 onwards are required to undertake citizenship tests and an oath of allegiance before the newly acquired citizenship would come into effect.

Like Singapore and several other developed countries (such as Australia, Canada and the United States), the UK situates itself in the global economy and one of the top priorities of the country is to ensure its global competitiveness. In contrast to earlier immigration policies that severely restricted all forms of immigration, the managed migration approach seeks 'to facilitate movement across frontiers in a way that would produce the maximum benefit for British interests' (Flynn, 2005:464). Managed labour migration is used to resolve the demographic and labour shortfalls faced by the UK. The Business Visa, for example, is meant to encourage entrepreneurship and foreign capital investment in the British economy. The Working Holidaymakers scheme for young Commonwealth citizens is regarded as an effective way to inject temporary and youthful casual migrant labour into the British workforce while simultaneously promoting the UK as a holiday destination. The most important component of the British immigration regime, however, is the work permit system that is used to achieve stipulated economic outcomes from labour migration.

There are four main elements in the work permits system: the main scheme (including work permits, first permission, training permits and work experience); the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme (HSMP); the sector-based scheme and the seasonal agricultural worker scheme (Clarke and Salt, 2003). Whereas the latter two schemes are targeted at filling less-skilled labour shortages in particular industries, the main work permit scheme and the HSMP



are aimed at attracting professionals and highly skilled migrants to work in the UK and retaining them.

The various work categories grant to workers on particular visas differentiated sets of rights, such as family reunification, long-term settlement, and access to welfare and other state benefits. Work permit holders, for example, are allowed rights of immediate family reunification in the UK whereas the sectors-based workers have no recourse to that privilege. On the other hand, unlike the work permit holders who have limited flexibility to change employment, the HSMP migrants – who are admitted based on a points system – are free to look for employment of any nature. A similar migration management system is in place in Singapore wherein skilled migrants are grouped into a variegated set of categories with differentiated privileges depending on their qualifications, skills, income levels and work experience (MOM, 2006; Yeoh, 2006).

Immigration as conceived by the British government is tied to the notion of citizenship as a ‘reward’ for orderly migration and abiding by the rules of integration (Flynn, 2005:482). British citizenship may be acquired in several ways: *jus soli* (by birth in the UK to a parent who is a British citizen at the time of birth, or to a parent who is settled in the UK); *jus sanguinis* (by descent if one of the parents is a British citizen); adoption; naturalisation; or registration.

Naturalisation is the most common citizenship application procedure used by those by those who are not native and do not have prior lineal ties in the UK.

Recent changes to the criteria for citizenship by naturalisation require persons married to British spouses to hold permanent residency and to have legally resided in the UK for at least three years (previously two years). Other applicants need to have had permanent residency status for at least twelve months prior to the date of application, be legally resident in the UK for at least five years (previously four years), and show sufficient knowledge of life in the UK – such as being able to communicate in the English language (or Gaelic, Welsh or Scottish). Eligibility for citizenship by registration is more stringently restricted, being allowed only to persons in particular circumstances such as those who were born to British mothers before 1981, or those with the right of abode (IND, 2006). These trends on immigration and citizenship in the UK in relation to the Commonwealth are important for framing my later discussions on the emotional (belonging, identity and community) and political aspects (rights and responsibilities) of citizenship.

Scholars such as Kofman (2005:458) point out that there are inconsistencies in the immigration and citizenship regimes of countries promoting managed labour migration to fill skills shortages. Kofman (ibid) argues that in countries like the UK where shortages of skilled labour are officially recognised, states welcome the highly skilled and facilitate their route to citizenship whereas limitations are placed on the ability of less-skilled migrants to qualify for citizenship status. She cites the example of the sector-based scheme in the UK in which these visa holders are required to take a break of two months following the twelve-month work period before they can make a new work

application. Such clauses break the period of residence needed for foreigners to qualify for permanent residency in the UK. A similar situation exists in Singapore, which Yeoh (2006:26) describes as 'bifurcated labour': unskilled foreign workers occupy marginal positions in Singapore society and are restricted by official policy from applying for permanent residency or citizenship, whereas highly skilled foreigners are encouraged to settle permanently in Singapore and apply for citizenship. The immigration regimes in both of these countries are, therefore, not only meant to manage migration but also to regulate citizenship access (Brubaker, 1992).

The objective of managed migration policies in the British state is the reassertion of the capacity for state control with respect to immigration and citizenship (Flynn, 2005:465; Kofman, 2005). However, as I will show in this chapter, the ways in which migrants engage with state-framings of immigration and citizenship may transgress the boundaries that visa categorisations and their accompanying stipulations are meant to achieve. As I argued in Chapter Two, there is no simple way to define 'who' is a highly skilled migrant in terms of skills, qualification, experience or the length of stay (Koser and Salt, 1997). It is also open to question whether highly skilled migrants actually take up occupations that correspond with their skills set or their expectations of an international career path (Scott, 2004; Kofman and Raghuram, 2005).

Hence, in my study, instead of merely recruiting visa holders from the work permit scheme or the HSMP, I recruited Singaporean transmigrants from a

spectrum of visa categories. The common denominator in my sample, which concurs with Iredale’s (2001:8) definition of the ‘highly skilled’, is that the Singaporean transmigrants I interviewed in London possessed tertiary-level qualifications, or at least extensive experience in their given fields (refer to Chapter Three). In this way, my study includes migrants who fall outside conventional definitions of the ‘highly skilled’ and allows me to later problematise the artificial skills distinctions on which visa categorisations are based.

### **3 Singaporean transmigrants in London: visa categories**

Singaporean citizens enter the UK through a variety of visa categories and some gain residency or citizenship rights this way. In Chapter Three I elucidated the key characteristics of my interview sample in terms of their demographic profile, including citizenship status, age, ethnicity, level of education or skills, gender and marital status (also see Appendix I). In this chapter, I focus on the visa categories of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study so as to understand the way they fit into the schema of the British immigration and citizenship regime. This overview of their visa categories (Table 1) also sets the context for the discussion in the next section on their migration strategies and trajectories.

Almost half of my respondents (21) belonged to the *work permit* category (Table 2). Work permits are issued to specific persons for specific jobs. The work permit scheme lets employers in the UK recruit or transfer people from

outside the European Economic Area. It also allows overseas nationals to come to the UK for training or work experience. In this way, the work permit scheme features as an integral tool of the British state’s strategy to enhance its economic competitiveness in a global economy. At the same time, it is used by the Singaporean transmigrants in my study as the most popular route of entry to the UK. Given the preponderance of this visa category in my study sample, I provide a break-down of the occupational profiles under the work permit category in Table 2. The concentration of Singaporean transmigrants in the financial and legal services (11) gives a hint of the global city pull of London as a hub for advanced corporate services.

I also interviewed eight Singaporean transmigrants who were on *residence permits* (or indefinite leave to remain) that enabled them to live in the UK (Table 1). At least three of these respondents (all women) had transferred from spousal permits to permanent resident (PR) status after marrying a British citizen and fulfilling the required two-year residency criteria. The others applied for permanent residency in the UK either after being employed on the work permit for four years or by fulfilling the requisite ten-year legal residency criteria (as was the policy at that time).

At the time of the interviews, four of my respondents belonged to the to *UK Spousal Visa* category (all women) (Table 1). This visa grants them the legal right not only to live but also to work in the UK. Two of the women were married to spouses who had work permits in the UK; the other two women had

been married to British citizens for less than two years and thus were not yet eligible to apply for British permanent residency. In contrast, none of the Singaporean men interviewed were on spousal visas. Later in this chapter, I foreground the gendered experiences of migration with respect to the various migration strategies utilised by female Singaporean transmigrants who had moved to London to be with their partners.

Four of the respondents in my sample belonged to the *Working Holidaymaker Visa* (WHV) category (Table 1). The working holidaymaker scheme allows Commonwealth citizen aged between 17 and 30 to live in the UK for an extended holiday of up to two years<sup>6</sup>. There were about 50 000 working holidaymakers in the UK in 2003, of which the primary source countries were Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. There are, however, growing numbers of working holidaymakers from India, Malaysia and Sri Lanka (Migration Research Unit and Home Office, personal communication in 2004). 105 working holidaymaker visas were granted to Singaporeans in 2003 (ibid).

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<sup>6</sup> Working holidaymakers may work for up to an aggregate period of twelve months (unless the visa was issued before 8 February 2005 when this stipulation was not yet in place). Working holidaymakers need to provide evidence of the ability to support themselves without recourse to public funds. The WHV is not extendable but working holidaymakers may switch to a work permit after twelve months in the UK, or they may apply to stay in the UK under other visa categories such as the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme (HSMP).

**Table 1 Breakdown of interview sample by visa category and gender**

Visa/Gender	Male	Female	Total
Work permit	14	7	21
British permanent residency	3	5	8
Working holidaymaker	1	3	4
Spousal	0	4	4
British citizens	2	0	2
Student	1	1	2
Right to abode	0	1	1
EU visa	1	0	1
Total	22	21	43

*Source: Personal fieldwork, 2005*

**Table 2 Breakdown of interview sample by industry (work permits)**

Industry	No. of work permit holders (including training permits)
Financial services	7
Legal services	4
Management and administration	3
Building and architecture	2
Engineering	2
Medicine	1
Information technology	1
Education	1
Total	21

*Source: Personal fieldwork, 2005*

Although the proportion of Singaporeans on this visa is negligible relative to the overall number of working holidaymakers in the UK, the WHV is a popular migration strategy amongst young Singaporeans who intend to live in the UK, but do not qualify for work permits or other visas. Later in this chapter, I highlight the way in which the WHV is used as an intermediate migration strategy by some of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study.

Whilst my study is primarily interested in the experiences of Singaporean transmigrants working in London, I also interviewed two mature students who were pursuing masters-level education in the UK (Table 1). My intention was to examine the overlaps and blurred boundaries delimiting ‘student migration’ and ‘highly skilled migration’. At the time of the interview, one student was working as a bank intern in the City of London. The other student had undertaken her second bachelor-level qualification in London and was completing her masters-level degree. She had worked in Singapore in the legal profession for a decade before coming to London to study a different discipline. Both respondents indicated that they hope to continue to work in the UK upon completion of their studies.

Two of my respondents were resident in the UK by right of *British citizenship* (Table 1). Although they were British citizens they had significant links with Singapore. One respondent was a former Singaporean citizen who migrated to the UK in the 1960s and naturalised as a British citizen. The second respondent was a British citizen by birth, but he had worked in Singapore for a number of



years and was a Singaporean permanent resident. He was also married to a Singaporean citizen. In addition, one of the respondents in my interview sample was a citizen of a European Union member-state, which grants him the right to live and work in the UK. Another respondent had an *Ancestry Visa* that gave her the right of abode in the UK because she was born in the country. This was even though she had already given up her British citizenship in favour of a Singapore citizenship. Both of these respondents had grown up in Singapore and their parents and siblings were still living there.

There is an important visa category that deserves mention even though none of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study belong to it. The Highly Skilled Migrant Programme (HSMP) is a British government initiative that took off in 2002. Applicants for this visa category are selected through a comprehensive points system that is tailored to the applicant's age group (above or below 28 years of age). Points are allocated based on the applicant's educational qualifications, work experience, past earnings, personal achievement and also the achievements of the applicant's spouse or unmarried partner.

Given that the HSMP was inaugurated in 2002, the programme was not yet in place when many of my respondents decided to move to the UK. For others, even though they moved to London at a later time, they did not know of the HSMP while living Singapore because the scheme has not been widely publicised there. However, by the time I was engaging in the fieldwork process, word about the HSMP had disseminated and some Singaporean

transmigrants I met mentioned that they would consider changing to the HSMP upon the expiry of their existing work permit or working holidaymaker visa. The HSMP grants successful applicants the right to live and work in the UK under flexible employment for a year at first; after that the permit-holder may renew the visa for a longer period of time, which would eventually enable the individual to apply for British permanent residency status. The HSMP is thus considered by Singaporean transmigrants to be a more advantageous visa than the other working permits.

What does this overview of the profile of Singaporean transmigrants in my study suggest with regard to their visa categories? The majority of them appear to fall under the category of capital-producing subjects desired by the British state to enhance the country's global competitiveness. However, the information presented here is only a snapshot of their migration trajectories. Some of these Singaporean transmigrants had lived in London for a long period of time through a variety of visa categories; others indicated their intention to change to another visa category upon the expiry of their existing visa status. I argue that these observations suggest that a more nuanced analysis of their migration strategies and trajectories is necessary in order to fully understand their experiences of migration.

#### **4 Migration strategies and trajectories**

This section examines the migration strategies and trajectories of Singaporean transmigrants in London. I consider two questions: first, what are the ways in which highly skilled migrants move to London? Second, how do they think about and manage the limitations on their capacities and mobility? My goal in this section is to draw attention to the manner in which the Singaporean transmigrants in my study engaged with the immigration and citizenship schema envisioned by the British state. I argue that although there are a small number of Singaporean transmigrants who fit the ‘transnational elite’ profile popularised in the predominant literature on highly skilled migration, the majority of the Singaporeans in London – typified in my study – should be characterised as ‘middling’ transnationals (Conradson and Latham, 2005a:229). These persons usually undertake a range of migration strategies and changing trajectories in order to work and live in London, and this sometimes takes place in ways that belie their ‘highly skilled’ status.

I begin this section by, first, considering the representation of inter- and intra-company transferees (transnational elite) in my study. Then I turn my attention to the spectrum of respondents who came by other more ‘inventive’ means that later led on to longer-term visas. Lastly, I focus on the gendered experiences of migration and work to illustrate more explicitly the issues faced by migrants who deploy changing migration strategies and trajectories.

#### **4.1 Company-initiated transfers**

The literature on the inter- or intra-company transfers within and amongst transnational corporations highlights the ways that transnational corporations (TNC) utilise international employees to share human capital and intellectual knowledge in their foreign offices (Beaverstock and Boardwell, 2000). The predominance of this body of knowledge appears to conflate highly skilled migration with this category of transnational elite migration. Company-initiated transfers were indeed one of the ways by which the Singaporean transmigrants in my study moved to London. However, only five of them belonged to this migration category. Their narratives of migration were similar in the sense that all of them emphasised that they had been deployed to work in London so as to maximise the interests of their employers.

Isaac, for example, was sent to work in London by a multi-billion dollar TNC with operations in different parts of the world. He explained to me that:

I [am] part of [a] programme that [takes] me to different jobs to give me exposure... When I finished my assignment in China it was thought that the UK would be a good next step... I see myself possibly going to the US [after this] but I am not very keen. I want to go back to Asia first [...], preferably China. That is where our next growth engine is going to be and where I think my skills set will be the most valuable.

Isaac's migration trajectory epitomises the way TNCs deploy and utilise the international mobility of selected employees to transfer a desirable 'skills set' from one foreign operation to another. However, Isaac also sought migration as a means to utilise his skills set and capitalise upon learning opportunities in new contexts to further develop his career. As Beaverstock (2005:256) found in

his study of highly skilled British inter-company transferees in the financial district of New York, transnational experiences benefit the career of these workers in terms of promotions within the firm as well as the intellectual and social capital that they accumulate through international business interactions.

The challenges of shifting work/home environments and changing social-cultural milieu faced by the transnational elite have been documented in other studies (Waters, 2003; Nonini, 2004; Beaverstock, 2005; Yeoh and Willis, 2005b). Similar issues were raised during my interviews with the Singaporean transmigrants who had been sent to work in London by a parent company. They often underlined the uncertainties of work-initiated migration as the main factor determining their length of stay in a country.

Take for example Dorothy who was posted to manage the London operations of her Singaporean employer. She had previously studied hotel management in Europe after which she worked in the Asia-Pacific region, including being based intermittently in Singapore with different employers. Amongst other perks and benefits, her expatriate package in London included accommodation, a food allowance and medical insurance. However, she highlighted the attendant insecurities of being part of the transnational capitalist class:

Dorothy: Every time I go overseas I am on a contract so it is not like you [can] stay for as long as you like. When you finish a contract it is up to the company or you whether you want to renew [it]. If you decide not to then you have to look for a new jobs.

EH: Do you plan to stay here to work or continue to move?

Dorothy: Continue to move. I've been here for nine years and it is a long time. You still have to learn new things...

As this anecdote shows, Dorothy’s desire to accumulate knowledge and expertise by working in different geographical locations propels her to move from place to place rather than settling in one location.

Nonetheless, her mobility as a member of the transnational capitalist class was accompanied by the stress arising from the contingency of an employment contract that affects her length of stay in the place of work. Hence Dorothy decided to apply for permanent residency in the UK:

I am a PR (permanent resident)... Without [it] I [would] have to renew my work permit every two years. You would have to pay [...] two hundred and fifty pounds to renew each time. When you come in and out of immigration at the airport it is very difficult and time-consuming. They [...] hold you up and ask you all sort of questions like, ‘Why are you still working here’ and ‘are you on contract’? They ask you the same old questions. Not only do I go back three times a year but also for short trips within Europe and America often. I really hate [the hassle, so] I applied for PR.

Dorothy’s narrative relating the expenses of the work permit (even though paid for by the company), and the hassle and harassment encountered at immigration to re-enter the UK presents a counter-discourse to uncritical accounts of globalisation that valorise unfettered travel. These experiences of being treated like an outsider prompted her decision to apply for British permanent residency. Nevertheless, as I will discuss later in this thesis, most of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study said that they do not feel they ‘belong’ in British society, even after spending many years in the country, because of the perceived differences in cultural norms and values.

Inter- and intra-company transfers most closely correspond to the British state’s declared goals for managing immigration, and partial or full citizenship status is offered as an incentive for such migrants to settle. The transfer of human capital – represented by persons such as Isaac and Dorothy – facilitates knowledge transfer, promotes the reproduction of London as a global city and enhances the global competitiveness of the UK (Findlay *et al*, 1996; Beaverstock, 2005; Flynn, 2005). Nonetheless, even though company-initiated transfers appear to be a privileged form of international migration, the transnational experiences of such workers are still shaped by their social-cultural embeddedness, and the real and imagined boundaries of territorial inclusion and exclusion.

#### **4.2 ‘Inventive’ migration strategies and trajectories**

The majority of the Singaporean transmigrants I encountered during my fieldwork had not been transferred to work in London by a parent company. Instead, many had made a personal and independent decision to migrate to London. Global cities, such as London, draw large numbers of relatively young and well-educated migrants from other affluent countries.

Three-quarters (34) of the forty-three Singaporean transmigrants that I interviewed were in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties. These Singaporean transmigrants were likely to undertake a range of strategies outside of the intra- or inter-company transfer category in order to live in London. Their migration strategies and trajectories provide useful insights into the world of ‘middling’

transnationals (Conradson and Latham, 2005a:229) with reference to highly skilled migration. It is also worth noting that half (26) of my respondents had received some form of tertiary education in the UK. I found that their educational histories and networks in the UK influenced their migration decisions. The following sub-sections illustrate ‘inventive’ means of migration utilised by the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. The first relies on initial entry to the UK via non-working visas while the second relies on the working holidaymaker visa that allows the visa holder to undertake a limited period of work.

#### 4.2.1 ‘Independent’ work migrants

Most of the Singaporean transmigrants that I encountered may be categorised as ‘independent’ work migrants in the sense that they had looked for suitable employment *after* arriving in London on specific non-working visa schemes (e.g. tourist or student visas). Their experiences of migration differed from the more commonly told stories of company-initiated transfers in the highly skilled migration literature. I illustrate this with the example of Oscar, one of the ‘independent’ Singaporean transmigrants in my study.

At the start of the interview, Oscar qualified that he did not migrate ‘the normal way’, by which he was referring to company-initiated international work transfers. This suggests that in the popular imagination, company-initiated transfers are still regarded as the norm and a preferable migration route. Oscar had studied in the UK for his bachelor’s degree and returned to work in



Singapore for two years after his graduation. However, he came back to London in 2001 on a tourist visa with the intention of finding paid employment in the city. He explained his decision to me:

I was sick and tired of working in Singapore so one day I packed my bags and came over here. I told my mum that I would give myself six months to find a job here and if I can't find anything I would go back to Singapore... I went for quite a few interviews but it wasn't easy because [...] they would have to apply for [a] work permit [for me]. So a lot of companies [were] not that keen because it [meant] extra trouble for them. To employ me they would have to go through the trouble of informing immigration, arranging for a work permit and proving why me and not a local. It wasn't easy at all. A lot of times I thought that the interview went well, but the moment they heard that I needed a work permit they would just switch off...

Oscar's experience illustrates the distinctive practical and emotional challenges faced by independent work migrants. He highlighted the reluctance of companies to undertake the extra costs and trouble of applying for work permits for those without the legal right to work in the UK, thereby creating barriers to entry for foreigners.

During the interview, Oscar also revealed that he would never forget the experience of being 'literally down to [his] last penny' during the months it took him to secure a job in London. Eventually he was offered a work position through the recommendation of a former university friend:

I think I was lucky because one of my university classmates was working in this company and she had been here for three years. She was homesick and the company was desperate for people at that time so I could start almost immediately. It was like being at the right place in the right time... I was quite all right during the interview and they could see that I was keen. My friend had done a good job so maybe they [thought], 'Chinese more hardworking'. Also, they were desperate for people so two weeks after that I got it.

Rather than skills or qualifications, Oscar attributes his eventual job success to luck (‘being at the right place at the right time’), his friendship networks from having previously studied in the UK and his ethnicity (‘maybe they think, “Chinese more hardworking”’). This underlines the significance of social networks – professional, educational and ethnic – as a pivotal factor enabling migrants to successfully secure employment (Purkayastha, 2005). Oscar’s experience provides an insight into the practical and emotional challenges faced by ‘independent’ work migrants, which is distinct from those shared by the transnational elite and low-paid labour migrants.

Another strategy employed by Singaporean transmigrants who intend to work in the UK is to first study in the country, and while doing so, look for employment opportunities in the country (unlike Oscar who utilised his tourist visa). As Felix puts it, ‘it is easier to apply for a job when you are [in London]’. Felix had been working in the civil service in Singapore for a number of years before he decided to have ‘a career switch’. He registered at a business school in London for the purpose of obtaining a job in the UK:

My intention is to work overseas and it is not that easy to get a job overseas unless you have experience in that country... After working for a few years in Singapore I found that [...] a bit small. I’d done quite well but to progress further I believe you have to go overseas... If you want to reach senior level in the multinationals they expect you to have overseas experience... People who have done the MBA and worked in more than one country tend to get a job compared to those who have not... It’s only when you start looking for work overseas that you realise how competitive it is, especially in countries like London and New York. You are competing against the world. It is not like in Singapore. In Singapore you send out one CV and you get one interview; here you send out ten CVs and you are lucky if you get one [interview].

The above anecdote from Felix underscores the geographical advantage of applying for a job in London by having lived and studied in the city beforehand. The way that Felix puts emphasis on the necessity of accruing an overseas education and international exposure to improve his career prospects resonates with the findings of Waters (2006) in her study of Hong Kong students from Canada. She argues that international education was a specific means of accruing the cultural capital and social networks that would facilitate future employment prospects.

Building on the findings shared by Waters (*ibid*), my case study of Singaporean transmigrants in London shows that an overseas work exposure is regarded as a further means of expanding one’s cache of cultural capital and social networks. Nevertheless, as Felix’s anecdote reveals, these middling transnationals find it challenging to successfully apply for a job in London because of the international competition for work opportunities (‘you are competing against the world’). The difficulties faced by ‘independent’ highly skilled workers to break into the labour market have thus far received little mention in the highly skilled migration literature (except with reference to gendered identities).

Oscar and Felix both undertook ‘independent’ migration decisions to move to work and live in London. Their narratives were not atypical in the broader context of my study. Many of my respondents – both men and women – who had moved by ‘independent’ means underscored the pull of the global city for

them, but also the practical and emotional challenges of finding work in the city despite their high level of qualifications and credentials. Thus it was not unusual to find that their migration trajectory usually capitalised upon two or more strategies in order to remain in London.

#### **4.2.2 Working holidaymakers**

Another ‘inventive’ means of migration capitalised upon by Singaporean transmigrants to move to London is via the working holidaymaker visa category. In his study of British working holidaymakers in Australia, Clarke (2004) frames his work around their tourist experiences. However, I argue in this section that unlike the British working holidaymakers studied by Clarke, the Singaporean transmigrants I met who belonged to this visa category had more strategic intentions than to merely holiday in the UK. Four of my respondents were working holidaymakers (Table 1) at the time of their interviews, but two other respondents had previously been on this visa before switching to a different visa category. All of the current four working holidaymakers indicated their intention to transfer or were in the process of transferring from the working holidaymaker visa to a longer-term work or residency visa. Therefore the working holidaymaker visa was as an intermediate means of migration for them.

Irene is an example of someone who made the successful transition from working holidaymaker to work permit holder. She wanted to work in a different industry from her job in Singapore and felt that ‘London was the best

place to find a different [and] more creative job’. She decided to apply for the working holidaymaker visa and she believes that her application was relatively smooth because she had existing friendship networks in the country from the time when she was studying in the UK. While on the working holidaymaker visa, she moved from workplace to workplace in London until she decided that ‘cash was running low’ and she would stay in her current job.

At the time of the interview, Irene’s employer had signalled its willingness to sponsor a work permit application for her. To Irene, changing to a work permit status seemed the natural route to take because:

[The working holidaymaker visa] was an option [to] live [in London] without having a visa. Most people would change to a permanent work permit, obviously, when they have found a firm they want to work for...

Irene’s experience shows that the purpose behind her applying for the working holidaymaker visa was not to holiday in the UK, but to capitalise upon the visa as an opportunity to work in London with the goal of eventually obtaining a full-time work permit. In a sense, Irene’s intentions correspond with the British state’s goal of using the working holidaymaker visa as a means to inject temporary and youthful casual migrant labour into the British workforce. However, the time and work allowances provided by the visa also enables migrants, such as Irene, to utilise the visa to work for various companies until they find one willing to sponsor them for a longer-term work permit.

In other instances, the working holidaymaker visa is used as a strategic means to extend residency in London. Michelle’s migration trajectory exemplifies this

scenario. Michelle had graduated with an undergraduate and masters-level degree in art from a London university but after her graduation, she wanted to ‘do something different’ so she ventured into the food and beverage industry. She started from scratch by packing meals for a sandwich chain in London, and a few months later she chanced on the opportunity to apply for an administrative-level job vacancy in the same conglomerate.

Michelle was successfully selected for the job and transferred to a longer-term work permit status, but she stressed that her original intention was primarily to continue to live in London:

[At that time] I was quite open to anything that stepped my way [because] I would be sad [if I had] to leave London. If I were using [the working holidaymaker visa] as a stepping stone I would be actively looking for jobs, which I wasn’t. I liked the fact that [the visa] gives Commonwealth nationalities the option. It’s good for Singaporeans because it gives people the chance to come out and see the world more... Not everyone has the chance to come out to study, especially Britain because of the exchange rate. I think it is a good scheme.

For Michelle, her main purpose behind applying for the working holidaymaker visa was so that she could remain in London after the completion of her studies. Her migration trajectory – from student to working holidaymaker and eventually work permit holder – illustrates the way that some migrants incrementally extend their overseas stay in London by employing a range of migration strategies.

Both Irene and Michelle highlighted that their eligibility for the working holidaymaker visa depends on evidence of their financial ability to support

themselves in the UK. Their successful applications were possibly facilitated by the fact that they had existing friendship and social networks in the country from their previous educational histories. In fact, five of the six former and current working holidaymakers in my study had previously studied in the UK. These findings point to the ways in which the emigration of Singaporean transmigrants to London is constituted by class factors related to the migrant’s family background and household income-level. Due to the high costs of an overseas education (particularly in London), Singaporeans in the UK tend to come from upper middle- and high-income families. Nevertheless, when these individuals move to London they usually live more frugal lifestyles because their relatively modest personal income levels have to accommodate the higher costs of living compared to Singapore. The contingency of their work contracts and visa status is also a form of stress that they need to negotiate during their transmigrancy.

This discussion on ‘independent’ work migrants and working holidaymakers illustrates some of the ‘inventive’ migration strategies employed by the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. I foreground the importance of paying attention to the range of migration strategies undertaken by these migrants. Their narratives often emphasised the importance of educational histories and London-based friendship networks as factors facilitating their migration. My goal is to expand the research optic beyond migrants who belong to company-initiated transfers – normally categorised as the transnational elite – so as to offer a more balanced panorama of highly skilled migration. The ‘highly

skilled’ Singaporean transmigrants described here experience difficulty finding employment, and they usually end up occupying middling social and economic statuses in London. As such, they should be classified as middling transnationals instead of the transnational elite. The changes that occur over the course of their migration trajectory also call for attentiveness to the way that they experience migration over space and time.

### **4.3 Gender, work and immigration regulations**

In this section I focus on the experiences of ‘highly skilled’ female Singaporean transmigrants who had migrated with a partner. I do this to explicate the practical and emotional challenges faced by migrants utilising ‘inventive’ migration strategies that lead to changing migration trajectories. Through this discussion, I also argue that these female transmigrants should not be categorically identified as ‘trailing spouses’ or dependents that have ‘put aside their careers’ (Yeoh and Willis, 2005a:214). Instead, my respondents employed a range of inventive strategies to find career satisfaction and accrue educational and social-cultural capital through transmigrancy.

These observations arise from my empirical study of the twelve married female Singaporean transmigrants that I interviewed in London. Six of the women interviewed were married to British men, four had Singaporean husbands and the remaining two women were married to spouses from other nationalities. The UK has a set of relatively liberal immigration and work policies for spouses of legal migrants or couples that are able to provide evidence of a



long-term relationship. However, my research suggests that for couples who have yet to reach a mature stage in their relationship, female partners who ‘follow’ the lead male migrant often first undertake more inventive migration strategies in order to remain in the country.

For example, one of my respondents, Hannah, selected her migration route with such strategic intent. For her, the working holidaymaker visa was a means to live in the UK with her boyfriend (now her husband) who had been studying in the country. The working holidaymaker visa status, however, unexpectedly contributed to a de-valorisation of her skills set. Although Hannah graduated with a social sciences degree in Singapore, she had difficulty finding employment in the UK that was commensurate with her qualifications because of her visa status:

I was trying to do anything and everything. There weren’t that many alternatives at that time... I think initially there was a poor understanding of the visa. In Singapore they tell you that there are quite stringent visa restrictions on the working hours and where you work. When I came to the UK I had reservations about applying for jobs because I didn’t know if legally I could apply for full-time jobs. What the Commonwealth office tells you is you shouldn’t apply for jobs that are trying to further your career. You can do bar work and that sort of thing as long it gives you [the] cash flow to sustain your lifestyle, but not really to further your career. When I rang the Home Office here and I told them about my visa, they said you can work in any type of environment as long as your employer knows what kind of visa you have because it is up to your employer to decide to employ you. When I first started applying I was wary and I didn’t quite know what to tell my employer. After I [had] checked it out, my fears were allayed – but at the same time, there was some nervousness about the grey areas and not knowing where you are, especially because you are worried about your status to remain in the country.

As this narrative illustrates, the working holidaymaker’s visa scheme is regarded as an alternative and temporary route of migration to the UK for migrants who do not qualify for an employment-sponsored work permit. Of the

four female working holidaymakers in my study sample (Table 1), two of them had taken up the visa partly to follow their partners to the UK.

However, for women like Hannah who have university-level qualifications, limited publicity about the visa in Singapore and frequent changes to the rules and regulations of the visa lead to a poor understanding of the visa conditions. This hinders them from capitalising on their full working potential and even results in the de-valorisation of their skills. Such individuals also have to cope with the anxiety that they may unknowingly flout their visa regulations and risk deportation or being granted re-entry when they leave the country. Hannah eventually found a temporary job as a telemarketer and later transferred from the two-year working holidaymaker’s visa to a spousal visa that allows her the right to work in the UK as long as her husband was gainfully employed in the country as well. However, she highlighted the fact that the decision and the timeline for them to get married had been mediated by the knowledge that her working holidaymaker’s visa was near expiry.

Hannah’s situation parallels feminist arguments explicating that modes of entry into a country can limit female migrants’ ability to have their skills recognised (Kofman and Raghuram, 2005:151). However, with the spousal permit, Hannah later found a job with an accountancy firm that sponsored her professional training to qualify as an accountant. Although it was a surprise career change for her, she was grateful for the opportunity to work in a different field. She believes that it would not have happened had she remained

in Singapore, which has a ‘more restrictive’ labour market that is less open to ‘people moving from one career to a different career through a degree change or training programme’. This was a common sentiment told to me by both male and female Singaporean transmigrants who had used their stint in London to pursue new career tracks that would have been frowned upon in the more conservative Singaporean labour market.

Rachel was another of my respondents who found work opportunities in London that she felt would have been less likely to happen in Singapore. She entered the UK with the right to work on a spousal permit through her husband who had been sent by his employer to work in London. Nevertheless, she consciously resisted being categorised as a trailing spouse and stressed that their migration:

[Fits] into the whole general life plan of living and working in a different country, doing something different and career advancement. It wasn’t as if I was reluctant to come and it wasn’t entirely because of him. In terms of timing, yes, it probably accelerated the process but I was also exploring working overseas.

Although for Rachel, ‘coming [to the UK] entailed a whole job switch’, it suited her personal plans to embark on a new career trajectory. She made the qualification that her migration was not entirely because of her husband; rather, it was because she wanted a ‘variety of experiences’ for herself too.

When Rachel arrived in the UK she found it difficult to look for work because ‘the economy was in doldrums’. Hence she took up cooking lessons and attended advanced French language classes while continuing her job search.

When she finally found a job, it was with a London-based bank that wanted to send her to work in Paris. Being 'practical about it', she decided to accept the offer but she also spells out the difficulty of having to commute between work and home to juggle both her job and relationship:

Work-wise [it was] very fulfilling but for us it was difficult because I was out the whole week. I would come back on Friday and go back on Monday. Monday to Friday I was based in Paris but I would come back to London on weekends... It [was] tiring, which is why at the end of the one year I asked myself, 'Is this going the right way?'

During the period of commuting between Paris and London, it was usually Rachel who travelled to London. She explained that was because the apartment in London sponsored by her husband's employer was 'more comfortable' and 'bigger'. After a year, Rachel successfully requested for a company transfer back to London, a move that she described as being 'closer to [her] long-term career goal'.

Past research shows that women tend to sacrifice their career goals to accompany their husbands on overseas work postings. They make their migration experiences fulfilling in other ways such as by spending time on their leisure pursuits, bringing up a young family or even through community work (Yeoh and Khoo, 1998). Likewise, most of the Singaporean women I met who migrated to London because of their spouses have had to make adjustments to their lifestyles and career expectations. However, this is where my findings partially depart from the conventional literature on trailing spouses (Yeoh and Khoo, 1998; Yeoh and Willis, 1999; Willis and Yeoh, 2000; Boyle, 2002).

A number of the Singaporean women that I came across, including Hannah and Rachel, continue to pursue their personal and career goals even in transmigrancy. In fact, they welcome the opportunity to live overseas for the international exposure and to experience a different lifestyle. They could continue to carve a career niche for themselves because of the liberal British visa regulations for accompanying spouses. In contrast, the British expatriate wives described in Singapore (Yeoh and Khoo, 1998) and New York City (Beaverstock, 2005:262-263) have limited work opportunities because of the restrictive immigration policies in Singapore and the United States for partner-led migration. The language, skills and qualifications match between the Singaporean and British work cultures enhances the job prospects of Singaporean wives looking to find work in the UK. Several of them also said that compared to the Singaporean work environment, the British workplace allows more leeway for them to explore different job scopes, even if their primary skills set was not fully compatible with the job requirements. These findings underscore the critical role played by the state in shaping women's migration outcomes.

My findings concur with Kofman and Raghuram (2005:153) who argue that the 'model of hegemonic masculinity where women follow merely as appendages or cede to the career aspirations of the male partner, and become the trailing spouse, is both partial and deeply problematic'. In fact, several of the highly skilled women demonstrate the capacity and willingness to make

work and migration decisions independently of their husbands. For example, when I saw Rachel again at a party, she told me that she was making plans to leave for the United States to pursue a postgraduate degree. I asked her about her husband’s plans in that case and she replied that he was seeking a transfer to work in his company’s operations in the United States so as to move with her, albeit to a different part of the country. She emphasised that even if his request for a work transfer was turned down, she would still go ahead with her plans for further studies and they would maintain a long-distance relationship for the time being. Rachel’s story demonstrates the need to keep in view the coexistence of flexible and multiple femininities compared to the dominant model of ‘homogenous’ femininity often portrayed in opposition to masculinity.

In making this argument, I do not, however, want to lose sight of the ways in which gender relations structure skilled migration: unequal gender power relations are still the norm during transmigrancy. Women tend to follow the lead male migrant because of his higher earning power and the male as head-of-the-household ideology. At the same time, as Purkayastha (2005) argues, women often place more emphasis on making a relationship work than men; therefore they are more amenable towards making work-place compromises. In Rachel’s case, she acknowledged that her physical and career mobility may be curtailed when her husband and she decide to start a family in the near future. The implications of familial concerns for return, settlement and citizenship decisions will be discussed later in this thesis.

This discussion on gender, work and immigration foregrounds the ways in which female Singaporean transmigrants who migrated with a partner were channelled into forms of middling transnationalism despite their high level of qualifications. I also drew attention to the ensuing practical and emotional issues that they faced as middling transnationals. However, I emphasised that many of these women utilised their migration experience to gain new skills sets and career tracks. Their migration to London was usually born not only out of a desire to be with their partner, but also because of their personal goals for self-development and exploration.

Drawing together the preceding threads of analysis on the range of migration strategies and changing migration trajectories of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study, I argue that there is a need to analytically separate the transfer of highly skilled migrants from the transfer of skills that is more typically highlighted in the highly skilled migration literature. The transfer of skills refers to cases such as inter-company transfers or when highly skilled migrants work in jobs that utilise their primary skills sets and knowledge base. Speaking in terms of the transfer of skilled migrants places the emphasis on highly skilled corporate subjects making the move from one country to another, even if the migration outcome in the host country entails the learning of new competencies in jobs that do not necessarily tap into the migrant’s existing skills and knowledge. Acknowledging this paradigm shift allows for further contemplations about their world as ‘highly skilled’ middling transnationals.

The question that remains to be answered is why did these Singaporean transmigrants give up their job security and relatively more comfortable lifestyles in Singapore to move to London?

## **5 Migration motivations**

In this section, I consider the migration motivations of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. This discussion facilitates an understanding of why a number of my respondents chose to undertake unconventional migration strategies in order to remain in London despite the challenges that it presented. For example, why did Oscar feel ‘sick and tired of working in Singapore’? What reasons propelled him to utilise his tourist visa to find full-time employment in London (section 4.2.1)? Iredale (2001:8) postulates that migrants seek to maximise their returns when they move. Whilst this is usually interpreted to mean economic returns, Conradson and Latham (2005a) argue that migrants also move for more prosaic reasons to do with self-development and self-exploration through migration.

In the discussion that follows, I agree with both points of view – the Singaporean transmigrants in my study moved to London for both career reasons and to develop themselves through an overseas experience. However, I argue that it is also important to consider the institutional and societal dynamics in the sending country to fully comprehend their migration experiences. I explore these aspects of migration motivations through two themes: first, in relation to the postcolonial and ‘cosmopolitanism’ dynamics in



Singapore, and second, with reference to the Singaporean state-society relationship. It is important to make the qualification that although some Singaporeans leave Singapore for a predominant reason, in most cases, the factors that I spell out below work in tandem and in varying proportions to constitute the migration decision.

### **5.1 Beyond career progression and self-development**

The previous discussion on transnational company transferees highlighted career progression as one of the reasons why Singaporean transmigrants move to London. The presence of transnational companies and highly skilled international labour in global cities further reinforces the global control capabilities of these cities and thereby their appeal to potential labour migrants (Findlay *et al*, 1996; Beaverstock and Boardwell, 2000). I also emphasised that educational histories and networks act as factors enabling other Singaporean transmigrants to return or remain in London to work after the completion of their studies. A number of them said that their original decision to study in the UK had been with the intention to position themselves advantageously for later employment in the country. As such, access to good work training opportunities and a challenging work environment prompt Singaporean transmigrants to work in London.

However, in their study of young New Zealanders in London, Conradson and Latham (2005b:290) argue that monetary returns and career progression (economic motivations) were not the only reasons why these transmigrants

moved to London. Rather, their migration was also motivated by 'a more prosaic (but no less interesting) process of sustained self-experimentation, exploration, and development afforded by the liminality of travel' (ibid). In other words, migration may be propelled by reasons that are more nuanced than career and financial concerns. I found evidence of this interspersed in the narratives of many of the Singaporean transmigrants I interviewed in London.

Helen was one of the four working holidaymakers in my study sample. Her visa enables her to be employed as a project manager on various short-term work contracts in London. She had previously studied in the United States and returned to work in Singapore for a short period of time. Then she decided to move to London to undertake a postgraduate degree and eventually became a working holidaymaker in the UK. Although her pay and job security in London were less advantageous than when she was working in Singapore, she told me that she believes the trade-off is worth it because the London experience would benefit her career progression when she returns to Singapore.

However, Helen's migration motivations were simultaneously intertwined with the desire to 'try out different environments and encounter different peoples both in the workplace and in a different community outside of work'. She explained her migration decision as:

Professionally [London] is the place that I like to be at the moment. It is very interesting even though I am juggling a strange configuration of jobs and assignments. I think it is stressful in that regard because financially I am not completely viable. But exposure-wise in terms of the experience, the diversity of development agencies, opportunities within the sector that I am interested in – be they internships or volunteering; the kind of people that I have met... It is

collecting and building up experiences and knowledge before eventually casting roots down [in Singapore].

Helen exemplifies a group of Singaporean transmigrants whose 'mobility emerges from a complex set of personal motivations, amongst which financial considerations are not primary' (Conradson and Latham, 2005b:288). In Helen's case, the 'exposure', 'experience', 'diversity', 'opportunities', 'kind of people' and 'activities' that she found in London were the more important aspects of mobility. To her, it affords the chance for career progression while being experimental at this point in her life.

In Conradson and Latham's (2005b) consideration of New Zealander transmigrants in London, there is, however, a significant silence on the influence of political, societal and cultural conditions in the country of origin, and the way these factors shape migration motivations. Instead at the centre of their analysis lies the 'process of societal individualisation' that 'places an enormous emphasis on the cultivation and the nurture of the individual self' (ibid, 293). Although they (ibid) qualify that this does not suggest that individuals have become decoupled from social institutions, the end-result is, I argue, an over-valorisation of the 'self'. I postulate that this is a consequence of the context-specificity of the New Zealand case-study, which is characterised by a relatively liberal political climate and an individualistic societal culture. In contrast, one of the themes that emerged from my research is the way that the societal and institutional impetuses in the country of origin act as important triggers for emigration.

Patricia was one of those Singaporean transmigrants who moved to London not only because of its attractions, but also in response to particular societal dynamics back in Singapore. She had undertaken her undergraduate education in London in the knowledge that the British legal qualifications would be compatible with the requirements of the legal profession in Singapore if she wanted to work as lawyer there. She eventually returned to work in Singapore for a year but she decided to move to London again. Although her move was tied to the pull of London for work purposes, she also revealed that her decision was in no small part prompted by her unhappiness with the work culture in Singapore:

It is more professional [in London] in terms of interaction with your colleagues. You don't feel that everything is personality-driven. You can have an argument with your boss and after the argument is over it doesn't carry on into your personal life, whereas in Singapore I felt that everything rolls into one... Work takes your whole life and you are not able to have that professional interaction with your colleagues... I think that Singaporeans have not evolved in their work in terms of professionalism, like work is work and life is life. They are not sophisticated enough to make that distinction. It is also Chinese, taking things to heart that Western people I think, have less of...

What is noteworthy in Patricia's narrative is, first, she faults the lack of 'professionalism' amongst Singaporean workers on ethnicity; and second, she presumes that 'Western people' are less likely than the Chinese to take things to heart.

Patricia's rather stinging critique of the Singaporean workplace was not unusual amongst my respondents. These Singaporean transmigrants preferred Western working norms, which they constructed as 'different' from

‘Singaporean’ work cultures. Their attitudes reflect a larger malaise in Singaporean society in which stereotypes of ‘Western’ and ‘Chinese’ cultures (the latter was often conflated with ‘Singaporean’) are circulated and uncritically reproduced. However, like ‘race’ (see Jackson and Penrose, 1993), ‘culture’ is a social construct whose essentialising and naturalised condition needs to be problematised in relation to the power geometries that constitute it.

I illustrate this argument through Ian’s narrative, which depicts the hierarchies of ‘race’ and ‘culture’, but also reveals the mutable and contested nature of these social constructs. Explaining his migration decision, Ian said:

I [felt] that it would help enrich myself to live [...] in a different part of the world [and] see a different culture. The second aspect is for career development. When I was working for a Singaporean firm I always felt that we have this mentality where we tend to look down on ourselves. If we are Singapore-trained and we don’t have exposure overseas then we are second-class... I felt that acutely in both [companies] where I worked because we always assumed that foreigners are better. As long as there were foreigners in our team we assumed that they are foreign talent and they are more talented than we are. It was very frustrating because I studied abroad as well. I know that that is not necessarily the case. I mean, sure there are foreigners who are very good but we shouldn’t assume that every foreigner is better than a local. And I felt that in order to further my career I had to prove that I could work abroad in a foreign environment in a foreign firm with foreigners.

Ian’s narrative depicts a complex set of motivations for migration: to enrich himself, to progress in his career, and to prove that he was as good as the ‘foreign talent’ hired by Singaporean companies.

The ‘foreign talent’ issue is a hotly debated topic in Singaporean society. In a country of only 3.5 million Singaporean citizens (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2005), the Singaporean state has always stressed the importance of

welcoming skilled and professional foreigners to work in all sectors in Singapore (see Chapter Two). Singaporeans, however, regard this as competition for jobs and they resent the privileges accorded to these foreigners in a bid to attract them to move to Singapore (Ho, 2006). Ian’s move to London can be read as a backlash response to stereotypes in Singapore claiming that Western employees are more effective than Singaporean workers. To Ian, who had been educated overseas on a government-sponsored undergraduate scholarship, the ‘foreign talent’ policy becomes unreasonable when it is simply ‘assumed that foreigners are better’. In a personal quest to challenge this typecasting, he undertook a masters-level qualification in London and then full-time paid employment in the City of London.

In the following dialogue, I further probed this issue on ‘foreign’ versus ‘Singaporean’ workers by questioning what he thought was the source of the stereotypes:

EH: Was this a perception on your part, on your superior’s part or your colleagues’ part?

Ian: A lot of it is basically those [of] colleagues and superiors.

EH: Why do you think they have this mentality?

Ian: I think part of it must be our colonial past. We were a colony before and the people in [power] were foreigners. That mindset has probably been with Singaporeans – or the people of Singapore – for many, many years. So it is very hard to just get out of that mindset. I ask myself this question a lot. I go to China and the people don’t have this mentality there. The Mainland Chinese don’t assume that white people are better; they don’t. Likewise if you go to Thailand the people don’t necessarily think that way too. But the people who have been colonised before – Malaysia, Singapore, even Hong Kong – they do have that mindset and I think it is going to take time to change.

Here Ian attributes the assumption of ‘white’ superiority to Singapore’s colonial history when the island was governed by the white-European political and mercantile classes. Ian’s migration motivation can thus be interpreted as a personal response to challenge stereotypes of ‘white’ superiority in postcolonial Singapore.

Comparing Patricia and Ian’s narratives of migration reveals even deeper underlying tensions between Singapore’s colonial past, postcolonial present and future ambitions to be a cosmopolitan global city. Having spent close to a decade studying and then working overseas in a high-flying professional job, Patricia may be categorised as a prototype of the ‘Singaporean cosmopolitan’ that the Singaporean state aspires to fashion in its cosmopolis project (Goh, 1999). However, Patricia’s vignette expressing her beliefs that ‘Western’ people are less petty than the Chinese’ and that her Singaporean colleagues ‘are not sophisticated enough’, reflects essentialising constructs circulating in Singaporean society that are rooted in the colonial past. Postcolonial Singapore still operates under a colonial rubric that subscribes to a hierarchical and complex placing of class, nationality and ethnicity (Yeoh, 2004 and 2006; Ho, 2006).

This argument shows that, paradoxically, the Singaporean state’s initiatives towards cosmopolitanism are locked in social-cultural and spatial articulations based on constructed perceptions of the East and the West, which also centre the power-geometries located in Western contexts (Massey, 1992). Global

cities – such as Singapore and London – that are populated by past and new waves of migration are also sites of contradictory postcolonial social encounters and politics that reconfigure understandings of the colonial past, postcolonial present and ‘cosmopolitan’ future.

The arguments presented here indicate that in addition to what has been mooted by Conradson and Latham (2005a and 2005b) as motivations to migrate in order to develop the ‘self’, the significance of institutional and societal impetuses for migration should not be overlooked too. One of these institutional and societal factors, as I showed in this discussion, relates to postcolonial histories and contemporary ‘cosmopolitanism’ discourses. In the next discussion, I will highlight the way that the state-society link in Singapore influences the decisions of Singaporean transmigrants to move to London,

## 5.2 Escape from ‘comfort’ and ‘control’

Central control is the other hallmark of an Air-conditioned Nation. Managing the temperature of a habitat through air-conditioning requires covering up openings, providing adequate power supply, and ensuring regular servicing. Singapore’s development model, similarly, is a total systems approach to economic management. It is highly infrastructure intensive, and demands fine planning and constant management... In an Air-conditioned Nation [...] comfort is achieved through control.

(George, 2003:17-18)

This observation was made by Cherian George, a journalist-turned-academic based in Singapore and also the author of the book, *The Air-conditioned Nation*. His metaphor – describing Singapore as an Air-conditioned Nation – refers to the politics of control and comfort in the nation-state. In his book,



George (2003:14) highlights the beliefs of Lee Kuan Yew – popularly regarded as the founding father of modern-day Singapore – who argued that it was the humble air-conditioner which made the Singaporean lifestyle comparable to temperate climates, thereby improving work productivity and efficiency in the city-state.

Lee’s argument is controversial but what is striking about the metaphor of the ‘Air-conditioned Nation’ employed by George is the imagery that connotes closure and boundary-making. An ‘Air-conditioned Nation’ inevitably has to be cordoned to maintain a controlled and constant temperature within the delimited environment. Singaporean migration, as I discussed in Chapter Two, is brokered by the Singaporean state, which encourages citizens to spend some time working and living abroad to gain an overseas experience that would benefit Singapore’s economic progress. However in this section, I show that migration also provides a means of breaking out of the zone of comfort for those Singaporean transmigrants who have grown weary of being conditioned in what comes across strongly as an engineered society and polity.

Take for example, Irene who moved to London using the working holidaymaker visa because she wanted to try a more ‘creative job’. After completing her undergraduate education in the UK, she returned to Singapore to work. However, she decided to move to England again soon after, explaining that:

I would rather live in England than in Singapore... I really liked my time in university here. People here are different. They are slightly more, I would hesitate to say they are more interesting, because that gets a little harsh but there are more people here. It is a large city so obviously there is more variety of people and they have a different outlook from the people you have grown up with, especially if you grew up in Singapore. [There] are five junior colleges [in Singapore] and everyone knows everyone. After a while it seems like a little village!... It is really cosy, but for me, it makes my skin crawl. I don't want to know another person who plays golf at the same country club as my friends who you know, work in the same law firm. It's just, oh, I can't... I like the fact that [in London] I can meet individuals who are slightly offbeat, kind of bookish like me. I'm not into the usual Singaporean thing, which is like learning how to play golf. I club but I'm not like crazy and I certainly don't like sitting around eating supper everyday.

Irene's motivation for moving to London was not for career progression or monetary returns. Rather it was because she felt that Singaporean society was too 'cosy' (comfortable) or limiting for her liking.

Although there are more than five junior colleges (pre-universities) in Singapore, the interlinking networks between Singaporeans who attend the few top-ranking schools in the country mean it is likely that friendship circles between the collegiate from these institutions would overlap. Some of these friendship circles are transported to London through transmigrancy. Unlike the New Zealanders in Conradson and Latham's (2005b) study who replicate friendship networks from home during their transmigrancy, the re-emergence of such friendship networks was not necessarily relished by the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. They had left Singapore because they wanted to escape from the 'village' environment in Singapore in the first place, as described by Irene.

In Irene’s case, she snubs what she deemed as some typical Singaporean social practices, such as socialising over supper, golf games and clubbing. Instead she was attracted to London because, first, her friends from the British university that she used to attend were now working in the City of London; and second, she could meet like-minded individuals in London. She also highlighted her view that:

I think a lot of my own [Singaporean] friends [are] unhappy with Singapore...  
They are just moving really, anywhere but Singapore...

Although Irene shared an apartment with other Singaporeans, she emphasises that the people she lived with in London were not ‘typically Singaporean’. Throughout the interview, I found that she consciously differentiated herself from other Singaporeans. Her resistance towards being typecast as ‘Singaporean’ was not unusual amongst the Singaporean transmigrants that I met in London.

Such Singaporean transmigrants reflexively portray themselves as having a ‘cosmopolitan’ outlook and lifestyle. Their narratives defined ‘cosmopolitanism’ not only in terms of their self-image (such as travel and overseas exposure, language competencies, embodied norms and values, and identity), but also in relation to other Singaporeans who have what they consider more ‘localised’ attitudes and behavioural traits. The politics of representation come to mind in such instances wherein the cosmopolitan ‘self’ is consciously narrated in a way that distinguishes itself from Others who may

be construed as similar to self. The politics of ‘cosmopolitanism’ in relation to the Singaporean community will be developed in detail later in this thesis.

My findings also indicate that the emigration of Singaporeans appear to be in reaction to the societal discipline directly and indirectly enacted by the interventionist Singaporean state. The evolution of Singaporean society is arguably in part constituted through the ideologies and practices circulated by the Singaporean state. I illustrate the rationale behind this argument through the narrative of Olivia. When she returned to Singapore after an overseas education in the UK, Olivia found that she did not ‘fit in’ with Singaporean society anymore. Elaborating on her experience in Singapore, she said:

I [was] offered a job in Singapore and as most young people do, I took the job. I was training for two months and I couldn’t take it anymore. It was a very Singaporean environment, which I didn’t fit... It’s just very Singaporean and very judgemental and small-minded... In a Singaporean firm there are all these strange hang-ups if you don’t fit a certain mould... I am not sure if I can explain this but unquestioning, sucking up to your superiors seems to be a big thing, that kind of speaking in a certain way. They claim I speak differently. They expect everybody to be like them... They think, ‘Oh you think you are better and you are rejecting us’.

During the interview, I found that Olivia spoke grammatically correct and articulate English, which might have made her stand out amongst her Singaporean colleagues who were more likely to use *Singlish* (Singaporean English comprising a mix of English and other languages used by the different ethnic and dialect groups in Singapore) in their daily parlance. The politics of the English language in Singapore can also be interpreted as identity politics shaped by distinctions in class, educational background and cultural capital. An individual like Olivia – who had been educated at elite schools in Singapore

and later undertook an expensive overseas education – stood out on account of her accent, which was construed by her colleagues in Singapore as cosmopolitan pretension.

Olivia also expressed frustration about facing workplace prejudice in Singapore. She explained that the Singaporean conglomerate employing her had undertaken a mass recruitment exercise at the British university where she studied. However, unlike the rest of the recruited cohort who had been given investment-related positions when they started work, she was offered a job to train ‘those who did investments’. Olivia surmised that the underlying reason had been because her undergraduate major in the social sciences was not categorically associated with a financial background. However, she argued that the ‘politics, philosophy and economics’ combination selected by her contemporaries was also not necessarily useful for financial work.

Olivia eventually resigned from that job to take up another position in an international law firm that later sponsored her legal training in the UK. In the following dialogue, she recounted to me her experience in the Singaporean company:

Olivia: At first I thought I would just take the job but later I thought, ‘Why am I being prejudiced against?’ It is not that I can’t do it. I am now a financial lawyer. It is all tinted lenses.

EH: Where do you think it stems from? Is it society, employers or...

Olivia: All of them, *the government especially*. These values are very ingrained. In our society we needed the kind of skills to make it the country that it is, and these skills are finance-based, engineering and law. But it is not necessarily the only way to do things. (Emphasis original)

Olivia’s account strongly suggests she believed that the values and norms in Singaporean society, particularly in relation to skills and attitudes, were direct and indirect outcomes of an interventionist state.

Based on the findings of a quantitative survey conducted amongst Singaporeans in Singapore, Tan (2005) argues that political alienation is not a significant factor for emigration. However, my qualitative research probing migration motivations amongst overseas Singaporeans suggests that the combined effects of economic, societal and political factors influence emigration decisions. Olivia’s impetus for migration stems from her rejection of the way that the state-society nexus manifests itself in Singapore. By her act of migration, she was challenging and transgressing the social-cultural boundaries set up by the Singaporean state and maintained by mainstream Singaporean society.

Another respondent, Lionel, emphasised even more strongly the climate of societal ‘control’ that he experienced while working and living in Singapore.

Lionel, who had worked in the Singaporean civil service, said to me:

I was getting more and more unhappy for various reasons and it got too much for me [so] I finally decided that I didn’t want to go on like that. It may sound like little things [such as] not being allowed to ask questions or to question anything... It generated a lot of hostility not just from the people-in-charge but also [my colleagues] who pulled me aside and told me, ‘We are telling you this for your own good. Stop asking so much’. I felt that everyone was trying to make me fit into a system that I didn’t fit into... Whenever I read The Straits Times online I get so angry about the way it is micromanaged. I felt like I was being controlled all the time [in Singapore]... It is such a paranoid nation... It is very top-down.

By describing Singapore as a ‘top-down’ nation, Lionel was in fact referring to political governance in Singapore and the way that the political culture of paternalism and control had filtered down to the everyday psyche of Singaporean society. The relationship between society, culture and the state has been brought to the forefront by Marston (2004:5) who argues that the state should be confronted less as an abstraction with autonomy from the rest of society, and more as a manifestation of the materialised social practices of human agents. Lionel’s narrative illustrates that just as the state is a product of society and culture, so is societal culture a product of state practices.

In the Singaporean case study, the way that society embodies the state became reason for independent-minded young Singaporeans to take flight instead of conforming to the norms shaped by the tightly interlocking state-society nexus. In Lionel’s case, he decided to return to the UK since he had previously studied in a British university:

I chose to come to live in London which is more expensive than Singapore. I earn a lot less money. The way I live has completely changed. One reason I cycle everywhere is because I can’t afford the tube. I am the sort of person for whom money is not very important. I like to have enough to live comfortably but I am not willing to sell myself to get that. I am not going to do a job I hate or live somewhere I don’t agree with. I guess it is a trade-off. I am happy with the way I am living. I am doing exactly what I want. I feel free. The trade-off is I don’t have as much money and I can’t buy as much as I like.

At the time of the interview, Lionel was teaching in a language school on a working holidaymaker visa and simultaneously pursuing his interest in theatre. His lifestyle in London was more frugal compared to what he had been

accustomed in Singapore, where it was sustained by a comfortable income. However, he had no qualms about his quality of life and the freedom experienced in London. Instead of having to ‘fit into a system’, he was free to ‘do exactly what [he] want[s]’ with his life.

Irene, Olivia and Lionel belong to a category of Singaporeans who were unwilling to conform to what they consider mainstream Singaporean society, which they regard as ‘too cosy’, ‘unquestioning’ and ‘paranoid’. Individually they reiterated that they did not ‘fit in’ with such a national and societal culture. Olivia and Lionel also highlighted the role that they believe the Singaporean state has played through policies, campaigns and ideologies that shape the societal norms and values in Singapore. These individuals tend to hold the Singaporean state to account for the way Singaporean society has evolved. This directly and indirectly impinges on their decisions whether to remain in Singapore or move elsewhere.

Whilst previous educational histories in a more liberal foreign country might have helped shaped critical perspectives towards Singaporean society and the Singaporean state amongst these Singaporean transmigrants, I argue that such attitudes were noticeable even amongst those respondents who had not lived outside of Singapore prior to their move to the UK. Hence, although the ‘Air-conditioned Nation’ was comfortable, the climate of control was also resisted (Olivia: ‘It is not the only way to do things’) and challenged (Lionel: ‘I am not



going to... live somewhere I don't agree with') through the flight of Singaporean transmigrants.

Drawing together the two discussions in this section, I emphasise the influence of institutional and societal impetuses as motivations for migration that have been thus far neglected in the emerging scholarship on middling transnationalism. In the Singaporean case study, the motivations for Singaporean emigration appear to be born out of contradictory representations in Singaporean society that are the product of the colonial past, postcolonial present and 'cosmopolitan' future. These historically and spatially mediated representations are in turn underpinned and circulated by the ideologies and practices of the Singaporean state. However, the manner in which individual and group mobility inflects upon nationhood and citizenship in the context of advanced capitalism and global economic competition is still open to further debate.

## **6 Conclusion**

This chapter identified the limits of the existing literature on highly skilled migration by demonstrating the variety of 'highly skilled' migrant experiences and the creative means through which such individuals migrate. My research shows that in their quest to remain in the UK, Singaporean transmigrants in London utilised what I term as 'inventive' migration strategies. In the course of their migration trajectories, they engaged with a range of visa categories permitted by the British state. Some of these visas, such as the working

holidaymaker scheme, even fall outside what would be considered conventional definitions of the ‘highly skilled’. My study further underscores the significance of educational networks and histories as important factors precipitating and facilitating migration to London.

I next considered migration motivations and underscored the need to go beyond the economic rationalities of migration. Like Conradson and Latham (2005b), I argue that non-calculable indices, such as personal exploration and development in the social and cultural milieus, are not merely secondary considerations for migration. I also draw attention to the institutional and societal contexts in the country of origin as important factors shaping migration decisions and experiences. In the Singaporean case study, postcolonial mentalities in relation to Singapore’s contemporary cosmopolitanism project emerged as an important theme in my research. This was conveyed by my respondents in terms of coming to London (a more ‘cosmopolitan’ city) to encounter ‘foreigners’ and to challenge colonial framings within Singapore by studying alongside and competing ‘with Westerners’. Other than that, negative perceptions amongst Singaporean transmigrants toward the tightly interlocking Singaporean state-society nexus also compelled their emigration. I will develop these themes further in the subsequent chapters.

In this chapter, I also discussed the gendered dimensions of skilled migration. In some ways, the migration experiences of female Singaporean transmigrants resonate with the ‘trailing spouses’ and ‘dependents’ imagery popularised by

existing feminist critique. However, I also make the argument that the liberal immigration regime and labour market in the UK enabled some of these women to make new career explorations whilst living overseas. As such, their migration can be viewed in an emancipating light. For these women, their partner-led migration trajectory was as much tied to their spouses’ career advancement as to their own desire for exploration and self-development. In this way, I underline the importance of keeping in view the multiple and flexible forms of femininity circulating in society. This finding contributes to developments in feminist scholarship with regards to gender, work and transnational migration.

By examining ‘highly skilled’ migration, my research develops the scholarship on middling transnationalism in two ways. First, I advocate a migration perspective sensitive to the fluxes that occur during the migration trajectory. Highly skilled migrants may not be channelled into ‘highly skilled’ occupations. In some instances, the de-valorisation of their skills set is not a matter of choice, but it is equally likely that for others, undertaking a different occupation is a deliberate lifestyle choice. Migrants may shift in and out of their highly skilled career trajectories to work in other jobs, explore their interests or undertake additional educational and professional qualifications. Paying attention to these shifts gives due recognition to the temporal, social-cultural and spatial situatedness of mobile subjects.

Second, I also argue that looking at forms of middling transnationalism is insufficient. Instead, a fuller picture of the migration experience can be obtained only by taking into account the motivations for migration, which explain why particular migration strategies and trajectories are undertaken. In this respect, I urge for the need to consider migration motivations not only in terms of the individual ‘self’, but to relate the ‘self’ to broader institutional and societal dynamics in the country of origin.

# 5

## **Nation, state and the trans-‘national’: Discourses of belonging, identity and community**

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## **1 Introduction**

Whilst accentuated transnational migration often compels immigrant-receiving states to spell out the terms of inclusion and exclusion from the national polity more explicitly, migrant-sending states are also establishing programmes to extend an extraterritorial reach over internationally mobile citizens. From this chapter onwards, I focus on my research objective to explore the relationship between transnational migration and citizenship. In this chapter, I address in particular the meaning of membership to a national community during transmigrancy. I do this by exploring the perspectives of the state and internationally mobile citizens towards citizenship.

In this chapter, I argue that the Singaporean state intentionally underlines ideals of belonging, identity and community in the way that it constructs Singapore citizenship extraterritorially. Meanwhile, although ideas of belonging come to the fore in the way the Singaporean transmigrants in my study conceptualised citizenship, they structured their ideas of belonging towards Singapore in emotionally and socially complex ways. Their emphases on belonging also should not be taken as a simplistic identification with the national community during transmigrancy. Instead I propose that the idea of a Singaporean trans-‘national’ community is internally fractured by intersecting axes of social identity. My goal in this chapter is to problematise the presumed interconnections that link internationally mobile citizens with the sending state and national community during transmigrancy.

I develop my argument in three parts. The first part addresses the ways in which the Singaporean state constructs citizenship extraterritorially. This discussion reveals the character and projected outcomes of particular state discourses, legislation and policy practices. I begin by highlighting the significance of overseas Singaporeans to the Singaporean state in terms of economic value as well as other social and political concerns. I pay special attention to the political rhetoric couching citizenship in terms of belonging, identity and community. Next, I consider two examples of legislation used by the Singaporean state to ensure overseas Singaporeans remain formally and singularly committed to the city-state. Lastly, I focus on policy initiatives that are deployed in cooperation with non-state actors to create the imagination of a tangible extraterritorial Singaporean community. Through these themes, I suggest that the extraterritorial construction of Singapore citizenship by the Singaporean state is characterised by the concurrent expansion and contraction of ways of governance.

Next, I turn my focus to the perspectives of Singaporean transmigrants toward citizenship. I do this in order to consider the way they respond to the Singaporean state’s attempts to shape citizenship extraterritorially. I examine their constructions of citizenship and tease out the multiple and often conflating meanings given to citizenship. I then foreground the idea of ‘belonging’, which came up as a predominant theme in their interpretations of citizenship. I use ‘belonging’ to forward the concept of *‘emotional citizenship’* so as to stress the contingent, subjective and socially differentiated nature of

citizenship. I also focus on the ambivalent attitudes towards a ‘Singaporean’ national identity and suggest that the salience of ‘belonging’ should not be confused with national identification. I argue that these findings indicate the contingent power of state actors to project an extraterritorial national identity upon its overseas citizenry.

The final part of this chapter continues to problematise the power of the Singaporean state to define belonging, identity and community in extraterritorial ways. I do this by debating the manifestations of a Singaporean transnational community in London. I argue that despite state attempts to create the idea of a coherent transnational community, the Singaporean transmigrants in my study did not identify with this. I provide evidence, first, by examining the way they positioned ‘self’ in relation to fellow overseas Singaporeans and the Singaporean state. Second, I consider some of the social and cultural politics between and within the Singaporean community associations in London. Through this discussion, I demonstrate that political inclinations, generational differences, duration of overseas stay, socio-professional interests, cosmopolitan framings and ethnicity are important variables in the constitution and manifestations of transnational migration processes and formations (Scott, 2004; Smith, 2005). In this way, my analysis contributes to transnationalism scholarship by pointing out the distinctiveness of transnational social formations over space and time.



## 2 Extraterritorial constructions of Singapore citizenship

It is now widely recognised that even though capital has outgrown the shell of the nation-state through globalisation, the nation-state remains central to the functioning of capital and in the imagination of national populations. In fact, the Singaporean state, helmed by the People’s Action Party (PAP) government, successfully mobilised globalisation to strengthen civic and ethno-cultural nationalism within the territorial framework of the city-state (Brown, 2000). However, what about the remit of the Singaporean state over its overseas citizenry? How does the Singaporean state maintain sovereignty over internationally mobile citizens riding the waves of globalisation? This section examines the extraterritorial construction of Singapore citizenship by the Singaporean state. In doing so, I argue that whilst encouraging the globalisation of Singaporean citizens, the Singaporean state simultaneously uses specific technologies of rule to tie them to the national community.

The globalisation of Singaporeans is strongly encouraged by the Singaporean state as part of its strategy to position Singapore as a cosmopolitan and economically competitive city-state within the global economy (see Chapter Two). As Yeoh and Willis (1998:2) explain, the Singaporean case-study epitomises a ‘diasporic design’ in which ‘new forms of identification [are] assumed by nation-states and individuals [...] in *strategic* ways to better position themselves in a globalising world’ (emphasis original). Nonetheless, this ‘diasporic design’ (ibid) of the Singaporean state is contingent on the condition that overseas Singaporeans do not form ties of attachment and

allegiance to another country, and rescind their legal membership and commitment to Singapore. Therefore even as the Singaporean state exhorts Singaporeans to explore an ‘external wing’ (Yeoh and Willis, 1998 and 1999; Yap, 1999) for the Singaporean economy, it also endeavours to expand its reach towards overseas Singaporeans and tighten the remit over them. These political rationalities are implemented in a number of diffuse ways that I explicate in this section and categorise as the ‘Overseas Singaporeans Strategy’.

The population of Singapore consists of only 3.5 million citizens (another 1 million are foreigners) (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2005). In the belief that Singaporeans living abroad are likely to be highly skilled, well-educated and cosmopolitan in their mindsets, the political elite in Singapore emphasise the need to retain their commitment since they can contribute to the success of Singapore. Highlighting the importance of the community of overseas Singaporeans to the Singaporean economy, former Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (now Prime Minister) said:

The diaspora of overseas Singaporeans is growing. We need to maintain links with them, make them feel part of the Singapore family, tap them for their contacts, their networks, their knowledge of the countries they live and work in. (Lee, 2002)

In the above speech given to undergraduates at a Singaporean university, overseas Singaporeans are represented by Lee (ibid) as ‘pivotal actor[s] in the economic realm [and] a potential catalyst for economic development and [the] prosperity’ (Smith and Bakker, 2005:140) of the country. From the state

perspective, overseas Singaporeans are regarded as a potential economic asset in terms of the overseas experience, exposure and networks that they accrue from living abroad.

However, I argue that the social and political dimensions also need to be taken into consideration to fully comprehend the interest of the Singaporean state in its overseas citizenry. When I was liaising with Singaporean policymakers for this research, my request to be put in touch with the relevant ministries to discuss ‘citizenship issues’ resulted in follow-up interviews with representatives from the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) (in-charge of labour affairs), the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) (in-charge of immigration) and the Ministry of Community, Youth and Sports (MCYS) (in-charge of population and social issues). I was informed that the representatives from these ministries were interested to know more about my research because it falls under the rubric of ‘population issues’ for them. This encounter alerted me to the non-economic currents underpinning the ‘Overseas Singaporeans Strategy’.

Singapore has an ageing population, which coupled with a declining birth rate, results in demographic concerns over the social reproduction of the Singaporean population. Whilst the outflow of Singaporeans in this generation has the potential to generate economic benefits for Singapore, if these persons fail to return to Singapore, the ramifications could mean future labour shortages and problems for a country that is dependent on military

conscription. More importantly, the political elite believe that overseas Singaporeans and their offspring represent ‘talent’ in terms of future leadership resources for Singapore. Therefore, liberalising the rules governing the passing down of Singapore citizenship by descent for overseas Singaporeans (see Chapter Two) sends an important signal encouraging the eventual return of overseas Singaporeans and their families (including foreign spouses). Even though the volume of returning Singaporeans would not contribute tangibly to a population increase for Singapore, the deeper significance for formalising their ties with Singapore has to do with perpetuating an intergenerational sense of national belonging, identity and community amongst the overseas citizenry.

I also posit that ‘population issues’ pertain to concerns over social cohesion in Singapore. The potential fractures to the national fabric arising from the mobility of Singaporeans received widespread attention in 1999 when former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong sparked what later came to be known as the ‘cosmopolitan’-‘heartlander’<sup>1</sup> debate (Goh, 1999). The purported differences between the internationally mobile ‘cosmopolitans’ and the less mobile ‘heartlanders’ in terms of socio-economic status, values, outlook and mobility

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<sup>1</sup> Goh (1999) used the term, ‘heartlander’, to refer to the conservative majority in Singapore who live in public housing estates. He described them as being rooted in their cultures and traditions, respectful of authority and less vocal in their demands. Their concerns are also likely to centre on their livelihood and children’s education, rather than abstract notions of artistic and political space. While heartlanders speak ‘*Singlish*’ (Singaporean English) and make their living locally because their skills are not marketable internationally, the ‘cosmopolitans’ speak English and have skills that command high incomes. Cosmopolitans have an international outlook that enables them to work and be comfortable anywhere in the world.

prompted the former Prime Minister to project a vision of Singapore as a home where these two groups of Singaporeans should bond and identify with one another (*The Straits Times*, 23 August 1999).

Given the likely socio-economic divisions that mark overseas Singaporeans from their more localised counterparts, the value of overseas Singaporeans is, on the one hand, valorised to the national community so as to ameliorate any stirrings of local discontent. On the other hand, overseas Singaporeans are encouraged by the political elite to remain connected to the national fabric and conscious of their obligations to the national community. In other words, the ‘Overseas Singaporeans Strategy’ may be read as a holistic framework targeted at both internationally mobile and less mobile Singaporeans. The goal is to generate the social glue that would promote social cohesiveness in spite of the socio-economic and political challenges arising from globalisation and transnational migration.

These concerns over future leadership, national cohesion as well as human capital resources lead to moralising state discourses emphasising the need for overseas Singaporeans to remain rooted to the country, and to continue to identify with Singapore and the national community. The issue of emigrating Singaporeans received widespread public attention in 2002 – this time with reference to the ‘stayers’-‘quitters’ debate (see Chapter Two). Goh emphasised that whether Singaporeans choose to be a ‘stayer’ or a ‘quitter’ would depend on whether they regard Singapore as ‘[a] home for themselves and their

children, or whether they treat Singapore as a hotel’ (Goh, 2002). Whilst Goh included overseas Singaporeans who ‘feel’ (ibid) for Singapore’ in the ‘stayer’ category, this was based on expectations that they would retain their primary sense of belonging and allegiance to Singapore. In other words, overseas Singaporeans are expected to retain a single-minded commitment to the national community and polity. I now want to use two legislative examples – on dual citizenship and national service – to illustrate the ways in which this exclusivist mindset is projected in the construction of Singapore citizenship.

First, the dual citizenship restriction in the Singapore Constitution disallows Singaporean citizens from holding foreign citizenships. This rule dates back to the creation of Singapore citizenship in 1957 (see Chapter Two). This restriction had been premised on the fear that the immigrant origins of those who took up Singapore citizenship could result in their divided national loyalties. The justification for this rule was reiterated by the Minister of State for Home Affairs, Ho Peng Kee, during a parliamentary debate in 1999:

Singapore is young nation. We have not reached the stage of nationhood where a Singaporean with a second citizenship would still retain his identity and loyalty to Singapore as his homeland wherever he goes... (*Hansard Report*, 8 March 1999, column 86)

As the above anecdote makes clear, the dual citizenship restriction is tied to concerns over national identity, loyalty and ideals of homeland. The restriction on foreign citizenship implies that Singaporean citizens who wish to acquire foreign citizenship rights would have to give up their Singaporean citizenship status.

The discursive and practical contradictions arising from the existence of such a rule is exposed when viewed alongside the liberalisation of citizenship rules regulating the passing of Singapore citizenship from overseas Singaporean parents to their children (see Chapter Two). Despite allowing for the children of overseas Singaporeans to become Singaporean citizens more easily, young Singaporean citizens who hold dual citizenships by way of *jus soli* or *jus sanguinis* are still expected to choose between their Singaporean citizenship and the foreign citizenship when they reach twenty-one years old. For persons who have equally strong familial and emotional ties in both countries, it could be difficult to decide which citizenship they should give up.

There is no indication that the dual citizenship restriction in Singapore would change in the foreseeable future. The political elite cite reasons such as the fear of divided loyalties and complications arising from the national service requirement for male Singaporean citizens (*Hansard Report*, 8 March 1999). In other words, the legal status of Singapore citizenship and membership to the national polity carries with it the burden of duties and obligations to the nation-state. In a personal interview with a senior official from the Ministry of Home Affairs (in 2005), it was also hinted to me that another reason for not allowing dual citizenship is because of the sensitivity of the issue to ‘local’ Singaporeans. I infer from his comment that this refers to a situation in which less internationally mobile Singaporeans may begrudge the foreign citizenship privileges allowed to internationally mobile Singaporeans. As I suggested

earlier, there is a broader political concern over the viability of social and national cohesion in the light of the class, social and cultural divisions generated by globalisation and transnational migration.

Apart from the dual citizenship restriction, another way that the Singaporean state defines citizenship is through military conscription. The Enlistment Act requires male Singaporean citizens reaching eighteen years of age to serve in national service, and thereafter report for annual reservist duty till they are forty years old (Attorney General’s Chambers, 2006b). National service defaulters are liable to a fine or imprisonment. These technologies of citizenship, however, come under stress when citizens capitalise upon mobility to evade their national service duties. A highly publicised court case about an internationally acclaimed Singaporean pianist, Melvyn Tan, brought this issue to public debate in 2006 (*The Straits Times*, 17 January 2006; 14 February 2006). Tan left Singapore when he was thirteen to study music in Britain. His parents had paid S\$30 000 (approximately £10 000) as a bond to the Singaporean state to defer his national service. When Tan did not return, this sum of money was forfeited.

Tan subsequently renounced his Singaporean citizenship for British citizenship<sup>2</sup>. Although Tan became an internationally renowned pianist, he did

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<sup>2</sup> At that time, the prevailing policy in Singapore allowed national service defaulters to renounce their citizenship without being held liable for national service. However, this



not return to Singapore for three decades because the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) would have prosecuted him for evading his national service. However in 2005, advertisements carrying news of his solo performance in Singapore appeared in the local newspapers. It emerged that Tan was free to return because he had paid S\$3000 (approximately £1000) as a fine for his national service offence. By this time, he was past the upper age limit for national service. The news sparked a heated debate amongst Singaporeans, some who felt that he had been let off too lightly. The controversy highlights the underlying class issues in relation to nationhood: the costs of emigration and national service avoidance can be borne by wealthy Singaporeans, thereby incurring the resentment of less well-heeled Singaporeans who have no such recourse.

In the aftermath of the incident, the Enlistment Act was amended by the Singaporean state. Singaporean boys aged thirteen years and above who leave Singapore for more than three months now require an exit permit from the Ministry of Defence – the previous age requirement was sixteen and a half years old. Those who fail to obtain a permit would be fined S\$2000 (approximately £660) and their parents or legal guardians are individually liable to additional fines of the same amount. The maximum fine for national service defaulters has been doubled to S\$10 000 (approximately £3300) (*The*

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is no longer the case, as clarified by Defence Minister Teo Chee Hean, in the wake of the court case. Teo said that someone in a similar situation today would not be allowed to renounce his Singaporean citizenship and would still be liable for national service (*The Straits Times*, 17 January 2006).

*Straits Times*, 14 January 2006; *Today*, 4 April 2006). These new national service regulations point to the way in which the disciplinary measures of the Singaporean state extend over its citizens in both space and time. It also puts the onus on Singaporean parents to ensure that their sons fulfil national service; this can be read as an indication of the emphasis that the Singaporean state places on the family as a social institution and its intersections with nationhood and statehood.

What is distinctive about the two accounts of citizenship legislation in Singapore is that although the Singaporean state purports to have become more inclusive in its definition and practice of Singapore citizenship, it still adheres to a mentality in which belonging, identity, community, rights and responsibilities are defined in nationally exclusive ways. Moreover, the disciplinary discourses put in place by such legislation is both capitalist in intent – tapping on the economic capacities of overseas Singaporeans – and patriarchal in the way that paternalism and militarist masculinities are reinforced (Silvey, 2003; Wright, 2003).

Besides using legislation as a technology of rule, the Singaporean state has set in place a series of ‘soft’ measures or bureaucratic initiatives (Levitt and Dehesa, 2003:590) to reach out to overseas citizens. Singaporeans living overseas are encouraged to register with their local Singaporean diplomatic mission. In addition, a worldwide network of *Contact Singapore* government agencies serves as nodes for overseas Singaporeans to connect with one

another and with the state. In March 2006, a new initiative called the *Overseas Singaporean Unit* (OSU) was launched to signal the state’s growing interest in its overseas citizenry. This high-level initiative was announced by the Home Affairs Minister Wong Kan Seng (who is also the Deputy Prime Minister) during a dinner for overseas Singaporeans in London. He said that the OSU serves as an ‘information concierge’ for overseas Singaporeans, and it would organise bonding and networking social events to ‘help [...] those who are keen to return to Singapore to work, or be hired in a Singaporean company in other parts of the world’ (*Today*, 14 March 2006).

Other than official state initiatives, non-state actors also work in partnership with the Singaporean state to maintain contact with overseas Singaporeans. The Singapore International Foundation (SIF) receives both public and private sector support for its work to maintain links with overseas Singaporeans and Singaporean community associations (SIF, 2002). Besides the SIF, overseas Singaporean community associations have sprung up worldwide to reach out to the overseas Singaporean community. Most started off as local efforts by Singaporeans living abroad to maintain contact with Singapore and other overseas Singaporeans, but several of these associations now have increasing links with the Singaporean state. In London, these include the Singapore-UK Association (SUKA), Singapore Business Group (SBG), Singapore Professionals Network (SPN) and Singapore Golf Society (SGS).

When I was undertaking ethnographic fieldwork in London, I found that most of these overseas Singaporean community associations worked closely with Singaporean government officials based in London and in Singapore. Their committee members were often key figures in Singaporean businesses based in London. These groups helped to publicise the functions endorsed by the Singaporean government agencies, and in turn, their activities received the patronage of the state in terms of sponsorship and other social and political connections. Such community associations thereby contribute to the imagination of an overseas Singaporean community that the Singaporean state seeks to create as a means of keeping the extraterritorial citizenry connected to the national body.

The re-appropriation of the extraterritorial citizenry by the Singaporean state, whether through rhetoric, legislation or bureaucratic initiatives (in partnership with non-state actors), suggests a tightening framework to re-assert governance over internationally mobile citizens. The political rationalities characterising the 'Overseas Singaporeans Strategy' are often couched in references to belonging, identity, community that are encapsulated in the state ideal of Singapore citizenship. The question is to what extent are these state overtures accepted or resisted by internationally mobile Singaporeans?

### **3 ‘Grounding’ citizenship**

This section unpacks the meanings given to citizenship by the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. Unsurprisingly, different persons gave different meanings to their sense of Singapore citizenship. However, what I found particularly revealing was that the most salient facet of citizenship to them often had to do with aspects that I characterise in my analysis as ‘emotional citizenship’. In contrast, my respondents rarely brought up the political aspects of citizenship until I prompted the issue. Given that the silences in conversations often constitute unspoken statements of meaning (Hyams, 2004), I found this fieldwork encounter particularly telling about the way that citizenship was conceptualised in the imagination of Singaporean transmigrants, which reflects the nature of political governance and the state-citizen relationship in Singapore.

In this section, I argue that citizenship was interpreted by my respondents in ways that conflate distinct aspects of citizenship, thereby eliding the power relations that structure citizenship. Then using the concept of ‘belonging’, which was most often mentioned by them in relation to citizenship, I propose the idea of ‘emotional citizenship’ to underline the contingent, subjective and socially differentiated nature of citizenship as practice. However, I qualify that narratives of belonging in association with citizenship should not be confused with national identity or identification with the national community during

transmigrancy. Instead I argue that the idea of an identifiable extraterritorial Singaporean identity was often disputed by my respondents.

### **3.1 The multiplicities of citizenship**

The following analysis focuses on the multiple and conflating interpretations of citizenship from the perspective of Singaporean transmigrants. I suggest that the ambiguities associated with the concept and practice of citizenship conceal the power relations intended to produce particular political effects through citizenship.

Amongst those who participated in my study, citizenship was often most immediately conceived by them in terms of inclusion and exclusion. Take for example the response of Dewi when I asked what Singapore citizenship meant to her:

I am a [Singaporean] citizen simply because I am legally so, and at the end of the day that [is] where you are born. I think that the place [where] you are born would accept you a lot more willingly than the place that you are trying to flow [to] as an immigrant.

As a locally-born and bred Singaporean, Dewi regarded her citizenship status as a 'natural' mode of membership rooted in her place of birth. This conceptualisation of citizenship, which was typical amongst my respondents (despite their different backgrounds), emphasises that citizenship enacts territorial and social closure through axes of inclusion and exclusion (Brubaker, 1992) spelled out in social-cultural terms, such as the place of birth, shared ancestry or culture (Painter and Philo, 1995).

Based on these boundary-making mechanisms, social membership to the territorial and national polity presumably confers rights and demands obligations from citizens. For instance, Luke – who was also born and bred in Singapore – interpreted citizenship as:

Citizenship is belonging to a country. You have to follow the Constitution of the country while the country – the government – gives you special priorities, protects you from harm. [If] anything crops up, [it] is there for you in a political situation. Taking it further, I think a country should always, not just protect, but give its citizens special privileges that other people who come to the country do not enjoy.

Notions of belonging, duties or obligations (‘have to follow the Constitution’), and rights (‘special priorities... protects you from harm’) made up Luke’s understanding of citizenship. He also emphasised the boundaries of citizenship in terms of inclusion and exclusion (‘give its citizens special privileges that other people who come to the country do not enjoy’). In this view, citizenship encompasses rights, duties and obligations based on legal and social-cultural membership to a national polity (Painter and Philo, 1995; Isin and Turner, 2002).

I also found that the male Singaporean transmigrants in my study often associated citizenship with notions of allegiance, presumably because of their national service experience. Steven was one of my respondents who brought up allegiance in relation to citizenship:

EH: When I talk about citizenship, what comes to mind?

Steven: [Quickly] Allegiance.

EH: Can you elaborate?

Steven: I am a [Singaporean] citizen. If Singapore goes to war, I fight for Singapore. That is my definition of citizenship. ‘*Guo ming*’, or rather ‘*gong ming*’<sup>3</sup>. You are part of the country. A PR (permanent resident) is like an alien who just happens to be living on the piece of land, period. I met PRs – Malaysians in Singapore – and they have no bloody allegiance at all. I can’t stand the way they keep condemning Singapore... Maybe I am more nationalistic. That is what NS (national service) has made me.

Steven’s narrative emphasises that being ‘part of the country’, by which he meant having attained citizenship by birthright, entails pledging allegiance to the national polity. He believed this aspect of allegiance was lacking in those who only held permanent residency in Singapore. During the conversation, it came across clearly that Steven’s idea of citizenship was imbued with a sense of pride and devotion towards Singapore. In contrast, he was angered by what he perceived as a lack of commitment on the part of Singaporean permanent residents. The way he couched his attitude towards citizenship indicates that it was a deeply felt emotional issue for him.

However, I contend that the simplistic association of membership and belonging with notions of rights, duties and obligations (including allegiance) belies the political and social dynamics that structure citizenship. The conflation of belonging with aspects of duties and obligations may be used by political actors as strategic manoeuvres to perpetuate the notion of a singular commitment to a particular nation-state. I highlighted this in the preceding discussion underscoring the way the Singaporean state utilises discourses of

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<sup>3</sup> Both of these terms mean ‘citizen’ in Mandarin.



belonging, home, identity and community as moral devices to legitimise restrictive citizenship regulations.

Although Steven questioned the allegiance of Singaporean permanent residents, the following interview excerpt shows that male Singaporean permanent residents may develop a strong sense of loyalty to Singapore too.

Alan was a second generation Singaporean permanent resident and he completed his national service duty in Singapore (as required by the Enlistment Act) before moving to study and then to work in London:

There are three countries that I have connections with – Malaysia because I hold a passport; Singapore because I was born there and stayed there for twenty-one years; and England because I studied here. Malaysia I don't feel anything for... I like England a lot but I don't feel that this is home.... So that leaves Singapore. At this stage in life I would still say that Singapore is my home. Back to the rhetorical question, if Singapore goes to war with some other country, I [would] go back... Before I went to national service, I thought, 'Okay, fine. If I don't actually go they can't jail me. As long as I give up my PR I am fine'. But it's more like, 'Oh, if I don't go there are things that I have to give up'. To a certain extent, the minute I go [to national service] it [takes] the choice away from me about giving up my PR. I can still give up my PR but people are like, 'Oh, you have done your national service!'

Permanent residents and naturalised citizens usually have to think harder about citizenship than citizens who have been ascribed their citizenship status at birth. For Alan, the Malaysian citizenship ascribed to him by birthright means less than the Singapore permanent residency status that he obtained through his parents (also Singaporean permanent residents), and which he subsequently merited by fulfilling the national service requirement. The experience of Alan also points to the efficacy of national service as a legal mechanism and socialisation strategy to bind permanent residents and citizens to Singapore.

Nonetheless, the juxtaposition between Steven and Alan’s accounts of what citizenship means to them points to the problematic of assuming a simple correlation between allegiance and citizenship. The contingent association between allegiance and citizenship comes out even clearer in the way that another respondent, Lionel, narrated his attitudes towards citizenship. Although Lionel was born and had lived in Singapore for most of his life, he said:

I have a very fluid concept of citizenship. I think it is just whoever you choose to throw in your allegiance with. I don’t think it necessarily depends on where you were born or grew up. It is where you want to belong. I have a Singaporean passport but I don’t think of that as binding or permanent. I never chose to pledge my allegiance to Singapore so I don’t [feel] particularly bound to it. I think if I had been born elsewhere and applied for PR, then converted to citizenship, I would feel like I made some kind of commitment.

Lionel’s conceptualisation of citizenship emphasises that a sense of belonging is not a natural outcome of having been born in a place or growing up there. Instead belonging is a choice made by individuals that then leads to feelings of allegiance. This deconstruction of belonging as a matter of personal choice attests to the manufactured rather than natural condition of belonging.

The above discussion signals that there is a need to unpack the contents of citizenship and delineate the assumption of correlation between differentiated aspects of citizenship. The common running thread in the narratives I collated suggests that the affective element of belonging was the most salient aspect of citizenship to the Singaporean transmigrants in my study, and they were likely to premise other aspects of citizenship on the idea of belonging.

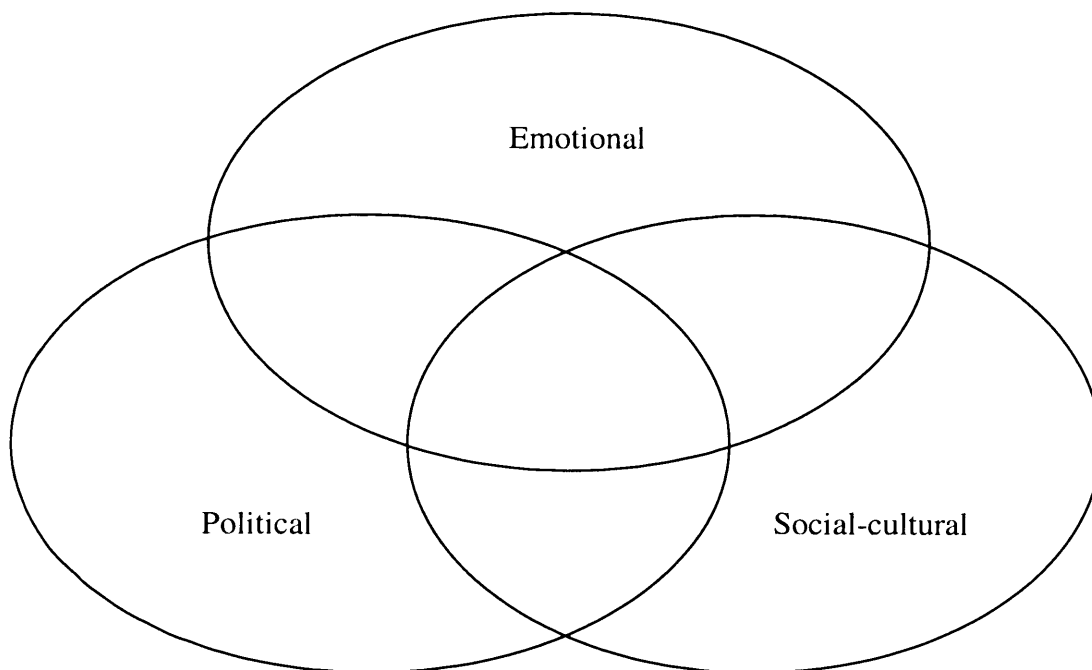
‘Belonging’ – like ‘race’ and nation (Jackson and Penrose, 1993) – is often taken for granted in both political and popular circles to be a natural condition that structures the way individuals and groups experience and understand the world. Even in academic discussions, the idea of belonging is sometimes mentioned as an immutable fact of membership in a political community even while it is recognised that national, ethnic, religious and other more particularistic identifiers are socially constructed and negotiated during transmigration (Nagel and Staeheli, 2004 and 2005; Secor, 2004). However, ‘belonging’ is a contested category that should be evaluated as a social construct so as to allow its reconstruction in ways that would challenge the power hierarchies of citizenship (Kannabiran *et al*, 2006).

### **3.2 ‘Emotional citizenship’ through discourses of belonging**

In this discussion, I forward the concept of ‘emotional citizenship’ to foreground the emotional intensities that underpin and give meaning to the concept and practice of citizenship. By introducing the concept of ‘emotional citizenship’, my intention is not to undermine previous conceptualisations of citizenship focusing on its political-legal and social-cultural content (Painter and Philo, 1995; Isin, 2002). Instead ‘emotional citizenship’ complements the main thrust behind those ideas underscoring the subjective and negotiated nature of citizenship (Figure 9). I develop the concept of emotional citizenship through the discourses of belonging expressed by my respondents. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the ideas behind emotional citizenship should only be limited to discussions on ‘belonging’. As I show later in this thesis, the concept

of emotional citizenship is useful for informing our understanding of the political-legal and social-cultural aspects of citizenship too.

In this discussion, I underscore the way that emotions work to shape belonging and structure citizenship. The condition of transmigration – in which human subjects undergo a set of experiential changes due to transnational migration – provides one way of re-evaluating the concept of belonging. I develop the concept of ‘emotional citizenship’ through belonging in two parts. First, I stress the contingent and emotional content of ‘belonging’. Second, I consider the ways in which ‘belonging’ is fractured by embodied and felt experiences of ethnicity.



**Figure 9 Dimensions of citizenship**

### 3.2.1 Contesting ‘belonging’

The first part of this discussion teases out some of the elements that constitute ‘belonging’ to a political and national community so as to underline the capricious and emotional qualities of ‘belonging’. Although there is now an emerging body of work exploring the ‘politics of belonging’ (Kannabiran *et al*, 2006:190), belonging in this scholarship is regarded as a ‘thicker’ concept than citizenship (*ibid*, 189) in the way that it is understood as ‘not just about membership, rights and duties, but also about the emotions that such membership evoke’<sup>4</sup>. Whilst agreeing with the emotional emphasis in this conceptualisation of belonging, I argue that this approach takes the intellectual analysis of belonging in a slightly different direction. Instead, in my thesis I foreground the emotional aspects of belonging so as to interrogate its production of citizenship.

Belonging is central to western models of citizenship in the way that it connotes membership to a territorial political community, often corresponding to the boundaries of a national community. In this sense, citizenship acts as a ‘strategy’ that ‘works to define and lay claim to a bounded space of belonging delimited against an *exteriority*’ (Secor, 2004:353; emphasis original). One of the ways in which Singaporean transmigrants constructed ‘belonging’ was by association with the image of ‘home’, such as in the case of Dina:

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<sup>4</sup> For an exception in this special issue of *Patterns of Prejudice* on the politics of belonging, see the contribution by Yuval-Davis (2006) that mentions the relationship between belonging, rights and duties in association with citizenship.

EH: What does citizenship mean to you? What comes to mind?

Dina: Home actually. It’s like belonging to a club, knowing that if you get kicked out of anywhere else you still have a place to go to, and the right to work and the right to live.

Dina had moved to live in London three years ago when she married her British partner. Her idea of citizenship was premised on a sense of belonging as a member of the political community, which then confers the rights to live and work within that territory.

Even though Dina could apply for British citizenship through her spouse, she was reluctant to do so because to her:

[Singapore citizenship] is always a backup. You never know what is going to happen... [But] it [also] goes back to how I feel that it is home. I don’t think you can ever change that.

Whilst professing the practical reasons for retaining her Singaporean citizenship in spite of her plans to settle in the UK, Dina also highlighted the importance of Singapore citizenship in terms of the way it symbolises ‘home’ to her. This illustrative anecdote underlines the centrality of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ in the citizen imagination. The imagery of ‘home’ and belonging has also been played up in political rhetoric in Singapore, such as with regards to the ‘cosmopolitan-heartlander’ and ‘stayers-quitters’ debates. ‘Home’ is used in these instances to connote security, familiarity and familial and friendship ties in order to lend credence to nationhood.

Nonetheless, critical cultural scholarship has highlighted the politicised (Ahmed *et al*, 2003; Blunt, 2005), multiple and fluid constructions of notions of ‘home’ (Walsh, 2006), which in turn begs a closer consideration of ‘belonging’ (as a premise of ‘home’ and a citizenship ideal). The emotional dimensions of citizenship in terms of belonging – in association with ‘home’ – were brought up by Isaac who has lived overseas for more than a decade:

Singapore is home... It is where my roots are. It is where I grew up; it is where my memories are most etched. It is where my relatives and family are; it is a place where I go back to feel comfortable... Singapore is to me where I am a citizen of because it is where I grew up and where [my family] is based... It is not so much a piece of paper that says who I am or where I come from, but the psychological and sentimental affiliation to the country... I find it important because for me, it is difficult to pin down, but it is where I want to go back and where I am deeply concerned about. Even though I am not there eighty percent of the time, I am thinking about it all the time.

To Isaac, citizenship was not merely a legal status but also an emotional disposition that he found ‘difficult to pin down’. The ‘psychological and sentimental affiliation’ expressed by Isaac materialises as tangible attitudes of concern and longing, thereby producing a sense of place-based belonging for him. These sentiments were closely echoed by my other respondents as well. I argue that it is this emotional quality of citizenship that provides ‘clues and ways of seeing’ (Bennett, 2004:414) the power – or ‘emotional agency’ (Davidson and Milligan, 2004:524) – that citizenship has over its subjects.

Yet, just as the emotions are capable of giving power to citizenship, this power of ‘emotionality’ (Ahmed, 2004:12) may be revoked by redefining ‘belonging’ to place. Isaac’s narrative underlines the way that belonging is often created through common histories, experiences and places. However, the premise of

such a sense of belonging is subject to change over time. The significance of roots and place-meaning, for example, were disputed by Oscar who said:

One of the things I don't like about Singapore is [that] it has changed so much. I feel quite detached from it. I remember when [I] was young, [there was the] Van Cleef Aquarium, my old school and the National Library... Things like that [the Singaporean government] keep[s] tearing down and changing old historical buildings to purple-coloured art museum [instead]... [Increasingly worked up] *Why do [they] keep doing that? Why can't [they] leave it as it [was]?* Like the old Satay Club [was] where I had my first *satay* (meat on skewers) walking along the bay. That was ages ago and it has all changed now... Those are the things I identify with. I can't identify with the new Singapore [that has] a lot of new buildings [and a] very Americanised culture... I think you have to actively promote Chinatown and what Chinatown stands for... A lot of youngsters in Singapore nowadays don't even know where Chinatown is. They are so detached from their roots now. (Emphasis mine)

Oscar's place-memories of Singapore, as expressed above, were fast fading with the rapid pace of change in the urban landscape. He also contested the idea of cultural rootedness in view of the Western influences in Singaporean society.

The erosion of both of these factors affected the quality of Oscar's emotional experience in terms of belonging ('I feel quite detached from it') and ability to identify with 'the new Singapore'. The outburst of rhetorical questions in the above anecdote attests to the emotional intensities that underpin his feelings of belonging (or non-belonging in this case). In turn, the erosion of 'belonging' impinged on the meaning of citizenship to Oscar. During the interview it emerged that Oscar had mixed feelings towards the significance and sustained relevance of Singapore citizenship to him.



Comparing Isaac and Oscar’s subjectivities towards ‘belonging’ illustrates that citizenship is a deeply emotive concept and practice. The ideals of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ are often reiterated in political rhetoric as a unitary political identifier for the national community and to promote citizenly attitudes and acts. However, just as ‘home’ is socially constructed and politicised, belonging is also intensely subjective and contingent. By foregrounding the contingent, subjective and socially fractured nature of ‘belonging’, my argument therefore punctures simplistic associations that premise other features of citizenship on the idea of ‘belonging’. Recognising the way that the world of citizenship is constructed and lived through the emotions destabilises predominant definitions of what citizenship should be, and the way that it should be practised.

### **3.2.2 Ethnic fractures of ‘belonging’**

This part of my discussion continues to unpack the power differentials characterising citizenship through discourses of ‘belonging’. My study shows that amongst the Singaporean transmigrants in my study, belonging was acutely fractured by the axis of ethnicity and this becomes heightened during transmigrancy. As such, I argue that belonging is premised on the social-cultural terms of acceptance that determine social affiliation and social differentiation is experienced as an emotionally-led process. This in turn has implications on attitudes towards citizenship.

To the Singaporean transmigrants in my study, their ethnicity shaped their sense of belonging or non-belonging. Since the population make-up in Singapore is primarily Chinese, it is unsurprising that most of the Chinese-Singaporean transmigrants I interviewed claimed that they felt more ‘at home’ in Singapore than in the UK. In Singapore they were less likely to encounter racism or be singled out as a foreigner because of their skin colour or accent. Significantly, several of them also said that Singapore citizenship represents to them ‘Chinese values’, such as loyalty, respect and filial piety.

Concomitantly, their lack of a sense of belonging towards the UK was also shaped by the embodiment of ethnicity, as illustrated in Xavier’s narrative:

EH:           When you think of citizenship, what comes to mind?

Xavier:       My home... I feel a sense of belonging since I spent so long in [Singapore]. I can’t express it in words... [Even] if you tell people that you are a British citizen, when people look at you, you are Chinese. Obviously you are not white and you are not born here. You can be born here and be a British-Chinese, but some people might still think that ‘you are not part of “Us”’.

Here Xavier relates his sense of Singapore citizenship and his decision not to apply for British citizenship despite his eligibility to do that. His decision to retain Singapore citizenship was in part tied to a sense of ‘belonging’ towards Singapore. Xavier found it difficult to verbally express the emotional quality of ‘belonging’ to Singapore, but it is significant that he used ethnic identity to convey his feelings of ‘non-belonging’ in the UK.

The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) in Britain commissioned a study in 2005 to uncover what is signified as ‘Britishness’ to British citizens from various ethnic backgrounds. The study found that a portion of the focus group participants<sup>5</sup> still equated ‘Britishness’ with an exclusively ‘white English’ society (CRE, 2005). This is probably what Xavier was referring to when he commented that a British-born citizen of Chinese ethnicity would still be regarded as an outsider in British society (‘you are not part of “Us”’). As a foreign-born Chinese, he felt even more excluded. This is even though he had studied and lived in the UK for more than five years. The multiculturalism discourse in the UK, like in Singapore, is hotly contested. Both the Singaporean and British states propound an official discourse of multiculturalism, but the way multiculturalism unfolds on the ground is contested by those who experience inclusion or exclusion, thereby contributing to the ambivalence of citizenship as lived practice.

In Chapter Two, I argued that the multiculturalism policy in Singapore ameliorates some ethnic divisions while simultaneously accentuating other ethnic differences. In my case study, the non-Chinese Singaporean transmigrants expressed more ambivalent feelings about their sense of belonging to Singapore compared to the Chinese-Singaporeans (despite the shared sense of being classified as outsiders whilst in London). The attitudes of

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<sup>5</sup> The focus group participants included Scottish, Welsh, English, Black Caribbean, Black African, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi British citizens.

the non-Chinese Singaporean transmigrants were usually based on ethnic discrimination experienced while living in Singapore.

Citing the example of his Indian-Singaporean counterparts, Yogesh said:

Being an Indian in Singapore is difficult because they make up only six, seven or eight per cent of the population in Singapore. It [is] difficult for them to penetrate into jobs and society. Furthermore there was also a bit of Chinese chauvinism like [the] ‘Speak Mandarin’ [campaign]<sup>6</sup>. Because numerically they [are] not strong enough to express themselves and they cannot fight, so they have to find other means of channelling their energies. They started to spread their wings.

Yogesh believed that a considerable number of Indian-Singaporeans had left Singapore because of their experiences of discrimination in Singaporean society, which they felt they had little power to change. Although it is hard to ascertain this observation numerically because of the preponderance of Chinese-Singaporean transmigrants in London, Yogesh’s narrative alerts us to the racialised contours of the migration of Singaporeans, which has thus far been neglected in the official state discourse on Singaporean transnationalism. Instead what is forwarded by the Singaporean state is a unifying ‘Singaporean identity’, even though it may not correspond to the citizenship experiences of Singaporean transmigrants.

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<sup>6</sup> The ‘Speak Mandarin’ campaign is a high-profile annual event promoting the use of the Mandarin language amongst the Singaporean population. The campaign was launched in 1979 at the behest of former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. The objective of the campaign at that time was to encourage Chinese-Singaporeans speaking various Chinese dialects to switch to Mandarin as a common language of communication. However, the target audience of the ‘Speak Mandarin’ campaign now are the majority English-educated Chinese-Singaporeans who have a poor command of the Chinese language.

Although racialisation experienced in Singapore triggers emigration in some instances, paradoxically, racialisation can also be transported into transmigrancy. Dewi, a Malay-Singaporean, recounted that when she was living in Singapore, other Singaporeans would question her ‘all the time’ about her ethnicity. She related that Singaporean taxi-drivers would ask, for example, whether she was ‘Eurasian’<sup>7</sup> and she surmised that it was because her smart Singaporean-English accent was not associated with the Malay population in Singapore (who tend to speak English with a strong Malay accent that is construed as indicative of a lower socio-economic class<sup>8</sup>).

This experience of racialisation was carried into Dewi’s transmigrancy and she described to me an experience in which she was made to feel excluded by the Singaporean student society during the societies fair in the British university where she studied:

Dewi: I stood at the [society] booth – the Malaysian society was here and the Singapore society was here. The Malaysian society did this sign [signals to beckon] and the Singapore society people just looked at me like...

EH: They ignored you?

Dewi: Oh yeah, because I am Malay, right? And what would a Malay-Singaporean be doing there? It’s like there aren’t that many of us. I can’t even relate to another Malay-Singaporean. It’s weird. [My

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Eurasians’ are ranked higher than the Indians in Singapore society’s informal ethnic hierarchy because of their white origins.

<sup>8</sup> Barr and Low (2005) argue that the Malay population in Singapore has been systematically marginalised by Chinese hegemony in spite of the official multiculturalism discourse, partly because of the stereotypes pinned on them by the political elite and wider Singaporean population.

response to the Malaysian society] was like, ‘Actually it’s this one’ [meaning the Singaporean society]. So [I decided I] might as well [not] join [any of them].

Dewi speculated that her Malay appearance led the representatives at the Singaporean society’s booth to assume that she was Malaysian rather than Singaporean. She believed that there was also an underlying assumption that Malay-Singaporeans lack both the intellectual and financial ability to undertake an expensive overseas education (‘what would a Malay-Singaporean be doing here?’).

The above dialogue suggests that Dewi took offence at the way she was made to feel she did not belong to the Singaporean community (based on the intersections of ethnicity, class and assumed intellectual ability). This emotional response in turn structured the social-cultural interactions (Davidson and Milligan, 2004:523) that she had with the Singaporean community and towards Singapore citizenship. To her, being in ethnically diverse London provided some relief from feeling, as she explains, like a ‘real minority back home’. It emerged during the interview that Dewi’s attitude towards the Singaporean community and what citizenship represents to her was tinged with expressions of resentment and frustration. Dewi’s story is illustrative of the way that the non-Chinese Singaporean transmigrants in my study had to negotiate racialisation both in the host and sending countries. Their experience of a lack of belonging was doubly compounded by the embodiment of emotionality and ethnicity.

The above analysis demonstrates that ‘belonging’ (or membership to a community) in the Singaporean context is inflected by experiences of ethnic marking. The Chinese-Singaporeans in my study were more inclined to frame their sense of belonging to Singapore in terms of it being a predominantly Chinese society where they felt more included than in the UK. In contrast, non-Chinese Singaporeans indicated ambivalence towards ‘belonging’ and described instances in which they were made to *feel* they did not fully ‘belong’ even though they had formal membership in Singapore. In this way, the ‘sociality of emotions’ (Ahmed, 2004:10) impinges upon the meaning and practice of citizenship by ‘creating’ the very effects [...] that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside’ (ibid). Citizenship, as Joppke (1999b:630) argues, acts as both a legal status and identity that excludes rather than include people embodying ethnic difference. It is significant that these dynamics of ethnicity are elided in the ‘Overseas Singaporeans Strategy’ advanced by the Singaporean state, which tends to focus on unifying discourses of belonging, identity and community instead.

Pulling together the two parts of my discussion on ‘emotional citizenship’, I argue that ‘belonging’ is an aspect of citizenship shaped by three interactional components. First, ‘belonging’ is predicated on histories, experiences and places that are subject to change, which often creates an emotional response. Second, there is an emotional quality to belonging that attests to its subjectivity. Third, ‘belonging’ is coloured in hues that are contoured by social-cultural relations and experienced as an emotional process. Together,

these structure the emotional content of belonging in particular ways that become accentuated during transmigrancy. The indeterminacy of belonging makes it problematic when other multiple meanings given to citizenship – such as allegiance, rights and responsibilities – are premised on it. By framing this discussion in terms of ‘emotional citizenship’, I underline the emotional and material experiences of power differentials that give form to unequal practices of substantive citizenship.

### **3.3 Debating ‘national identity’ during transmigrancy**

The contested character of ‘belonging’ and fractures of ethnic identity lead to questions about national identity in the Singaporean context. I argue here that is possible to regard Singapore as a place of belonging without endorsing a shared national consciousness or identification with the national community. In fact in my study, I found it hard to pin down the idea of an extraterritorial ‘Singaporean’ identity amongst the Singaporean transmigrants in London.

In her study of Singaporeans working in Beijing, Kong (1999a:579) suggests that the Singaporean ‘national identity’ is enhanced as transmigrants confront their transnational situations. For Kong (ibid), national identity connotes, first, a national consciousness, which she defines as a shared image of the nation and a lively sense of pride at what distinguishes one’s own from other peoples. Second, there is also the sense of identification with a state (corresponding to political boundaries) or a group of people (cultural boundaries), even if they do



not necessarily know the other members of the nation. This shared identity helps to bind people.

According to Kong’s empirical study of Singaporean transmigrants in Beijing, ‘Singaporeanness’ is asserted and homeland culture reproduced amongst overseas Singaporeans in Beijing. This is manifested as a sense of community through both club activities and in the more quotidian practices of everyday life, particularly through food consumption. This description by Kong fits the idea of a ‘transnational community’ (Levitt, 2001:10), in which the members of the community ‘acknowledge that they belong to a collectivity constituted across space and express some level of self-consciousness about this membership by forming groups like hometown organisations that manifest their transnational character’.

Although there are broad similarities between the Singaporean transmigrants that Kong (1999a) studied in Beijing and my study in London, the differences are also striking. I postulate that one reason for this could have been because my respondents had been recruited from a variety of sources, thus they embodied a spectrum of views towards Singapore and varying degrees of affiliation with the country. It would have been different, for example, if I had only recruited my respondents from the networks of the Singaporean community associations in London, or through particular friendship circles. Recruiting respondents from only the Singaporean community associations would have more likely produced insights suggesting an extraterritorial

Singaporean identity because of the way these persons tend to coalesce together. On the other hand, recruiting respondents only from particular social circles would have also produced biased results because of the preference amongst some overseas Singaporeans not to mix with other Singaporeans when they are abroad. Therefore, I decided to draw my respondents from a variety of Singaporean community associations and other social and friendship networks. This methodological strategy reveals, as I shall show later, important theoretical insights on the distinctiveness of transnational social formations.

In my study, I found some evidence of the idea of a national identity (shared consciousness and identification with a community) amongst Singaporeans in London. This was most often manifested as a sense of pride with regards to Singapore’s international reputation for efficiency and high standards of work. To Lydia, for instance, Singapore citizenship signifies being ‘rank[ed] amongst the top [that] helps complete the pride of belonging to a winning team’. A number of respondents also brought up the ‘prestige’ and convenience associated with ownership of a Singaporean passport, especially with regards to the ease of international travel. For example, Hannah’s view towards the Singaporean passport was, ‘You can go wherever you want... you don’t need visas when you travel [so] I can’t think of a better passport to have’. Besides these distinctive attributes regarded as ‘Singaporean’, another trait my respondents often associated with ‘Singaporean identity’ was the habit of socialising over food. As Ian puts it, ‘the number one pastime in Singapore is food’.

However more often than not, the question of ‘national identity’ was met with ambiguous responses amongst the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. They translated and performed their ‘national identity’ in personally ambivalent and contradictory ways. Irene, for example, observed that the Singaporeans in London with whom she spent time were ‘different’ from other Singaporeans. She surmised that this was because:

[Only] a Singaporean who doesn’t want to be in Singapore can totally identify with a Singaporean who is away from Singapore. That is a national identity in some ways.

It is ironic that in Irene’s interpretation of national identity, the extraterritorial national consciousness hinges on a shared desire to stay away from Singapore. Irene’s personal sentiments towards Singapore give hint to the contradicting emotions in the psyche of overseas Singaporeans. This type of response towards the extraterritorial Singaporean community was not uncommon amongst the Singaporean transmigrants I met in London.

In some cases, ethnic identity took precedence over national identity. Sharing his thoughts on being ‘Singaporean’, Oscar said:

I find it difficult describing what being Singaporean [is]... I don’t want to blend into society like an *ang moh*<sup>9</sup>. I still want to be a very proud Chinese. I still want to uphold the values of being Chinese. Generally Chinese do work a bit harder and things like that in the work place... I know it is a very wide thing but when I say ‘Chinese’, I mean Chinese values, things like filial piety... What does it mean to be Singaporean? [Ponders] I can’t really answer that question...

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<sup>9</sup> ‘*Ang moh*’ refers to a person of white ethnicity in *Singlish* (Singaporean English).

For Chinese-Singaporeans like Oscar, the cultural context of their destination country made their Chinese ethnic identity more salient amongst a predominantly non-Chinese population in London. Nevertheless, this did not take away the significance of their ‘Singaporean identity’.

Like the Chinese-Singaporeans in the studies conducted by Kong (1999b) and Yeoh and Willis (2005b) in China, Singaporean identity comes to the fore when the Chinese-Singaporean transmigrants in my study interacted with the Chinese from other parts of the world. Michelle said, for example:

[Being] Chinese, I like to say that I am from Singapore. To me that is important. It defines where I am coming from, like whether I am from Taiwan, China or Hong Kong... Maybe it is because we know Chinese from other places... If you see a Singaporean [who is] Indian, being a Chinese-Singaporean you know where that person is coming from whereas [...] if I meet an Indian from England, it is different...With Indians from Singapore you click... We speak *Singlish*...

As Michelle’s narrative makes clear, Singaporean transmigrants in London perform their social identities situationally in relation to their social company. Their distinctive social identities – individual, ethnic, Singaporean/‘national’ and, in some cases, ‘cosmopolitan’ – are layered and interweaved in distinctive ways. What this finding highlights is the constructed nature of ‘Singaporean identity’, which resonates with the citizenry in some situations, but not in others.

Besides the socio-spatial context, time acts as a significant factor constituting a sense of ‘Singaporean identity’. Having been away from Singapore for a number of years, Ian was one of my respondents who professed that his sense of attachment to Singapore and his Singaporean identity had become accentuated. However, his narrative was simultaneously marked by doubts over the idea of a shared Singaporean identity:

I think now that I have stayed [in London] for a year and a half, I feel a sense of attachment to Singapore... Therefore I feel stronger about my Singaporean identity. But there are other times when I feel, ‘What does it mean?’ I will give you both sides of it... My granddad came from China and he settled in Malaysia; my dad was born in Malaysia and he settled in Singapore. We are Hakkas and Hakkas have a history of migration. We have migrated all over the world. So my question to myself sometimes is, ‘What keeps me from moving?’ I can migrate too. I can continue the path that my granddad started... If the opportunities are present in places outside Singapore for me to have a better life, there is no stopping me unless there are really good reasons for me to sacrifice that for Singapore. So that’s one way of looking at it. The other way is it has been really hard. There is a certain Singapore story that you can tell. It was a miracle that it happened. We were lucky to have that land to have self-growth and build an economic miracle. You want to be part of that story... But sometimes I feel that, am I really participating in that process?

Ian’s narrative illustrates the countervailing pulls of rootedness and mobility that has its origins in the migration histories of Singapore. His narrative shows that, on the one hand, migrant family histories impinge on the formation of a stable contemporary ‘Singaporean’ identity and contribute to a sustained mindset of mobility that is, in fact, now selectively encouraged by the Singaporean state. On the other hand, many Singaporeans, like Ian, are proud of the ‘Singapore story’ narrating the ‘miracle’ by which Singapore became a viable polity and economic success. In Ian’s case, this sense of national pride was, however, eroded by what he perceived to be a lack of political

accountability and citizen participation in the Singaporean political process. I will develop this argument on political citizenship in greater depth later in this thesis.

The above discussion shows that the way the Singaporean transmigrants in my study aligned themselves with the idea of national identity is complicated by competing representations of personal and ethnic identities, migrant histories and socio-political attitudes. The contested way in which these Singaporean transmigrants regarded their national identity belies the Singaporean state’s endeavours to project the Singaporean identity in extraterritorial ways through state initiatives and partnership with non-state actors. The personal attitudes towards identity and community have important implications for the way the Singaporean transmigrants in my study engaged with other Singaporeans in London.

#### **4 Politics of engagement with the trans-‘national’ community**

Having unpacked the ideas surrounding belonging and identity, I now focus on the way Singaporean transmigrants in London engage with one another, and with the Singaporean networks represented in the city. I question the coherence of an extraterritorial Singaporean community and forward the view that transnational outcomes are expressed in different ‘social articulations’ (Scott, 2004:403) based on variables such as political affiliations, life-stage, professional status, ethnicity and other cultural traits.

I build my argument, first, by debating the manifestations of a Singaporean identity and community in London. Second, I examine the social dynamics that are materialised through personal interactions (or non-interactions) with other Singaporeans in London. Third, I inspect the social dynamics that take place on a community level in the Singaporean community associations in London. The analyses in this section address in particular the politics of cosmopolitanism and the state-citizen relationship with respect to the Singaporean case study.

#### **4.1 The overseas Singaporean community in London**

In my study, I was interested to know more about the ways in which Singaporean transmigrants in London interacted with one another, and their involvement (or non-involvement) in the construction of an extraterritorial community. In the ethnographic component of her study, Kong (1999a:579) highlights the availability of recognisable Singaporean food ‘haunts’ in Beijing where Singaporeans gathered impromptu to ‘relax amongst “countrymen”’. She also suggests that Singaporeans in China provided ‘mutual help and support’ to one another (ibid). These seem to be indicative of the ‘*in situ* sociability’ also described in Scott’s (2004:402) study of British expatriates in Paris. Scott (ibid) highlights the presence of recognisable British pubs in Paris that serve as meeting points for British expatriates to network with one another. In my study, I found evidence of these traits amongst the Singaporean transmigrants in London, but to a less pronounced degree.

Given that food culture is widely acknowledged as a key socialising element for Singaporeans, I paid special attention to the food habits of Singaporean transmigrants in London when I was conducting my ethnographic fieldwork. There are several Singapore-themed restaurants in London, such as the Singapore Chinese Restaurant at Holland Park and the Bugis Street Brassiere at the Singapore-owned Gloucester Hotel. However, there are also a number of other ‘mixed’ eating places in which Singaporeans socialise, such as Chinatown in central London where Chinese-style eateries may be found; Oriental City in Colindale, Northwest London, which has an Asian-style ‘food-court’; and the Mawar and Melati restaurants in central London that serve Malay-style cuisine. Even so, the Singaporean transmigrants in my study appear to be more dispersed in their food consumption habits and locales than in Kong’s (1999a) China-based study, presumably because of the comparatively more cosmopolitan population and food cultures in London.

Incidentally, I also found that private food- or festival-themed home parties had become particularly popular amongst Singaporean transmigrants in London. This reflected the high costs of dining out in London (particularly in large groups) and was facilitated by the introduction of prepared food mixes for Singaporean cuisine (either brought to London from Singapore or bought from Chinatown). Besides that, the ‘food cultures’ of Singaporean transmigrants in London, like their friendship networks, appear to fragment into their respective ethnic and cultural identities. Dewi told me, for instance, that other than the (mostly Chinese-Singaporean) friends that she knows from her schooling days



in Singapore – who have also moved to London – she usually spends her time with Malay-Malaysians that she befriended at the Muslim restaurants or the mosque. As for the Chinese-Singaporeans, they seem to coalesce into their ethnic identifications with the Chinese from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Malaysia. Although their ‘Singaporean identity’ might become evident within these cultural groupings, this should not be mistaken as a manifestation of community bonding amongst overseas Singaporeans.

The sense of community and mutual help described by Kong (1999a) appears limited to Singaporeans who join the Singaporean community associations and organised activities. For such Singaporeans, the Singaporean community associations act as a starting point to acclimatise to a new environment. Isaac who was plugged into these networks explained that:

I think when you come to a new place you want to [...] talk to people who would understand and relate experiences that you can both benefit from - as well as take a step into unfamiliar ground.

The Singaporean community associations are regarded as an anchor point for Singaporean transmigrants with attitudes similar to Isaac. During one of the social events, for example, I was introduced to a female professional in her early-twenties who had arrived in London two weeks earlier on her first overseas work posting. She was regarded as ‘newbie’ by some of the longer-term Singaporeans present at the event and they sought to help orientate her to London. At the end of the event, she left in the company of a group of new (yet familiar because of the shared background) friends for dinner at Chinatown.

This corresponds with Kong’s (1999a:580) description of the ‘*gotong royong*’ (village) spirit, indicating a sense of community, sharing, trust and support.

Nonetheless, this chapter demonstrates later that the Singaporean community associations do not embody what it means to be ‘Singaporean’ or represent ‘homeland culture’ in a straightforward manner. In fact, the often lacklustre interest in the extraterritorial Singaporean community that I found during my study merits closer investigation. Less than half of my respondents were or had been active in the Singaporean community associations. A few of them were not involved in any of the associations but signalled their interest to know more about these activities. Janice, for instance, said that she would ‘really love to meet other Singaporeans working in London’ because she wanted to ‘eat Singaporean food and talk about Singapore’. In other words, she sought the cultural familiarity of a Singaporean circle of friends. However, for busy individuals like her, their lack of involvement was because they had ‘never got round’ to subscribing to the email lists or taken the initiative to find out more about these clubs. They were thus disconnected from the larger Singaporean community in London and formed friendship networks at work or created other social affiliations instead.

It was more common, however, for my respondents to indicate a lack of desire to participate in the Singaporean community associations in London. These persons may spend time with small groups of fellow Singaporeans by

socialising over meals, coffee or drinks; clubbing; watching films; playing sports; travelling; and shopping. However, they also felt that, as Irene explains:

Singaporeans have so many informal networks that it is not necessary to find another network to find more Singaporeans.

Such attitudes towards the overseas Singaporean community appear to be born out of an individualised decision to interact with the overseas Singaporean community in limited ways. However, I argue that the deliberate personal distancing from Singaporean networks as well as the lack of motivation to seek out fellow overseas Singaporeans is indicative of broader structural dynamics and ideological tensions.

#### **4.2 Politics of the ‘self’**

In this part of the chapter, I analyse the reasons why the majority of my respondents said they had little interest to be part of an extraterritorial Singaporean community. One of the most often cited reasons why Singaporean transmigrants appear disinclined to attach themselves to the overseas Singaporean community was born out of a purposeful decision to get to know people from other national backgrounds and cultures while they were in London. Rachel explained for example that:

I am in London where there are lots of foreigners. If I join [the Singaporean community associations], I may like them so much that I [will] spend all my time with them. You only have x number of hours a day and if you make it so convenient and so comfortable, you don’t make an effort to mix with other people.

Rachel’s socialising strategy reflects a deliberate effort to challenge herself to move out of her ‘comfort zone’ and get to know non-Singaporeans living in London. Singaporean transmigrants like Rachel usually indicate willingness to engage socially with other Singaporeans, but also emphasise that they do not see the need to be part of a Singaporean trans-‘national’ community. For them, the Singaporean community is only one of their many other social affiliations in London. This reveals a reflexive positioning of the ‘self’ seeking to project an image of cosmopolitanism, wherein one feels equally adept at navigating the social company of both Singaporeans and non-Singaporeans.

Being ‘cosmopolitan’ appears to be the buzzword in Singapore at the moment, arising in part from the Singaporean state-sponsored strategy to create a cosmopolitan Singapore. The politics of cosmopolitanism, however, have been highlighted in various works (Cheah and Robbins, 1998; Ley, 2004; Ho, 2006; Yeoh, 2006) examining the way these politics are played out on a structural level. In this thesis, I suggest that the politics of cosmopolitanism are embodied in the intersubjectivity of the personal ‘self’, which ties up in particular ways with broader ideological discourses circulating in Singaporean society. This is exemplified in the manner that Singaporean transmigrants relate to each other whilst overseas. I argue that the deliberate decision to embrace ‘foreignness’ while distancing oneself from fellow Singaporeans during transmigrancy is a reflection of the cosmopolitics at work in the Singaporean mindset. I illustrate this argument through the following narratives.

Lionel belonged to the group of Singaporean transmigrants in my study who said that they had little interest to socialise with other Singaporeans in London. For Lionel, this was because he felt that many of them were ‘excessively Singaporean’:

[They] would eat Chinese food all the time, hang out with other Singaporeans; the Singapore society would stage a Singaporean play [...] and other Singaporeans from all over the country would come and watch it... This is London and [there are] lots of great theatre going on, but they would only watch Singaporean plays!... So I thought what is the point? Why come overseas? So a lot of times I think that staying in touch with Singapore means not getting to know the country you have come to live in or not moving out of your comfort zone... The reason why I see so few Singaporeans here is because most of them are excessively Singaporean, so if I say, ‘What do you think of the anti-terror legislation [in Britain]?’ They say, ‘Sorry, it was not in The Straits Times online’. ‘Have you seen this play?’ ‘Nope, don’t go to theatre; it is not a Singaporean show’. ‘Shall we go to this restaurant?’ ‘Nope, I only eat Chinese food’. Only a small group is that extreme but they do exist.

In Lionel’s narrative, the unwillingness of some Singaporeans to expand their networks beyond the Singaporean circle was looked upon with condescension. By ‘excessively Singaporean’, he was referring to a lack of willingness to engage with new experiences outside of Singapore that would help sharpen the quality of mind. He said these Singaporeans instead prefer to recreate the comfort and familiarity of Singapore while overseas through their choice of social networks (‘hang out with other Singaporeans’), social activities (‘Singaporean plays’), information sources (‘The Straits Times online’) and food consumption (‘Chinese food’). Their closed world then becomes a barrier to Lionel’s desire to develop himself through new experiences while overseas.

Yet quite often, the underlying rationale for differentiating oneself from other Singaporeans actually reflects a deliberate resistance towards the state agenda

to create an extraterritorial Singaporean identity and community. Consider Irene who said:

[The] problem with Singapore is the government is identified and associated with the notion of a country. So people think of keeping in touch with their friends and family, but they don't think of that as keeping in touch with Singapore. So when the 'official Singapore' tries to keep in touch with them everyone goes, 'Eww... big brother!' I don't know if it's paranoia, but in college there was a big rumour going around that there is a spy in our midst who is obviously going to report what everybody says. So who is the spy, who do we think the spy is? It's like Cluedo, right?

Irene's account illustrates the disjuncture between the Singaporean political identity and the emotional affiliation in terms of 'friends and family'. More importantly, her anecdote shows that there is a climate of suspicion amongst some overseas Singaporeans towards the interventionist Singaporean state. This analysis relates to my earlier argument making clear that the emigration of a number of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study was tied to intentions to break away from prevailing representations of Singaporean society created and perpetuated by the interventionist Singaporean state (see Chapter Four).

Rather than a state-led approach, these Singaporeans advocate the organic development of an overseas Singaporean community. Ian was one of them and he said:

I think when the government starts reaching out too actively, people [would] get scared because it's like direct marketing, right? Or 'spam model', [as some people] call it. I think it's more effective if there are informal networks where as long as you have groups of Singaporeans while you are overseas that's enough for them to keep their sense of belonging. I mean for me here I have a group of friends who are Singaporeans or friends [that] are linked to Singapore, and that keeps you in touch [with] home.

Ian’s remark that ‘people [would] get scared’ arises out of the impression that even extraterritorially, the Singaporean state keeps a tight surveillance over Singaporeans living abroad. Instead, Ian preferred ‘informal networks’ that function as a more subtle form of keeping in touch with happenings in Singapore. Both Irene and Ian’s accounts signal the contested ways in which Singaporean transmigrants engage with the Singaporean state’s endeavour to manufacture a coherent extraterritorial national identity and community.

Nevertheless, other Singaporean transmigrants wanted the Singaporean state to connect with its overseas citizenry. Isaac, for example, agreed with the Singaporean state’s attempts to construct an extraterritorial Singaporean identity and even recommended that the state should make a concerted effort to mobilise its overseas citizenry:

[What] the government can do is to think more deeply about what this group of people mean to the country. I put myself in this group; and so are you. These are a group of people who are reasonably talented and have aspirations beyond what Singapore can provide, but still have that level of affiliation and emotional attachment. It is so important not to lose sight of these people because they can be an important source of the country’s thoughts and ideas.

Isaac’s remarks reminds us of the class-distinctiveness of Singaporean transnational migration (‘reasonably talented’ persons with ‘aspirations’ beyond Singapore), and the tense relationship between an economic imperative to globalise (riding on the wings of such human capital) and the nationhood project in Singapore (‘what these people mean to the country’). The lack of consensus over the extent to which the Singaporean state should engage with overseas Singaporeans also emerged as a matter of concern within the

Singaporean community associations in London. On this note, I shift my attention to a more thorough discussion of the dynamics of the trans-‘national’ Singaporean community in London and how Singaporean transmigrants respond to attempts by the Singaporean state to shape their experiences through the Singaporean community associations.

### **4.3 Politics of trans-‘national’ communities**

Since the day I came there [have] always been two groups: SUKA for the older generation and SYPUK for students and young professionals. I don’t know why. I think it is because SUKA has a lot of people who have been living [in London] for many years and they are already residents here, whereas SYPUK are people who have just graduated and want to work here to gain more experience. So you find that... the two groups [have] different wavelengths and different interests. If you attend a SYPUK event it would never be a garden party, but they would always have [it at] a disco or go to the pub. It is difficult for SUKA to organise events that would suit different ages, and don’t forget that SUKA is run by volunteers. For me I go to both. (Dorothy)

This interview excerpt from Dorothy captures some of the dynamics between and within the Singaporean community associations in London. I now present three case-studies – the Singapore-UK association (SUKA), the Singapore Professionals Network (SPN) (formerly Singapore Young Professionals-UK or SYPUK) and the Singapore Business Group (SBG) – to illustrate the ways in which the Singaporean community associations in London are fractured by axes of social identity. I demonstrate that the Singaporean state project of constructing its version of a Singaporean community extraterritorially was met with mixed attitudes by the Singaporean transmigrants in London. I argue that this throws in doubt the power of the Singaporean state to construct Singaporean identity and community extraterritorially.



Although the contemporary Singaporean community associations in London have close links with the Singaporean state, some older Singaporean transmigrants told me that it was different in the past. One of the pioneering members of the Singapore-UK association (SUKA), Charles, told me that SUKA – the most established of all the Singaporean community associations in London – started off as a government initiative. Yet until recent years, the Singaporean state had maintained a hands-off approach towards it. This was to change with the state’s growing interest in its overseas citizenry. Gradually, the incumbent older SUKA committee members were replaced (but not without a societal tussle) by younger Singaporean transmigrants perceived as ‘planted’ by the Singaporean state. Charles said:

SUKA should not be political. SUKA was formed, which is good, but I found that a lot [of people join it because] they want to use Singapore embassy to get to know the embassy [officials] and be a bit snobbish.

During the interview, Charles surmised that the closer association with the Singaporean state was the reason behind the declining popularity of the community associations amongst Singaporean transmigrants who prefer to keep a distance from the Singaporean state. He believed that those who joined, like in SUKA, were primarily after the benefits that they could obtain from being associated with the government officials.

Charles also commented on the Singapore Business Group (SBG), which focuses on business-level exchanges for Singaporean businesses in London:

Even [the] Singapore Business Group is not doing well because it is linked to the government – [they organise] meet-the-ministers and all this kind [of activities]. They do nothing for business in Singapore but the government does not know [that]. [SBG] is not generating business [for] Singapore and SUKA is the same.

The account of Charles is telling of the way in which such associational politics represent forms of resistance to state efforts to co-opt migrants groups into the vested economic and political interests (Smith, 2003:469) of the nation-building project. The distinctions emerging from political inclination and disinclinations hence shape the way that Singaporean transmigrants relate to the overseas Singaporean community associations.

Other than political affiliations, generational differences and the duration of transmigrancy also give form to the character and outcome of transnational community formations. The personnel replacement in SUKA was regarded by some individuals as a strategic move to infuse the society with new blood that would appeal to the contemporary inflow of Singaporean transmigrants to London. The new flows tend to be young and transient migrants compared to the Singaporean migrants of yesteryear who made up SUKA till then. After all, SUKA had gained a jaded image amongst the current cohort of Singaporean transmigrants.

Take for instance Kathy who used to be a member of SUKA but stopped participating in its activities because she felt that:

SUKA activities tend to be for people with family [and those] who have been here for [...] twenty or thirty years.

She explained that a number of the SUKA members had become British citizens and their ‘mindset [was] a bit different’ from hers in the sense that she did not ‘feel as entrenched as them’.

Another respondent, Dina, had heard about SUKA but chose not to join it because:

[Their members] have been here for a long time and they have their own little cliques so it is hard to penetrate [and] a lot of them are older as well.

Both Kathy and Dina felt excluded from the Singaporean circles in SUKA because of the combined effects of generational differences and their shorter length of overseas duration.

My own ethnographic observations at the SUKA dinner and dance and National Day celebrations corroborate these interview findings. At the SUKA dinner and dance, I found that most of the guests were in their forties and older, and they had their families in tow. There was a spirit of familiar conviviality, akin to that described by Kong (1999a) amongst her Singaporean transmigrants in London, but as a younger Singaporean who had only recently arrived in London, I felt out of place in that environment.

Instead of SUKA, younger Singaporean transmigrants prefer to gravitate towards a new grouping targeted at Singaporean professionals working in London. The society used to exist as the Singapore Young Professionals UK (SYPUK). According to an interview with a former SYPUK committee

member (in 2005), SYPUK had operated as a virtual internet community that circulated information on Singapore-related events, job vacancies or flat-sharing opportunities in London. The society was reinvented in 2005 – at the informal urging of Singaporean government officials in London – as the Singapore Professionals Network (SPN) with the aim of creating a platform for young Singaporeans working in London to network based on shared socio-professional interests.

In particular, SPN sought to capture the spectrum of Singaporean transmigrants who felt out of place in SUKA and the Singapore Business Group (SBG) (consisting of businesspersons or older and established professionals). Although SPN was set up at the behest of the Singaporean state, it maintains that it is ‘not beholden to any organisation’ even though it cooperates with the Singapore High Commission in London, Contact Singapore and the Singapore International Foundation (interview with SPN committee member, 2005).

The creation of SPN as a distinct entity from SUKA and SBG draws attention to the way that socio-professional interests, generational differences and length of overseas duration intersect to attract a particular profile of overseas Singaporeans to SPN activities. Felix, who was in his thirties and had been in London for only a few years, preferred the SPN rather than SUKA activities. He explained that:

SUKA is more like a socialising club whereas SPN is more positive. It has a mentoring program that I think is useful to help undergraduates who want to stay here to work [and] help them to think through their career. It fits in with the fact that I wanted to do more voluntary work.

In Felix’s case, migrating to London had been a strategic career move (he studied for an MBA with the intention to work in London) and the networking events organised by the SPN for young professionals was a more suitable socialising platform for him than SUKA.

The final axis of differentiation that I wish to address in this discussion focuses on the politics of ethnicity, but also highlights the way that it intersects with political affiliation, socio-professional interests and notions of cosmopolitanism. When I attended the SUKA and SPN activities, I saw that there were a small number of Indian-Singaporeans represented during these events. During subsequent interactions with some of these Indian-Singaporeans, I found out that they were playing prominent roles in the Singaporean community associations and they valued the opportunity to contribute to Singapore in this way. However, the representation of non-Chinese Singaporeans in these associations is still limited both culturally and numerically. I sought to find out the reasons behind this during interviews with other non-Chinese Singaporean transmigrants. I use the example of Gladys to illustrate the intersecting social dynamics that I uncovered.

Gladys – who was of Eurasian descent – explained that she joined the Singapore Business Group because of her interest to ‘do cross-border international Asian business’. She tried to encourage that within the group by eliciting the interest of British businesses towards the group. However she

eventually gave up her attempts and left the group, explaining that she felt she did not belong there:

The people who joined [the SBG] were very Chinese-Singaporean expats [who had been] posted to work in London from Singapore... The kind of [Singaporean] professionals from good organisations at senior-level [positions] – who spoke well and are internationalised – had no desire to go near the group because it was so ‘Singaporean’... After a while I got fed-up. It was dominated by the expat Singaporeans sent by the government... Ultimately the people who are running these are still very governmental in their approach. There is a slight snobbery like, ‘Oh my god, these people are so narrow’. You got that group, what is it called? [Elaine: Is it SUKA?] [She sighs in exasperation] In Singapore I never hung out with those very Singaporean kind of people anyway, so why would you when you are abroad. A lot of [them are] housewives... I enjoy being with people who come from the same background but who also have an international exposure abroad.

Gladys saw herself as being more cosmopolitan in her outlook than the ‘Chinese-Singaporean expats’ in SBG or the ‘very Singaporean kind of people’ and ‘housewives’ (trailing spouses) in SUKA who have a less international outlook. It is also significant that she construed the ‘governmental’ approach endorsed by some of those Singaporeans as ‘narrow’ (i.e. non-cosmopolitan). Her account shows that even within the category of overseas Singaporeans, there are gradations of ‘cosmopolitanism’ and ‘non-cosmopolitanism’ that rupture the purported fabric of an extraterritorial national community. This relates back to my earlier argument about the cosmopolitics arising from the desire to engage with persons from other nationalities and cultures, while preferring to differentiate oneself from fellow Singaporeans.

Gladys also made clear the politics of ethnicity in her anecdote. She felt (and was glad to be) excluded from the ‘very Chinese-Singaporean’ expats represented in SBG. These politics of ethnicity resonate with my discussion in

this chapter on the ways in which ethnicity inflects on a sense of belonging for non-Chinese Singaporeans. Gladys further highlighted her concern over the growing representation of Chinese culture within Singapore both in terms of the indoctrination of Chinese values and the way it influences the usage of the English language in Singapore:

When I went back I found that Singapore was becoming more *cheena* (Singaporean slang for Chinese), very Chinese. I also found that a lot of younger people speak really poor English. From that perspective I am glad that my daughter is growing up here. I don’t want her speaking with a Singaporean accent. It concerns me how ‘Chinese’ [Singapore is] becoming.

Her account on the politics of language in Singapore resonates strongly with my discussion in Chapter Four in which I related the situation of Olivia who was made to feel that she did not belong in Singapore because of the way she spoke proper English instead of Singaporean English (or *Singlish*).

In the case of Gladys, she felt excluded on two fronts from the overseas Singaporean community in London: first, as a non-Chinese Singaporean; and second, as an ‘international Singaporean’. Even some of the older Indian-Singaporean transmigrants who were involved in the Singaporean community associations agreed that Singapore had become more ‘racially chauvinistic’, in the words of one respondent, Prem. From the perspective of these non-Chinese Singaporeans, multiculturalism in Singapore had regressed and the pre-existing ethnic cleavages have become accentuated during transmigrancy.

In this discussion, I showed that political affiliations, age, length of overseas duration, socio-professional interests, cosmopolitanism framings (in terms of

economic and social-cultural attributes) and ethnicity are some of the axes of differentiation determining the way Singaporean transmigrants coalesce into some groupings and not others. These findings prompt reconsideration towards an unquestioning acceptance of the existence of transnational communities (Levitt, 2001). As posited by Guarnizo (1998:73), ‘while one could identify certain transnational communities at the micro-level, it is misleading to refer to the whole migration process as forming an aggregate transnational “community”’. Instead the term, ‘transnational social formation’ (ibid) is perhaps a more appropriate description for such phenomena. It is important to bear in mind that transnational social formations may exacerbate existing cleavages of social inequality within the nation-state framework. The intersecting politics of political affiliation, self-representation and ethnicity illustrate that while cosmopolitics in these instances take place at an individualised level, it does so in ways that resonate with economic, political and social-cultural discourses at the structural level.

## **5 Conclusion**

One of the aims of this chapter has been to develop an argument on ‘emotional citizenship’ through the discourses of ‘belonging’ shared by the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. Although my respondents constructed citizenship in a variety of ways, they usually framed citizenship in terms of belonging. Interestingly, I also found that they often premised the other aspects of citizenship – such as rights, duties and obligations – upon the idea of belonging. However, this chapter underlines the emotionally subjective,



contingent and socially differentiated nature of belonging in order to draw attention to the fallacy of reasoning citizenship this way. My analysis furthermore highlights the significance of place-meaning for notions of belonging and citizenship, and in particular the way that mobility has the double-edged effect of reinforcing yet undermining place-meaning and belonging.

Despite the salience of ‘belonging’ in the way that Singaporean transmigrants constructed citizenship, belonging should not be conflated with national identity. Rather, this chapter interrogates the idea of a distinctive Singaporean identity suggested by Kong (1999a) in her study of Singaporean transmigrants in China. My study shows that state-sponsored efforts to create an extraterritorial national identity were regarded with ambivalence by my respondents. Instead, the way they chose to coalesce with the extraterritorial national body or to differentiate themselves from other Singaporeans was characterised by politics that take place on a personal and community level.

Other than the differentiations marked by age group, length of transmigrancy, socio-professional interests and ethnicity, two distinct themes stand out in this study. First, I argue that the politics of cosmopolitanism manifest at the personal and community levels in terms of cultural capital and behaviour traits. Whilst displaying openness towards foreign cultures, Singaporean transmigrants also intentionally differentiated themselves from fellow Singaporeans. Furthermore, they carried this attitude into associational politics

in terms of their membership in these groupings. The second theme focuses on the way in which the politics of participation in the extraterritorial Singaporean community are shaped by the extent to which Singaporean transmigrants desired to engage with the Singaporean state agenda of creating an extraterritorial citizenry. These analyses problematise nationalist imaginaries and state- and territorially-defined notions of belonging, identity, community (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002).

By comparing the different transnational formations amongst Singaporeans in London and Singaporeans in Beijing (Yeoh and Willis, 1998; Kong, 1999a), this thesis supports the argument made by Smith (2005:239) that the character and outcome of transnational social formations are distinctively shaped by the circumstances under which they came into being. As I have made clear in Chapter Four, Singaporeans in London migrate for reasons that are constituted by career goals as well as equally important lifestyle choices (whether in terms of experimentation, experience, exploration or escape). Compared to the Singaporean transnational community in Beijing, the Singaporean presence in London is also more entrenched because of the historical Commonwealth ties that brought about earlier overlapping waves of migration, thus creating a layered landscape of peoples and community associations. The different findings in Beijing and London underline that the boundaries of ‘identities’ and ‘communities’ are always shifting, in flux and map out distinctively in space and time.

In sum, my study demonstrates that internationally mobile citizens can claim legal and emotional membership to their country of origin, but negotiate their social membership differentially and regard their political identity circumspectly. Through transmigrancy, their political identity may in fact unravel into other affiliations – in this Singaporean case-study, ethnic affiliation was an important fragmentation variable. This finding complements Nagel and Staeheli’s (2004) study of Arab immigrants to the United States in which although the respondents claimed legal membership in America and formed an American political identity, their sense of belonging and Arab cultural identities remained anchored in their countries of origin. In different ways, both studies indicate that the assumed congruity between citizenship, state and nation should be reconsidered. The terms associated with citizenship, namely ‘belonging’, ‘identity’, ‘national identity’, should be used circumspectly and not conflated with one another because this leads to analytical confusion and perpetuates power asymmetries between the citizen and the state.

# 6

## **Citizenship in a transnational world: 'Grounding' rights and responsibilities**

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## **1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I expand my discussion from belonging, identity and community to examine the political contents of citizenship. Transnational migration complicates national policies of redistribution and regulation that are premised upon a territorial understanding of who is eligible for the rights and services of citizenship based on membership. In immigrant-receiving states, national governments often couch the issue of rights in relation to the language of obligations through immigrant integration (Kofman, 2005). The question that remains is what happens to the rights, duties and obligations based in the sending countries of internationally mobile citizens?

There is a large corpus of literature on the traditions and developments in citizenship theory (Isin and Turner, 2002). My focus in this chapter is on the balance between ‘rights’ and ‘responsibilities’. These aspects of citizenship receive different emphasis in the liberal, republican and communitarian traditions of citizenship. Liberal conceptions of citizenship regard rights and responsibilities as a reciprocal relationship while the republican and communitarian standpoints place greater emphasis on the duties and obligations of citizens towards the political community (Yuval-Davis, 2006). My aim in this chapter, however, is not to debate these theorisations of citizenship but to consider the way that citizens themselves understand their ‘rights’ and ‘responsibilities’.

My primary objective is to contribute to a ‘grounded’ understanding of the ideas on rights and responsibilities<sup>1</sup> that are encapsulated in citizenship. I consider the way that these political aspects of citizenship are relationally constructed by the Singaporean state and overseas Singaporeans as a result of and through the process of transnational migration experiences. In doing so, I argue that transnational migration reinforces national-level understandings of rights and responsibilities while simultaneously providing spaces to rethink the national imaginaries of citizenship. I also underscore the significance of the emotional underpinnings of political citizenship as a potential mobilising force leading to political and social change.

In the first part of the chapter, I consider the ideals of extraterritorial rights and responsibilities constructed and projected by the Singaporean state. The manner in which rights and responsibilities are formally specified have a significant impact on the way that power relations between the state and citizen, and subsequent governance practices, are structured. I suggest that whilst the Singaporean state grants selective extraterritorial rights to its overseas citizenry, it places even greater emphasis on the obligations of overseas Singaporeans towards the national community. My argument in this section proposes that the Singaporean state frames the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in a manner that seeks to regulate the behaviour

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<sup>1</sup> The terms ‘duty’, ‘obligation’ and ‘responsibility’ are often used interchangeably in political and public discourses. Here, I use the term ‘responsibility’ to encompass both ideas of duty and obligation.

of overseas Singaporeans so as to further the country's economic and nation-building goals.

Then in the second part, I move my discussion to the way that Singaporean transmigrants perceive their rights as overseas citizens. I begin with the theme of rights because rights are, first, essential for the distribution of economic and social resources. Second, rights are necessary to ensure fair relations between the state and citizen, and between fellow citizens. Third, the conferment of rights often has an impact on the way that citizens perceive their responsibilities. My aim is to argue that even though the power to grant rights is often placed in the hands of the national state, transnational migration also creates possibilities for challenging the hegemony of state power.

I develop my argument on rights through two bodies of analyses. I first examine the significance of national-level rights to Singaporean transmigrants, but I also consider attitudes towards whether extraterritorial rights should be extended to Singaporean transmigrants, and if so, what type of rights. Second, I use specific examples to illustrate the ways in which the Singaporean transmigrants in my study expressed views that reinforced or challenged the hegemony of the Singaporean state to define rights. In these analyses, I also highlight the emotions underlying their narratives on political rights.

The third part of this chapter considers migrant framings of citizenship duties and obligations. I argue that the practised nature of political 'responsibilities'

as played out in the national and transnational arenas lends credence to the power of the nation-state, but transnational migration also creates specific strategies of resistance, evasion and subversion towards hegemonic definitions of ‘responsibilities’. More importantly, I contend that nationally exclusive interpretations of ‘responsibilities’ do not correspond to the lived realities of transnational migrants.

I begin my analysis by examining the manner in which my respondents carried out their political ‘responsibilities’ as a way of being despite a lack of personal identification with the idea. Second, I investigate the manner in which state-endorsed versions of political ‘responsibilities’ come to be challenged through transmigrancy. As in the preceding discussion on rights, I also foreground the emotions that structured notions of ‘responsibilities’ amongst my respondents. Through these analyses on ‘rights and responsibilities’, my thesis makes a key empirical contribution to theory-building within citizenship studies.

## **2 Deconstructing state constructions of ‘rights and responsibilities’**

In this section, I interrogate the framing of ‘rights and responsibilities’ by the Singaporean state with respect to citizenship and transnational migration. I focus on the conditional framing of ‘rights’ and the moral underpinnings of ‘responsibility’ forwarded by the Singaporean state. I argue that these constructions are meant to enact an extraterritorial reach over internationally mobile citizens in order to fulfil domestic nation-building goals, and so as to



meet the challenges of situating Singapore advantageously in the global economy.

In Chapter Two, I drew attention to the nature of the rights discourses in Singapore. I highlighted the uneasy state-citizen relationship with regards to the practice of political and civil rights, which arguably impinges on the operation of other social and cultural rights. Despite being a parliamentary democracy, the political climate in Singapore is such that the hegemony of the PAP government hinders political contestation by the opposition during political elections. This results in a lack of effective political participation through the ballot box on the part of the citizenry. The state-citizen relationship in Singapore is also marked by ‘OB markers’ (George, 2003:39) that determine the rules of political engagement between the PAP government and the broader public. This refers to the ‘out-of-bound’ issues that the PAP government considers unsuitable for public debates.

In the National Day Rally Speech in 2004, for example, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced the relaxation of rules governing free speech at the Hong Lim Park Speakers’ Corner<sup>2</sup> in Singapore, but he added that:

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<sup>2</sup> The Speakers’ Corner in Singapore was opened in 2000 and modelled after the original in Hyde Park, London. The idea was mooted by the PAP government and at that time, it was deemed as a milestone in the liberalisation of political expression in Singapore. However, public communicators intending to use the platform have to obtain a public entertainment licence from the police.

[You] can go and make any speech you like and we are going to say, 'Well, if you want to go there and have an exhibition, go ahead'.... I mean free expression as long as you don't get into race and religion and don't start a riot. It's a signal – speak, speak your voice, be heard, take responsibility for your views and opinions. (Lee, 2004)

Lee's speech clearly signalled the limits to free speech in Singapore: the 'responsible' citizen is one who would not cause public disturbance in Singapore. In this instance, the remark was made with respect to public debates on 'race' and religion, purportedly to avoid racially inflammatory remarks that might endanger the ethnic harmony in Singapore. The contradictory result, however, is that limiting the airing of opinions on cultural rights may impair claims for ethnic equality in Singapore.

For example, when two Malay students were forbidden from wearing their religious headdress in government schools in 2002, this sparked a controversial exchange between Muslim groups in Singapore and the PAP government (*The Straits Times*, 28 January 2002). However public debate over the issue was quickly subdued by the PAP government in the name of ethnic harmony and the Muslim leaders were openly reprimanded by key political figures in Singapore (Goh, 2002). The imposition of such 'OB markers' and the fear of political incrimination lends itself not only to the depoliticisation of the Singaporean public, but also creates general hesitance to enter debates that may be construed as 'political'. These considerations thereby generate what I observed to be a culture and embodiment of individual self-censorship amongst the Singaporean transmigrants in my study (see Chapter Three).

Limits to freedom were a reason why some Singaporeans left Singapore to settle in a foreign country. There were others who left for reasons to do with education, work and lifestyle. Nevertheless, the growing numbers of Singaporeans who spend part of their lives overseas and the importance of this spectrum of the population – primarily made up of well-educated, highly skilled professionals – to the sustained progress of Singapore prompted the Singaporean state to express growing interest in this group of Singaporeans. As part of the ‘Overseas Singaporeans Strategy’, some extraterritorial rights were granted to this group of Singaporeans to provide an institutionalised framework for their membership and participation in the Singaporean community.

The changes made to the Singapore Constitution in 2004 to liberalise the conferment of Singapore citizenship for the descendents of overseas Singaporeans is a case in point (see Chapter Two). The other significant change took place in 2001 when legislation was changed to allow overseas Singaporeans to vote during the Singaporean political elections<sup>3</sup>. However, I argue that the conferment of these extraterritorial rights is accompanied by conditions set out by the Singaporean state to regulate the terms of participation and the behaviour of overseas Singaporeans.

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<sup>3</sup> Overseas voting did not come into effect until the 2006 political elections. Although it was meant to be implemented in the 2001 elections, the plans were later scrapped because of security reasons in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist acts in the United States.

First, the rules governing the passing of Singapore citizenship to the children of an overseas Singaporean stipulate that the sponsoring parent must have lived in Singapore for a total of five years or more before the birth of the child, or for at least two out of five years prior to the birth of the child. In addition, the registration for citizenship has to be made within a year of the child's birth (Attorney General's Chambers, 2006a). The criteria based on residency aims to ensure that the Singaporean parent has a degree of familiarity and affiliation to Singapore that then merits the passing of Singapore citizenship to the child.

As for overseas voting rights, the Parliamentary Elections Act (Attorney General's Chambers, 2006c) sets out that a Singaporean living abroad is allowed to vote only if the person has been resident in Singapore for least two out of five years before the election year. Exceptions are made only for Singaporeans sent to work overseas in the service of the Singaporean state. This effectively prevents most overseas Singaporeans based abroad for an extended period of time from participating in the election of the government. Besides that, the Parliamentary Elections Act disallows any person whose name is on the electoral roll of any other country from being registered for voting in Singapore. In sum, the above stipulations governing citizenship laws and overseas voting act as mechanisms to regulate the behaviour of overseas Singaporeans in the way that they practise the extraterritorial rights granted to them by the Singaporean state. The integration of overseas Singaporeans into the national fabric thereby only confers limited political autonomy to them (Smith, 2003).

Alongside the recognition accorded to overseas Singaporeans through the granting of selective rights, it is important to consider the accompanying Singaporean state discourse on the role of overseas Singaporeans. As Secor (2004:355) argues, in the top-down creation of citizenship, rights are conceived as granted by the state while citizens are understood to be primarily in possession not of rights, but of duties and obligations. The following anecdote from the National Day Rally Speech (in 2002) by former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong exemplifies this line of thought:

The more we educate Singaporeans, and the more economic opportunities we create for them, the more internationally mobile they will become... Will Singaporeans be rooted to Singapore? Will enough Singaporeans stay here, to ensure our country's long-term survival? The answer depends on whether they feel deeply for Singapore, and for their family, friends, colleagues, and fellow NSmen in their army units... If they feel Singapore is home, then they will stay and fight for Singapore. Even if they are overseas, they will return and fight. They will work with passion and conviction for our future. They will make sure that Singapore continues to progress and prosper. (Goh, 2002)

Goh's speech emphasised the role that overseas Singaporeans play as an integral part of Singaporean society. The moral framing of the state discourse constructs a risk that mobility generates for the Singaporean nation in the absence of roots, emotional bonds and loyalties amongst overseas Singaporeans.

In this speech, Goh further suggested that the social contract of citizenship exists not only between the state and citizen, but also between fellow citizens in terms of a spirit of reciprocity. This rhetoric resonates with my argument in Chapter Two that the idea of Singapore citizenship had from the outset and till

now encompassed emotional, social-cultural and political dimensions. The difference is that the target audience of this speech was not potential immigrant settlers, but internationally mobile Singaporean citizens over which an extraterritorial form of citizenship was being constructed.

When Lee Hsien Loong took over the reins of leadership from Goh Chok Tong as prime minister two years later, he also highlighted the significance of overseas Singaporeans in his inaugural National Day Rally Speech:

We have groomed a strong generation ready for the future. And we have to groom this generation, to give them wings and to give them roots. We need to give them wings, expose them to the world, build their character, let them set their own goals and choices, let them learn from their own mistakes, let them grow and blossom and be themselves. Guide them, but don't constrain them. But we also have to give them roots, emotional experiences which will bind them here, playing together with each other, roughing it out, taking challenges together because then, they will create friendships, they will create ties, they will have memories and bonds to their friends and to the places where they made these friends. So, even with wings, they will fly all over the world but come back and be a Singaporean in Singapore. One critical aspect of rooting Singaporeans here is to empower them, to give them a say in their lives, to make them feel that they can make a difference... We've got to involve them in the community and in national affairs, to take ownership of the country and of the problems. (Lee, 2004)

What is noteworthy in this particular speech is that Lee not only encouraged the outflow of Singaporeans to the world, but also made it clear that these Singaporeans should be allowed to make their 'own goals and choices'. This marks a change of tone in the state rhetoric indicating 'guardianship' instead of 'custodianship'. Rather than the style of paternalism characteristic of Singaporean governance, the emphasis this time was to empower and involve overseas Singaporeans in the development of Singapore.

As we shall see in this chapter, these overtures by the Singaporean political elite can be read as a response to growing demands from an increasingly articulate and sought-after overseas citizenry who want a greater say in the way the country is run. These ‘spaces of invitation’ (McEwan, 2005:972), however, often have contradictory effects on citizen participation. As McEwan’s (ibid) work on South Africa shows, such spaces of invitation direct participation on the terms set out by state actors, thereby deflecting attention from other social issues and forms of political action. In addition, the ‘right’ to participate in the Singaporean case is born out of the interest of the state to enhance the rootedness of overseas Singaporeans, rather than to recognise them as democratic agents in their own right. In other words, the political project of the Singaporean state is to recalibrate the ‘rights’ aspects of citizenship so as to augment the sense of belonging and feelings of duty and obligation felt by overseas Singaporeans towards the national community.

My own ethnographic observations during the President’s Reception corroborate this discursive analysis of the way that citizenship has been constructed extraterritorially by the Singaporean state. The Reception was held at the Singapore High Commission in London in June 2005 to welcome the Singaporean President who was visiting at that time. The event was attended by London-based Singaporean diplomats and bureaucrats; representatives from the Singaporean corporations and Singaporean community and student associations; and other specially invited guests. I had obtained an invitation by

way of one of the Singaporean community associations. After the event, I recorded in my research diary:

In his opening speech, the President said that he was in London on a private visit, but the High Commission had invited him to host this reception. He decided to accept the invitation because it was his first visit to London since taking up the Presidency. During the speech he also emphasised that he hoped the overseas Singaporean citizens (and former Singaporean citizens) gathered there would continue to regard Singapore as home no matter how long they had been overseas *because it was the place that gave them the head-start to make it in London today*. He then mingled with the crowd. (Research diary, 17 June 2005)

The above encounter shows that the official state rhetoric on overseas Singaporeans is reinforced to internationally mobile citizens through the corporeality of travelling representatives of the Singaporean state, such as the Singaporean President and other ministry officials. Like the speeches of Goh (2002) and Lee (2004), the appeal made by the Singaporean president was based on a sense of ‘emotional citizenship’ that is premised on ideas of belonging (‘regard Singapore as home’) and justified by an expected attitude of gratitude towards Singapore (‘the place that gave them the head-start’).

The way overseas Singaporeans can contribute to the welfare of Singapore was brought up by the Foreign Minister Wong Kan Seng when he visited London to launch the Overseas Singaporean Unit (OSU) in 2006. Addressing a group of overseas Singaporeans, he said:

There is much that you can do for Singapore even while you are away. You become our ambassadors, contributing to our international image. When you return, whether immediately upon graduation or after working overseas for some time, you bring fresh perspectives and insights, contributing to our economic, social and political development. You have the power to effect change, to determine how our future landscape would look. This is both a privilege as well as *responsibility*. (*Today*, 14 March 2006; emphasis mine)



As internationally mobile citizens, overseas Singaporeans are persuaded to be ‘ambassadors’ promoting the image of Singapore, and upon their return they are encouraged to capitalise upon the economic and social-cultural capital they had accrued to contribute to Singapore’s continued success and development. These actions should be regarded as a personal ‘responsibility’ as well as a social obligation to the national community. In this way, the discourse on ‘responsibilities’ shapes the conduct of overseas Singaporeans in the interests of the Singaporean state and their corporeality outside the national territory is made to be at the behest of the Singaporean state (Mitchell, 2004a:18; Silvey, 2004).

The above discussion underlines the role that the Singaporean state believes overseas Singaporeans can play for the country. Couched in positive and dynamic terms, these discourses stress that even whilst they are abroad, overseas Singaporeans perform an essential function for the interdependent parts of the national body. However, the moral framings of these discourses are clearly identifiable in terms of putting the onus of ‘contributing’ into the hands of overseas Singaporeans who are to see it as ‘both a privilege as well as responsibility’ (*Today*, 14 March 2006). The goal is to mobilise overseas Singaporeans into sharing the national vision of building a prosperous economy and stable Singaporean society. Such discourses may also be read as a strategic manoeuvre by the Singaporean state to regulate citizenship behaviour by constructing ideals of what constitutes ‘good’ citizenly acts.

Having outlined the way in which the Singaporean state frames its version of ‘rights and responsibilities’, the rest of this chapter pays attention to the relational construction of ‘rights and responsibilities’ from the perspective of Singaporean transmigrants.

### **3 Citizens’ framings of ‘rights’ during transmigrancy**

In this part of the chapter, I shift my focus to the perspectives of Singaporean transmigrants with regards to their rights as Singaporean citizens. I am interested in particular to flesh out the ways in which transmigrancy shapes the content and attitudes towards rights. In doing so, I wish to ‘understand how historically situated subjects of the state participate in its ideological construction and its possible transformation’ (Marston, 2004:4). In Chapter Three, I highlighted the difficulties of ‘talking’ about citizenship and the culture of self-censorship that I encountered during my formal and informal interactions with Singaporean transmigrants in London. It is worth bearing in mind this caveat as I embark upon the following discussion on rights in the Singaporean context. Usually it was only after my respondents felt sufficiently at ease about my research agenda that they began to open up about their thoughts on the political aspects of citizenship in Singapore. Even then, there were a few respondents who preferred to side-step these issues during the conversations, which in itself sends a signal about the nature of the state and citizen relationship in the Singaporean context.

Based on the narratives elicited, I argue that whilst the power to grant rights remains in the hands of the Singaporean state, this power to define rights can be challenged by citizens who have been exposed to a different political system. I advance my argument in two parts. First, I demonstrate that national-level rights are important to Singaporean transmigrants but their transnational situations create demand for specific forms of extraterritorial rights. The rights discourse in this case reinforces the power of the Singaporean state over internationally mobile citizens. However, I also show that the transnational experiences of overseas Singaporeans bring about new ways of thinking about their relationship with the Singaporean state.

### **3.1 Significance of national and extraterritorial rights**

In this analysis, I draw out the rights that the Singaporean transmigrants in my study said were important to them. This discussion underscores the sustained relevance of a national model of citizenship to my respondents on one level. However, I highlight the different attitudes embodied by my respondents with regards to whether overseas Singaporeans should have special extraterritorial rights – and if so, what are the forms of extraterritorial rights that they would like to be extended to them. In this discussion I also draw attention to the way that my respondents capitalised upon the state discourse about overseas Singaporeans to press their claims for rights, and I signal the class issues that are embedded in transnational migration. The main claim that I make in this section is that the material and ideological power of the nation-state is

reinforced in the way that these Singaporean transmigrants looked to the Singaporean state to confer rights to them.

In the conversations that I had with my respondents, the rights that they said were most important to them usually had to do with the provision of national security and social stability, and other social and economic entitlements. In studies carried out in other contexts – such as migration from Hong Kong to Canada (Waters, 2003) and Indonesia to Australia (Nonini, 2004) – the failure of states in the country of origin to provide these rights were the reason why migrants sought citizenship status elsewhere. In contrast, my respondents rated the Singaporean state and Singapore citizenship highly on all of these rights aspects.

Take for instance Lydia's response on what she thought were some of the most important rights and privileges of citizenship:

As a citizen, what would you expect of the government? At a basic level, it is to have a decent standard of life through these character-building times – however that is defined in society, space and culture. You would expect the government to provide for education; the basic right to meritocracy, fairness; and [be] without corruption. Singapore comes out well as a role model. We do what we say and implement it extremely well... (Lydia, Singaporean citizen with British permanent residency)

Lydia's anecdote is imbued with a sense of pride about the achievements of Singapore, in particular the way that it can act as a 'role model' for other countries. By 'character-building times', Lydia was referring to the ongoing political and social instabilities in view of threats of global terrorism, which she believes Singapore has managed well. On a personal level, she also

expressed approval towards the way the Singaporean state has provided its citizens with a decent standard of living (in terms of employment, housing and healthcare) and access to education. The general level of satisfaction expressed by the majority of my respondents towards Singapore reinforces the value of Singapore citizenship to them, particularly when contrasted with the situation in other parts of the world – including the United States and parts of Europe – where the practice of social citizenship, in their view, often falls short of political ideals (Wong and Wong, 2004).

Transnational situations and identities also enhanced the importance of certain national-level rights to my respondents. One of the ways in which this manifested itself was with regards to the significance of Singapore citizenship as a legal status conferring Singaporeans transmigrants the right of return. For some, such as Gladys, this was important because of the economic opportunities represented by the Singaporean passport:

From the perspective of opportunity, being a [Singaporean] citizen gives me an added avenue to do well in terms of Asia as the place to be. It is the platform for Asia. So if you wanted to work in Asia and you want to have an international job in Asia then Singapore is a good base.

In other words, to Gladys, Singapore citizenship was advantageous because it allows Singaporean citizens to use Singapore as a strategic base to tap into the business opportunities in Asia. For internationally mobile Singaporeans like her, Singapore citizenship had taken on new meaning in terms of work and career advantage.

However, most of the time, the right to return was important to the respondents in my study primarily for familial reasons. For example, to Kathy whose elderly parents were living in Singapore:

The most important right is to be allowed back in for as long as I like... If my parents are ill I may have to go back regardless of what I want to do.

Like Kathy, many of my respondents underscored that Singapore citizenship grants them the right to work and live in Singapore indefinitely, which is important in order to be with their family.

Putting the model of national-level rights aside, the issue of whether overseas Singaporeans should expect special extraterritorial rights from the Singaporean state was a more contentious topic during the interviews. One point of view was that overseas Singaporean citizens should not expect any particular extraterritorial rights. This opinion was expressed by Patricia for example:

[If] one makes the decision to leave your country and go to another country then are you in the position to expect anything from that country merely by being a citizen of that country?... I am not in Singapore contributing anything... So to answer your question, I don't expect anything of Singapore because I have made the decision to leave. Why should they take care of me when I have left?

In her narrative, Patricia acknowledged the principle of reciprocity between the state and citizen relationship enshrined in the concept of citizenship. In this respect, she saw that she was not 'contributing anything' to Singapore while living overseas, so she did not 'expect anything' merely on the basis of citizenship status. Her idea of citizenship accepts the model envisioning that

rights and duties should be encapsulated within a national community delimited by territoriality (Brubaker, 1992; Miller, 2000 and 2005).

The same sentiment was expressed by Deborah who had moved to the UK because of her British husband, but her reasoning was slightly different from Patricia. Deborah explained:

We don't get a lot from the government. The government don't give handouts. We are not raised to expect handouts. So in that sense I am not expecting [benefits that] I can get out of my country. Not in that sense, no.

Although Deborah intends to settle in the UK, she planned to retain her Singaporean citizenship. In her narrative, her rationale for not expecting any particular rights from Singapore rests on her belief that Singaporeans have been socialised into not expecting 'handouts' (by which she meant state-provided welfare). Deborah's attitude resonates with the Singaporean state's rhetoric emphasising self-reliance to its citizens rather than dependence on state welfare. I argue that this manner of agreeing with the state rhetoric unquestioningly gives meaning to the state's construction of social rights and lends the state its ideological power over citizens (Rankin, 2003:712; Marston, 2004).

Another point of view, however, expected that the Singaporean state should be more sensitive towards the needs of its overseas citizens and grant special rights to them in accordance with their transnational situations. This is particularly if the state wishes to retain the relevance of Singapore citizenship to overseas Singaporeans. One of the sticky issues mentioned in my study was

with regards to the Central Provident Fund (CPF) based in Singapore. For instance, Rina, who had lived in the UK with her British husband for more than six years, explained:

I have stopped contributing to CPF and I am contributing so much here to national insurance... I was thinking, because there is no welfare system in Singapore [so] what [would] happen to me if something happens and I need medical care? It is a bit too late to start buying insurance and this is something I [am] concerned [about].

Having contributed to the British national insurance system for more than a decade, Rina was worried that her CPF funds would be insufficient if she required medical care in Singapore. The CPF scheme relies on co-contributions by Singaporean employers and employees that go towards a personal savings account backed by the Singaporean state (see Chapter Two). The territorial limits of the CPF restrict overseas Singaporeans from using the money outside of Singapore. In addition, the scheme stipulates that account holders cannot withdraw their savings until retirement age, or unless they relinquish their Singaporean citizenship. To Rina, ideally she would like for the CPF scheme to be extended more flexibly to overseas Singaporeans.

Another concern brought up over the course of interviews was with regards to the inability of overseas Singaporeans to tap into the state-provided childcare support based in Singapore. Hannah wanted the Singaporean state to provide special rights and privileges for overseas Singaporeans because of the accentuated difficulties they face bringing up a young child overseas:

We [can] get some [British] state benefits here in terms of help with childcare, but it would be great if Singapore would provide some subsidies towards that as



well. Living overseas you are more susceptible because [you] have no family network, and if you speak to people who are overseas that is the main reason why they prolong this decision. Things go back to normal in Singapore [after you have given birth] but it is not so easy here. You have to give up a fair bit of your life to look after your young family before you can go back to work... [Also] maybe providing more guidance in terms of education for young parents. I don't have a clue about kids' education [in Singapore].

Hannah's anecdote highlights the specific challenges faced by Singaporean transmigrants in terms of bringing up a young family whilst living overseas. The costs of childcare is higher in the UK compared to Singapore and the absence of help from extended family members makes it harder to juggle work and family responsibilities. Hannah rationalised that the Singaporean state should intervene to help overseas Singaporeans given the emphasis it places on procreation to ensure the sustainability of the Singaporean population. Similarly, she reasoned that if the Singaporean state wanted overseas Singaporeans to return to Singapore, it should facilitate the process by providing more information with regards to their re-integration (such as with respect to education for young children).

The above examples given by Rina and Hannah draw attention to the demand for extraterritorial rights made to the Singaporean state by internationally mobile citizens. Their conceptualisation of citizenship corresponds to Bauböck's (1994) concept of 'transnational citizenship'. In this conceptualisation of citizenship, national citizenship should be reformed to accommodate non-citizens residing within the territorial polity, but it can also provide extraterritorial rights to non-resident citizens. In this model of citizenship, the state acts as the guarantor and provider of citizenship rights,

and as such, the power to define rights lies in the hands of the state (Kofman, 2005).

It is worth noting that the present incongruence between rights that are only useful within the territorial jurisdiction of Singapore and the lived transnational situations of Singaporean transmigrants created dissatisfaction amongst some of my respondents. As Hugh, who spent many years studying and then working abroad, argued:

All these subsidies [are] things we do not see it. [For example], some of the child subsidies you have got to be in Singapore receiving it. What is the rationale behind that? If I am a [Singaporean] citizen living overseas I should be entitled to the same things as any other person living in Singapore. I do not have dual citizenship.

Hugh highlighted that his transmigrancy changes his ability to receive the rights associated with Singapore citizenship as a territorially delimited concept and practice. He contended that this made him feel like a partial citizen compared to persons living in Singapore. He also stressed that it was not as if he was denigrating his Singaporean citizenship by being a dual citizenship holder, hence he should be accorded full substantive recognition as a Singaporean citizen even though he was living overseas. The feelings expressed here have broader implications for the concept and practice of citizenship when compared alongside the Singaporean state's 'Foreign Talent Strategy', which grants particular rights and incentives to non-citizens living in Singapore. This issue will be made clearer later in this chapter.

Nonetheless, the complications arising from providing special rights to overseas Singaporean citizens are clearly acknowledged by the same persons advocating extraterritorial forms of citizenship. Despite his initial outburst towards the limited rights of overseas Singaporeans, Hugh recognised the social and political tensions between domestic nation-building goals and extraterritorial forms of citizenship. He said:

[The] overseas group are a minority compared to [the] heartlanders in Singapore - those are the people with the bread issues, who do not have the same mobility as people living abroad. Then yes, you [would have to] cater to the majority rather than the minority. I do not have an issue with that because [...] you still have to cater to the majority [...] rather than the minority outside. But again, the minority outside happen to be slightly more educated, slightly well-to-do and people who might be contributing more to the economy. So I don't know, I can't give you an answer on whether it is fair or not.

Although Hugh recognised the need for the Singaporean state to account to the less internationally mobile spectrum of the Singaporean population, what also stands out in this narrative is his self-positioning in relation to the state discourse on overseas Singaporeans. His reasons advocating the needs of the 'minority outside' were anchored in the language used by the Singaporean state emphasising the importance of this group of Singaporeans to the country. The elitist overtones of such an argument were repeated in conversations with other Singaporean transmigrants.

Gladys, for instance, recognised the merits of the change in citizenship regulations allowing the children of overseas Singaporean women to have Singapore citizenship. Her daughter was born in the UK and has British citizenship because at the time of her birth, the citizenship policy in Singapore

was patrilineal. Although the citizenship regulations specify that citizenship registration must be made within a year of the child's birth, Gladys planned to try and apply retrospectively for her daughter anyway. She explained why she thinks the Singaporean state should grant her request:

Frankly I thought I am not going to fly all the way home to give birth [to get Singapore citizenship]... To me it is kind of silly because in the past those who left Singapore were those with communist ideologies. More and more [of] those who leave Singapore [now] are [people] who don't want to conform. [They want] to be creative and [are] looking for expressions... The kind of talented people that the government should have... They go abroad and marry other people and bring onboard different aspects and views... So for the government, I am sure they look [at the applications] on a case-by-case [basis, such as] the qualifications of the parents. They [have] clearly change[d] the policy because they realise that a lot of good people have gone overseas, and they want to encourage them to come home.

Gladys' anecdote is revealing of the class connotations and selectiveness of immigration and citizenship policy in Singapore. Like Hugh, her reasoning echoes the language of the Singaporean state on the value of overseas Singaporeans ('good people') to the country.

In this way, just as the state strategically manoeuvres political discourses for its own ends, Singaporean transmigrants similarly capitalise upon state discourses to derive advantage and press their claims for new citizenship claims. Transnationalism acts as a vehicle for internationally mobile citizens to contest state hegemony (Mitchell, 1997a; Silvey, 2004). However, these developments also alert us to the class issues that may arise from the 'Overseas Singaporeans Strategy' when the group of internationally mobile and socio-economically privileged Singaporeans lay claim to specific rights that may exacerbate social

divisions within the national fabric. In these instances, transnationalism has the potential to deepen existing cleavages of social inequality (Guarnizo, 1998).

My argument in this section focused on the meaning of rights to Singaporean transmigrants and the ways in which their transnational situations created specific attitudes and demands towards the rights discourse. I showed that rights based on the model of national citizenship continue to be relevant to Singaporean transmigrants. However, I also pointed out the way in which the Singaporean transmigrants in my study expressed different attitudes over whether special extraterritorial rights (and what type) should be accorded to overseas Singaporeans. While one group felt that overseas citizens should not expect any particular rights from the Singaporean state, the other group advocated recognising the special value of overseas Singaporeans to the national community by conferring extraterritorial rights to them.

Nonetheless, underpinning both camps of thought is the belief that the state is the party that grants rights and privileges, thereby helping to reify the power of the state (Bauböck, 1994; Kofman, 2005). This belief arguably reinforces the hegemony of the PAP government in both popular and political imaginations. However, the acquiescence of internationally mobile citizens should not be taken at face value. The next section considers the ways in which the hegemony of the PAP government is variously reinforced or challenged through, and as a result of, transnational migration.

### **3.2 Debating state representations of ‘rights’**

The accounts in the previous section show that Singaporean transmigrants’ conceptualisation and practices of citizenship exceed national boundaries even whilst they affirm the validity of national citizenship. It is the tension between exercises of power in national spaces vis-à-vis the interstitial spaces of transnationalism that I am interested to examine here. In this discussion I use specific examples to illustrate the ways in which the hegemony of rule with regards to the rights discourse in Singapore is variously reinforced or challenged through transnational experiences and situations. The goal is to augment my overall argument in this chapter that the political power of the state (represented in citizenship) is contingent and relationally constructed in negotiation with the agency of internationally mobile citizens. I present my analysis, first, by addressing ambivalent attitudes of compliance towards the state discourse on rights; and second, highlighting examples of more overt forms of contestation and resistance.

#### **3.2.1 Ambivalent compliance**

My study suggests that a minority of the respondents expressed views that can be characterised as ‘ambivalent compliance’ towards the Singaporean state discourse on rights. Exposure to British society revealed to this group of transmigrants the differences between the political cultures in the UK and in Singapore. Yet this transnational exposure was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it created a partial desire for political change within Singapore. This was the case with Steven who contrasted the liberal climate of expression in

the UK with the constraints in Singapore. Using his knowledge based on the coverage of the large-scale anti-poverty campaigns that had just taken place in London during the time of this interview, he said:

The [...] right to the freedom of speech [...] is something that we should improve on. Obviously you can say that you are free to but if I were to walk around Orchard Road carrying a banner, it would not even be something against the government, but something like ‘Make Poverty History’, I would get arrested. I am not kidding.

In this narrative, Steven acknowledged the limitations of practising free speech in Singapore and pointed out that in terms of political citizenship, this was one aspect that the Singaporean state should address.

On the other hand, even though in that part of the interview Steven appeared to support the freedom of speech, he later added:

The [Singaporean] government has [limited free speech] because that is the only way to clamp down and make sure things run. Look at why Singapore runs so well compared to [our] neighbours. First of all, we are small. It is easy; the government has good reach over everybody. If you think about it, we are like a cattle farm. The government puts an electric fence around everybody. Nobody dares to run out. They are idiots because they will get fried... Look at Britain: it is such a big piece of land – you have two million [people]; you can’t put a fence around [them]. You can’t control because you can’t see what another two thousand are doing when you are managing five thousand. But in Singapore the government clamps down on a lot of things and I think it is in [our] own interest. If you give more freedom to people they start getting rebellious and you have no control over them.

Steven’s compliance towards the style of Singaporean political governance was shaped by reasoning (‘we are small’; ‘it is in their own interest’) that strongly resonates with the state discourse on the need to restrict the freedom of expression in Singapore. His comment is marked by an awareness of the ‘OB’ markers in Singaporean society demarcated by the Singaporean state. The

above narrative also contains a sense of paranoia about what might happen to persons who transgress the rules of political engagement ('nobody dares to run out... they will get fried'). This attests to my earlier argument about the culture of 'self-censorship' that is evident in Singaporean society.

Steven's account illustrates the catch-22 situation towards political governance in Singapore from the citizen perspective. Singaporean citizens, like Steven, often embody both compliance and critique, thereby creating for them a dilemma over the extent to which they should demand their political rights within the democratic ideal whilst balancing this with the pursuit of stable and prosperous national development, which the PAP government has delivered up till now.

There are a few important points to be mentioned in light of this example. First, such opinions highlight the tensions between what Mitchell (1997b:104) terms the 'homogenous vision of global processes' – which in this case is arguably the Western model of democracy that Singaporean citizens become exposed to as a result of their transmigration – and what Singaporean citizens acknowledge are the historical and geographical specificities of nationhood and citizenship. Western notions of citizenship are often premised on the principle of participation (Yuval-Davis, 2006). However, in her study of South Africa, McEwan (2005) writes about the reluctance of South African women to participate in formal decision-making processes because of culturally defined patterns of interaction between the state and citizens, and between men and



women as citizens. As a result, gender, social and political inequalities go unchallenged and become embedded in social space (ibid, 977).

In the Singaporean case study, weighing up the imagined costs of political transformation against the relative safety of preserving the status quo works to impede societal change. This suggests that academic exchanges expounding the 'progressive' potential of transnationalism, as Mitchell (1997b:102) argues, should be reconsidered in lieu of an alternative tide of conservatism. Nonetheless, we should not fail to recognise 'the potential for contradictory forms of consciousness to catalyse potentially more potent and collective forms of reflection on structural patterns of oppression' (Rankin, 2003:715), which brings my argument forward for the next discussion.

### **3.2.2 Politicised attitudes**

In spite of the acquiescence embodied in the views that I discussed above, I also found evidence of more vociferous political critiques towards the model of Singaporean citizenship during my fieldwork. These narratives usually emerged only after the respondents' initial guardedness towards my research had worn off, thereby representing what I believe is an inner layer of opinions about citizenship. For some respondents, dissatisfaction with Singaporean society had been a factor for their emigration in the first place (see Chapter Four). However, I also advance the view that transnational experiences heighten awareness of dissonances between the Singaporean and British models of political citizenship even amongst those who did not migrate out of

dissatisfaction in the first place. Both groups of narratives were often imbued with an emotional intensity that suggest to me the need for the Singaporean state to take heed of their criticisms if it wishes to retain its significance to the extraterritorial citizenry. In the rest of this discussion, I use two specific examples that emerged through my study in order to outline the reasoning behind this argument: first, on the limits of overseas voting rights; and second, on the lack of voting rights within Singapore.

My first example draws attention to the issue of overseas voting rights. I elucidated earlier the regulations imposed by the Singaporean state governing the exercise of this right. A number of my respondents expressed discontent over the restrictions. One of them was Isaac, who shared his experience on overseas voting during the Singaporean political elections in 2001:

When we were asked to register for voting – being able to vote is a basic right – I was rejected because I've been away from the country for more than two years and I was not with any governmental organisation. This was last year. We [wrote] to the Singapore embassy to say that we would have liked to vote – the group of us [working] in London and the expatriates in China. We were all rejected. The cynical reason was that the people who have been away would probably not vote in the direction that... [Uncomfortable pause] – I am being speculative. That is pretty unfair. If we are considered a citizen that is a basic right regardless of how long we have been away.

Isaac's prolonged absence from Singapore curtailed his ability to exercise his right to register as an overseas voter during the 2001 elections. Although overseas elections was eventually scrapped that year in the wake of the 9/11 terrorism acts, the lack of recognition as a valid voter on account of his absence from Singapore was a sore point for Isaac. This situation of limited voting rights lends itself to a growing sense of detachment from national issues for

Singaporean transmigrants who have been away from Singapore for a number of years.

Isaac's story highlights, on one level, the contradictions in the state-endorsed rhetoric for Singaporeans to internationalise while simultaneously imposing regulations that erode their sense of membership and ownership towards Singapore. On another level, the above anecdote also illustrates the underlying tension between the state and its overseas citizenry regarding the belief that overseas Singaporeans 'may not vote in the direction' preferred by the ruling party. The uncomfortable pause in Isaac's narrative is indicative of his uneasiness about openly criticising the PAP government control over voting rights, which he quickly qualified as personal speculation. Isaac's conjecture was that the strict overseas voting regulations helps to limit the influence of two groups of overseas Singaporeans over the outcome of the Singaporean political elections: those who had left because of dissatisfaction with the political regime, and those who developed more independent political views after living overseas. This leads to my second example on the more fundamental issue about the lack of opportunity to vote during the Singaporean general elections.

The barriers of entry for political candidates who are not endorsed by the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) often create what is known as 'walkover constituencies' (see Chapter Two). In these situations, the PAP candidate wins by default because of a lack of effective competition. The want of effective

participation to choose their political leaders causes some Singaporeans – such as Oscar – to feel disenfranchised from the decision-making process in Singapore. Referring to the inability to register his dissatisfaction through voting (in view of the ‘walkover constituencies’ trend in Singapore), he said:

I don't approve of the way the country is being run therefore I vote with my feet. Some people would sit in the coffee shops and moan all day. To me, I do it another way – I pack my bags and walk. I think it is [...] one of the reasons why [I left]. It is not the main issue but I feel [freer] here. I can say what I want; I can do what I want within the law. The law is different from in Singapore. I have the freedom of speech that I don't have in Singapore. That is how I make my dissatisfaction known. You have to know that to play politics in Singapore is a very dangerous game. That's why not many talented people want to do it. Why would they want to waste everything they have fought for, studied for, to do something that doesn't look like it will have an outcome?

Oscar's anecdote makes clear the way in which emigration acts as the means to register dissatisfaction ('vote with my feet') for some Singaporeans, particularly the 'talented' class who feel intolerant about the unequal citizenship social contract but believe that they are unable to confront the entrenched power of the political elite.

Lionel was also one of the Singaporeans who had left Singapore because of dissatisfaction with the nature of political governance in the country. In the following dialogue, he gives hint to his reasons for leaving:

- EH: What are some of the rights and privileges that are important to you?
- Lionel: The right to vote. It's a very big thing. I have never voted in Singapore because I have always lived in a walkover constituency, but I have voted [in the UK].
- EH: How does it feel to be able to vote in another country but not your own?
- Lionel: I felt in control here [whereas] in Singapore I felt that [I was] controlled.

In the above dialogue, Lionel emphasised the element of ‘control’ exercised by the PAP government, which is suggestive of his desire for greater parity in the state and citizen relationship in Singapore. More significantly, he contrasted his ability to vote in the UK with the inability to act likewise in the Singaporean political elections.

Like other documented and residential migrants in the UK, Singaporean citizens have voting rights in the local elections. However as Commonwealth citizens, Singaporeans also have the right to vote in the British national elections. While there has been a tightening of rules over the idea of ‘who belongs’ in the UK and rules on the right to entry (see Chapter Four), political rights like voting are still administered to Commonwealth citizens living in the UK (Joppke, 1999a:112-113; 223). Interestingly, the right to vote during the British general elections is not available to European Union (EU) citizens although European citizenship gives them other rights that are denied to non-EU citizens. This juxtaposition attests to the contingency and fluidity of scales of governance; likewise the scales of citizenship, as observed above, are dynamic and pliable (Desforges *et al*, 2005:440).

There is another group of Singaporean transmigrants whose initial motivation for migration had little to do with political dissatisfaction. However, their political awareness became accentuated as a result of their transnational experiences. Patricia who voted during the British general elections, but has

not had this opportunity in Singapore before, talked about the manner in which her transmigration changed her perceptions of Singaporean politics:

The truth is when I was back in Singapore I was never interested in politics because up till the age of eighteen I did not have any political ideas. I did not know. I think similar to other Singaporeans, you are told that the government does this [and] you have a good life... It was not until I came to this country and even then, it was not until four, five years [later] that I saw things were different and the Singapore system is pretty [hesitates] dictatorial [uncomfortable laughter].

Here, Patricia signals her awareness that as a Singaporean who spent her formative years in Singapore, it was only after she had left the country to live in another social and political context that she became aware of the social and political conditioning in Singapore. Yet it is significant that even after having been overseas for close to a decade, she still indicated discomfort when verbalising her criticism of the PAP government during the interview.

The narratives of Lionel and Patricia both illustrate the way their transmigration reveals or accentuates to them the differences in the models of citizenship between Singapore and the UK. The practice of political voting signifies the endowment of choice in the hands of citizens, and to them, this was lacking in the Singaporean model of citizenship. The practice of Commonwealth citizenship impinges on national-level citizenship in distinctive ways. Whilst the Singaporean state may try to assert hegemonic definitions of Singaporean citizenship extraterritorially, the rescaling upwards of citizenship practices towards the level of Commonwealth citizenship dilutes the definitive power of the national state. More importantly, the significance of overseas Singaporeans to the Singaporean state suggests the need to address,

rather than evade, their concerns with regards to the nature of political governance in Singapore.

The above examples highlight some ways in which the transnational experiences of Singaporean transmigrants inform and shape new political views and identities that destabilise state interpretations of citizenship. This finding is important because it destabilises popular perceptions within and beyond Singapore that regard the Singaporean state as a pervasive and powerful entity. My research points to alternative interpretations of the rights discourse by Singaporean transmigrants; even when compliance with the state was suggested, this was done with ambivalence. Their narratives were also often intensely emotive in terms of the discontent, anger, frustration and even resignation expressed during the interviews. Understanding these constructions of citizenship is important so as to mark out the activities that infringe upon the aspirations and ideals of citizens, which in turn may be potentially empowering for challenging state hegemony. The slippages in the rights discourse propagated by the Singaporean state also influence the way citizens respond to state rhetoric about the ‘responsibilities’ of citizens, which will be the topic of discussion in the following section.

#### **4 Framing citizenly ‘responsibilities’ during transmigrancy**

In this section, I focus on the way in which the Singaporean transmigrants in my study engaged with the state discourse on ‘responsibilities’ in association with citizenship. Once again, my goal is to tease out the particular ways that

internationally mobile citizens give meaning to or take power away from the state. Recent scholarship on the subject of political responsibilities has been mainly based on normative theorisations (Massey, 2004), quantitative surveys (Wong and Wong, 2004 and 2005) and discourse analyses (Raco and Imrie, 2000). There is still a gap in the literature regarding the perspectives of citizens towards the idea of ‘responsibilities’. Therefore my work explicating the perceptions of Singaporean transmigrants towards notions of political responsibilities makes an important contribution towards ‘grounding’ understandings of citizenship.

During the interviews I asked my respondents what they thought were their ‘responsibilities’, if any, as overseas Singaporean citizens. In this part of my fieldwork, I am aware of the possibility that I may have been reproducing the Singaporean state discourse by framing this aspect of citizenship in terms of ‘responsibilities’. The state discourse tends to place the burden of duty and obligation upon overseas Singaporeans who are reminded to contribute to the country out of a sense of gratitude for past benefits. However, couching the question as ‘responsibilities’ was necessary so that my respondents could identify with the context and respond correspondingly. I found that this in fact helped to tease out the ways in which the Singaporean state’s representations of ‘responsibilities’ did or did not resonate with my respondents.

My overall argument in this section is that although there are specific ways in which the idea of ‘responsibilities’ is tied to national level citizenship,



transnational situations also create ways of thinking that challenge and transgress state representations of ‘responsibilities’. I present my argument through two bodies of analyses: first, I draw attention to the constructed nature of political ‘responsibilities’ while demonstrating the manner in which it is practised as a matter-of-fact. However, the second part of this section problematises unquestioning attitudes towards the idea and practice of ‘responsibilities’ by showing the ways in which transnational migration destabilises hegemonic definitions of ‘responsibilities’. In this way, I use the narratives gleaned from transnational migration as a means to deconstruct the power-laden relations packed into ideals of ‘responsibilities’.

#### **4.1 Interpretations of ‘responsibilities’**

This discussion focuses on the manner in which my respondents interpreted the idea of ‘responsibilities’ in association with citizenship. I begin by problematising the concept of ‘responsibilities’ at the outset, but I also note that national-level responsibilities are often ‘practised’ by citizens as a matter-of-fact. The main thrust of my argument, however, highlights the ways in which such practices of ‘responsibilities’ are translated into transnational expressions by citizens, therefore helping to reify the power of the nation-state.

To arrive at a clear understanding of the concept of ‘responsibilities’, it helps to qualify at the outset of this discussion that the idea of ‘responsibilities’ did not always produce an immediate response from my respondents. In the following dialogue with Kathy for example:

- EH: Have you ever thought about what are your responsibilities as a Singaporean citizen?
- Kathy: [Pauses then chuckles] Actually no. It's never been an issue. I guess if you ask me off the cuff right now I would say, well, I have worked in Singapore [and] paid my dues. I behaved properly as a citizen, [and I] didn't cause any trouble.

Kathy's instinctive reaction to my question – a pause – was not uncommon amongst those who participated in my study. Whilst this could be because citizenship 'responsibilities' are often performed as a taken-for-granted part of social life, the significant number of non-verbal responses I collated in my research is suggestive of a lack of personal identification with the meaning of citizenly 'responsibilities' despite its practised nature.

In fact, the conflation of legal duty and moral obligation often invoked in the state discourses on the 'responsibilities' associated with citizenship merits more careful scrutiny. This is evident in Nathan's reply to my query on 'responsibilities':

[Ponders] I would say as a citizen I have duties... For example, if I have the chance to vote it is my democratic duty to vote, pay taxes, CPF that kind of stuff. But responsibilities as a citizen then not really... As an individual to Singapore, maybe there are some responsibilities [such as] having concern for Singapore... [However,] I think of responsibilities as a citizen distinctly from responsibilities to Singapore.

In Nathan's view, the notion of 'duties' (that he associates with the state) should be delineated from 'responsibilities' (that he associates with the nation). The conflation between duties and obligations in state discourses may be read as a strategic manoeuvre by national governments to evoke feelings of patriotism and nationalism for political reasons.

This analysis prompts a measure of circumspection towards the idea of political ‘responsibilities’. Instead the notion of ‘responsibilities’ was often scaled down by my respondents to other more immediate units of social affiliation, such as the family. Nonetheless, to my respondents, the notion of citizenly ‘responsibilities’ at the national level usually brought to mind acts such as voting (both a right as well as responsibility), paying taxes, abiding by Singaporean law, and feeling a sense of pride and pledging allegiance towards Singapore. In fact the male Singaporean transmigrants in my study often said that they had fulfilled their ‘responsibilities’ to Singapore by completing their national service duty.

However, the practice of ‘responsibilities’ in association with national-level citizenship took on particular expressions during transmigrancy. On the one hand, there were perceptions that it is harder to act out ‘responsibilities’ on account of the geographical distancing from the national polity. As Bee Huay, who lived overseas for more than a decade, said:

To be honest, I do not know what sort of measure I can use to say [that] I contribute to my [Singaporean] citizenship while I am [in the UK]. People can talk about nationality and residence here and there and everywhere. [However] I guess your sense of participation is dependent on where you are...

Bee Huay’s anecdote makes it clear that the practice of ‘responsibilities’ is in some aspects territorially bound, such as with regards to national service or contributions to tax revenues.

On the other hand, it was thought that there are ways for Singaporean transmigrants to carry out their ‘responsibilities’ as extraterritorial citizens – in other words, ‘transnationalise’ the content and practice of ‘responsibilities’ (Smith, 2003:472). One form of contribution was by facilitating the creation of an extraterritorial Singaporean community, as Steven explained:

I [chose] to get involved in the Singaporean [associations]... I feel happy doing it even though a lot of times it is ‘*sai gang*’ – shit stuff I am doing and people don’t appreciate it. But I feel happy because I am promoting awareness of Singapore. I am doing my national service here as well.

Steven acted out his ‘responsibility’ by participating in the generation of the extraterritorial Singaporean community through which other overseas Singaporeans could remain connected to the national body. This is consistent with the Singaporean state’s goal to keep overseas Singaporeans in touch with one another and with the state. Although Chapter Five made it clear that the idea of a Singaporean trans-‘national’ community is characterised by fractures based on ideas of ‘belonging’ and other axes of social identity, for persons like Steven, involvement in the Singaporean community associations was because of both personal desire (‘I feel happy’) and a sense of duty (‘I am doing my national service’).

Sometimes the idea of ‘responsibilities’ was associated with developing the ‘self’ for the future benefit of the national community. This idea of self-development to benefit the national community also corresponds to the Singaporean state discourse emphasising the economic and social-cultural

capital that overseas Singaporeans transfer to Singapore. Take for example

Helen who said:

I told myself a couple of years ago that I don't want to be part of a brain drain. My intention really is to garner experiences, contacts, everything for a time when I would go back. Everything for me is pointing towards that. It really is a course for me in a way [by] building up these experiences...

To Helen, it was important for her to 'cultivate the self' during her overseas exposure but this was not merely for personal gain. Rather, it was tied to her desire to position herself to contribute effectively to the future development of Singapore. Her sentiments exemplify the argument that I forwarded in Chapter Four suggesting that while it is helpful to look into the desires of migrants to develop the 'self' during their transmigrancy, it is also important to take into account institutional contexts in our understandings of transnational migration.

Another interpretation of the idea of extraterritorial 'responsibilities' by my respondents was to promote the image of Singapore as overseas representatives of the country. This manner of contribution is an important aspect of the Singaporean state discourse on 'responsibilities'. However, I found that Singaporean transmigrants who saw themselves as 'ambassadors' for Singapore were prone to express ambivalent attitudes about their role. For example, Patricia said:

My obligation to Singapore is to portray it as a good country. In a way to be ambassadors of Singapore, but I can't be an ambassador in the sense of our high commissioner because I will have bad things to say about Singapore... I do defend Singapore when people are making unjustified criticisms [of it]... I would do the same for any other country, [but] for Singapore I can say it in a more authoritative manner because I am Singaporean.

Patricia's narrative indicates her awareness of the merits and demerits of Singapore, and she would portray both sides of Singapore to non-Singaporeans. She professed, however, that she would 'defend' the country if it was unjustly criticised by others. Patricia's attitude hinges on her sense of social membership to the country and she felt strongly that her identity as a Singaporean gave her the right to be 'more authoritative' in her defence of the country.

This idea of social membership with regards to ambassadorship was also highlighted by Deborah. Like Patricia, she thought of her responsibilities as an overseas Singaporean citizen with mixed feelings:

I think it is up to Singaporeans to put Singapore in a favourable light – not to deceive other people but you know... I find that it is very easy to say, 'Oh, Singapore is run by a tyrant' for example, but you know why you are saying that – because you have got the background knowledge but other people they don't know. They would take it literally: 'Oh my God, Singapore is run by a tyrant!' And then they spread the message and it's not doing your country justice because it's wrong... It's kind of like, 'I can say bad things about my family but you can't!' It's the same with my country as well because even though I say that, the thing is that I understand the history and background, and you know, I've got links with my country - I have emotional links and whatever. I still won't like it if someone derides my country, especially if they are doing it by parroting what I say without really understanding what I say. On the most basic level I think you owe it to your country.

What is distinctive in Deborah's account is the way in which she situates her relationship with the country within the discourse of 'family'. This indicates a sustained depth of belonging during transmigrancy even though on a personal level, she was one of those Singaporeans who did not readily align themselves with the overseas Singaporean community (see Chapter Five). In this way, it suggests to me that, like Patricia, Deborah's feelings and attitude towards

‘responsibilities’, or what is ostensibly a political aspect of citizenship, were couched in emotionally-laden terms of ‘belonging’.

At the same time, what also stands out in Deborah’s narrative was her ambivalent attitude towards Singapore. To Deborah, loyalty and duty to Singapore should be demonstrated by contextualising the portrayal of Singapore in such a way that foreigners would not have a negative one-dimensional view of the country. Patricia’s attitude towards her role as an ambassador for Singapore was couched in similar terms. Both respondents sought to portray Singapore’s merits and demerits in a fair way, which may not match up to the glossy image of Singapore that the Singaporean state is more apt to promote. These contradictory feelings are perhaps distinctive to the Singaporean case study due to the way that Singapore is often considered an anomaly amongst the economically advanced countries. The strict political control exercised by the Singaporean state is often criticised by political observers as a contravention of Western democratic norms characteristic of other advanced economies. What I wish to underscore, however, is the significance of the ambivalent attitudes towards citizenly ‘responsibilities’, which points to the contingent power of the Singaporean state to exercise hegemony over extraterritorial forms of citizenship practice.

In sum, underpinning the narratives in this discussion is a shared sense that overseas Singaporeans still have ‘responsibilities’ towards their country of origin in spite of their transnational circumstances. In fact, these Singaporean

transmigrants utilise their transnational situations to fulfil their responsibilities in particular ways. Their tactics range from the personal (being an ambassador or gathering experiences and contacts that would benefit Singapore) to more institutionalised processes (participation in Singaporean associations). In this way, their views resonate with the Singaporean state discourse on the obligations that overseas Singaporeans have towards the national community. However, the constructed and ambivalent nature of the idea of ‘responsibilities’ that I signalled in this discussion also suggest that there is more to be uncovered with regards to the power of the state over internationally mobile citizens.

#### **4.2 Transgressing state ideals of ‘responsibilities’**

In this discussion I use the discourses from transnational migration to further unpack the shifting power relations in the notion of ‘responsibilities’. My goal is to examine the tensions that arise as a result of nationally defined ideals of ‘responsibilities’ being played out on the transnational stage. I present evidence to forward my argument that transnational migration creates the conditions that allow for the reworking of the idea of political ‘responsibilities’.

Despite the way my respondents appear to unquestioningly perform ‘responsibilities’ as a requirement of citizenship, transnational exposure and time away from Singapore often contribute towards the more intense interrogation of state-sponsored ideals of ‘responsibilities’. As I discussed earlier, Singaporean transmigrants in London usually experience a more liberal



rights regime in the UK compared to the Singaporean context, which is characterised by a political culture of paternalism and restricted rights vis-à-vis an accompanying emphasis on citizen ‘responsibilities’ instead.

The unequal weight given to these two aspects of the Singapore citizenship social contract was brought up as a subject of contention during some of the interviews, such as by Olivia who remarked:

I don't feel that I am getting any benefits so I don't feel like I need to give anything back.

To Olivia, the curtailment of political and civil rights and the paternalistic approach towards social rights in Singapore compares poorly with the British model that she characterised as less interventionist and open to greater debate. Rights and responsibilities were ideally regarded as balanced components of citizenship in Olivia's view.

I also found signs of resistance towards the moral framings of ‘responsibilities’ propagated by the Singaporean state, which is partly premised on the belief that citizenship should be a reciprocal and equally balanced social contract between the state and the citizen. Consider the view of Lionel who expressed resentment towards being ‘controlled’ by a paternalistic government:

As a citizen I would expect a reasonable standard of education for my children; [...] free healthcare at least for people who can't afford it; [...] infrastructure, just making things work and in exchange for that, you pay taxes and elect a government. [Instead] there is the whole sense that the PAP is what brought us to where we are, so you should feel grateful and obey it.

Like Olivia, Lionel felt that rights and responsibilities should be a matter of fair exchange between the government and the people who give it the mandate to govern. In his view, the PAP government had unfairly conflated Singaporean nationhood with the achievements of the ruling party instead. The intention, Lionel believed, was to obtain the gratitude of Singaporeans towards the ruling party and thereby legitimise its rule. Purushotam (2004) makes a similar argument in her analysis of the way that the Singaporean state associates the achievements of Singaporean society with the ‘benevolence and hard work’ of the PAP government in order to create a sense of dependent obligation towards the ‘giver’.

Besides that, to some respondents, inconsistent state policies towards migration and citizenship further erode the legitimacy of the Singaporean state to make demands on its overseas citizenry with regards to ‘responsibilities’. For example, the contradictions arising from the simultaneous execution of the ‘Foreign Talent Strategy’ and the ‘Overseas Singaporeans Strategy’ not only has material implications in incurring the resentment of Singaporean citizens towards the privileges given to non-citizens (Ho, 2006)<sup>4</sup>, but it also produces ideological ramifications. Comparing the two policies, Lionel pointed out that:

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<sup>4</sup> This finding was based on previous research gained from conducting focus group interviews with two groups of Singaporeans living in Singapore – those who had previously lived overseas for a period of time and those who did not have such experiences. This piece of research sought to problematise the ‘cosmopolitan-heartlander’ debate constructed by the Singaporean state at that time, but it also found out that both groups of Singaporeans had negative attitudes towards the ‘Foreign

[The government] wants to have it both ways. I don't see how they can possibly believe what they are saying [about retaining the commitment of overseas Singaporeans] when at the same time they are encouraging immigration [to Singapore] on such a scale. [According] to the government, [those foreigners] are quitters from their own countries. So [the government] can't believe what they are saying about stayers and quitters [with regards to Singaporeans] if they want these [foreigners] to come in...

Lionel's argument indicates the more fundamental issue at the root of debates over Singapore's globalising strategy emphasising the recruitment and retention of human capital flows. In his narrative, Lionel juxtaposed the exhortations by the Singaporean state urging overseas Singaporeans to retain their commitment to the country with its simultaneous pursuit of skilled and talented foreigners to settle in Singapore. Persons like Lionel found it inconsistent that the Singaporean state should pursue a line pressuring Singaporean transmigrants to be conscious of their 'obligations' to the national community alongside its policy of encouraging foreigners to renege on their original citizenships to take up Singapore citizenship.

The contradictions in these two policies trigger a sense of moral emptiness defying the moralising overtones favoured by the Singaporean state. The persistent framing of Singapore citizenship in terms of 'responsibilities', coupled with the perceived inconsistencies in moral rhetoric and policy, further produces a refusal to comply with techniques of governance. Dewi said for example:

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Talent Strategy' propagated by the Singaporean state and its implications for Singaporean citizens.

I think responsibility as a citizen becomes you when you are a Singaporean. At the end of the day there is no difference from wanting to do something and having to do something. When they want you to do something you have to do it anyway. [I don't think of] responsibility as in I have taken so much from the system that I have to give back... Maybe I am being selfish like a typical Singaporean, you know? The system is almost perfect and because of that you are accountable all the time. Also it has taken so much from you, so much in terms of what you would be as a person had you not been brought up there. For example, your creativity; your ability to voice out your thoughts; your ability to look at things from more than one point of view. These are things that were 'midgeted' or became sort of dwarfed because of the way the system works. So that has robbed me of the potential that I could have reached if I had been brought up somewhere else.

Dewi's narrative was marked by personal defiance towards paternalistic attempts of the Singaporean state to shape the conduct of Singaporean citizens ('you are accountable all the time'). She felt that this approach neglects the element of individual choice that should be exercised by citizens ('responsibility as a citizen becomes you when you are a Singaporean'). Her opinion that the Singaporean 'system' had 'dwarfed' her potential was in reference to the way Singaporean society encourages conformity rather than 'creativity' and independent thought, an argument that I developed in Chapter Four. Importantly, rather than being subject to state manoeuvres seeking to regulate her conduct as a citizen, Dewi's coping tactic was to leave Singapore and live abroad for a period of time.

Other respondents who resented the biased construction of 'responsibilities' by the Singaporean state also found personal means of evasion through transnational migration. George, for example, capitalised upon his transmigrancy to avoid his national service reservist duties. He said that since

moving overseas, he has not had to report for annual reservist duties in Singapore anymore:

- EH: Do you think you have responsibilities as a Singapore citizen?
- George: [Wonders aloud] Do I have?... Eh... I am very sure that we do... I can think of a lot but whether I choose to fulfil them is totally different.
- EH: Tell me, what are the ones that come to mind?
- George: Immediately you say, 'Look, as a Singaporean I have to defend my country', to say what I love and blah blah blah... And obviously I have to do my bit to put Singapore on the global map and all that, raise awareness of Singapore as a city. As for responsibility that I choose not to fulfil, very frankly, I think this whole notion about national service is a little bit over-rated.

Initially the idea of responsibilities did not resonate with George, but after some thought, he made a distinction between the Singaporean state's ideal of 'responsibilities' and his choice of whether to comply with the state's version. George stated matter-of-factly the notions of responsibility instilled into Singaporeans through state discourses. However, George challenged the way that the Singaporean state frames the idea of 'responsibility' with regards to national service. His narrative indicates ambivalence towards the idea of 'responsibilities' and transmigration provided a route for him to avoid particular ones such as his national service liability.

Transnational ways of living also allow for the emergence of strategies to subvert state ideals of political 'responsibilities'. The Singaporean state revised the citizenship laws in 2004 to enable overseas Singaporean women to pass down their Singaporean citizenship status to their offspring. This policy change sought to recognise the ties that overseas Singaporeans and their descendents

continue to have with Singapore despite long-term residency abroad. However, the policy intention may be undermined in situations such as that described by

Deborah below:

I would say, 'Oh, fine. I'm happy for my child to be Singaporean [...] if she is a girl, but not if it's a boy' because I don't want my son to go to national service. Maybe it's very selfish of me and maybe it doesn't make sense, but in two and a half years you could do a lot.

Deborah was married to a British citizen and she recognised that when she has children, her offspring would qualify for both Singaporean and British citizenship since the citizenship policies had changed.

However, the national service requirement for male Singaporean citizens was an important consideration to Deborah because of the perceived opportunity costs for her child. The estimated two and a half years that her son would have to spend in national service deterred Deborah from wanting her child to take up Singapore citizenship. The duty and obligation of national service was a sticky issue that often came up in the conversations that I had with the Singaporean transmigrants in my study.

The above examples illustrate ways in which practices of national-level responsibilities can be transgressed through transnational ways of living. Transnational migration allowed individuals such as George and Deborah to inhabit interstitial spaces of evasion and subversion. However, their practices of 'responsibilities' were still anchored in the imagination of the nation-state. In the following example, I show that although national-level responsibilities

remain meaningful, transnational ways of living mean that legalistic definitions had become inconsistent with the lived experiences of some Singaporean transmigrants.

During my interview with Prem, a successful businessman based in London, he described himself as ‘coming from an older generation of Singaporeans’ where the ‘Singapore passport still means something’ to them. Despite having left Singapore for almost two decades, he was conscious of his obligation ‘to help’ Singapore by way of providing professional expertise and international business connections to Singaporean companies. He reasoned that:

In the same way [that] Singaporean companies in India and China can contribute to Singapore, there are all sorts of opportunities for Singaporean professionals, directors and scientists to contribute to Singapore back there by developing opportunities [and] relationships here.

Prem’s translation of national-level responsibilities interlocks with the prevailing Singaporean state discourse promoting capitalist development through the international connections and expertise of internationally mobile Singaporean citizens.

However, despite cognisance of his strong sense of belonging to Singapore, Prem also contested the notion of circumscribing allegiance to only one nation-state:

You [can] have the situation where you keep everything to Singapore – basically, do the Lee Kuan Yew mentality – give them a vested interest to the point where they have a Singaporean passport, they have a Singaporean flat [and] their entire existence is based on Singapore. So if Singapore goes down they go down and they are going to fight for it. That is Lee Kuan Yew’s perspective of loyalty. I think that is a narrow-minded perspective on loyalty.

People will fight for anything that means something to them... I am not motivated by whether my money is tied up in Singapore [or] the UK. Quite frankly in this day and age, your property might be tied up [...] but a lot of people have assets in cash and stocks. They can be moved from point A to point B very quickly... If Singapore was to collapse tomorrow, regardless of whether they have a Singapore passport, they can go to US [or] the UK. It is not a problem. They already have a home there; they already have stock and shares there; they already have a bank account there.

In his narrative, Prem highlighted the difficulty of tying overseas Singaporeans down in a globalised world where cash, stocks and people are highly mobile. Even though his narrative appears pragmatic and individualistic in tone, during the interview I found that his personal attitude towards Singapore was characterised by emotional ties that made him feel bound to the country.

Nonetheless, Prem also emphasised the educational and international career ‘opportunities’ that had been made available to him in London, which he believes would be less probable in ‘backwater’ Singapore. Thus both the UK and Singapore were significant to him and he contends that notions of national allegiance and commitment should not be defined in a legalistic manner given that, as he puts it, ‘life involves people going to different levels’. He added that:

Lee Kuan Yew’s strategy of tying people economically to Singapore was fine for [the earlier] stage of development but it is no longer viable. Singapore needs to [create] a situation where being a Singapore citizen is the most advantageous thing ever in the flexibility it gives you, in the freedom of movement, in the ability to work and do things anywhere in the world so that it gives you the ability to contribute to businesses in Singapore and anywhere in the world.

In spite of feeling part of a place-based community in Singapore, transnational individuals like Prem seek a more flexible understanding towards the multiple



attachments and ensuing depths of commitment that transnational migrants develop from living in more than one nation-state. If notions of ‘responsibilities’ are, as Massey (2004) argues, relationally constructed then it follows that tying practices of ‘responsibilities’ in exclusive ways to a specific nation-state would have little resonance for individuals whose identities are not confined to territorial definitions of citizenship (Guarnizo, 1998).

This section advances my view that transnational migration provides ways of feeling, ways of thinking and ways of being that contravene national imaginaries of what the idea of ‘responsibilities’ ought to mean. Although to an extent the power to define ‘responsibilities’ still lies in the hand of the state, transnational migration allows for some degree of resistance to emerge. I argue in particular that exposure to a foreign political and social culture causes Singaporean transmigrants to rethink the balance between rights and responsibilities in the Singaporean context, and the nature of the state and citizen relationship in Singapore.

On a material level, transnational migration also enables Singaporean transmigrants to occupy interstitial spaces of evasion and subversion towards state strategies promoting particular forms of ‘citizenly’ conduct. The mindset behind these strategies, however, is a notion that exclusivist definitions of rights and responsibilities have become anachronistic to transnational lifestyles and outlooks. Therefore, what may be more appropriate is an approach cognisant of the transnational lives led by internationally mobile citizens whose

practices of rights and responsibilities may be simultaneously anchored in yet stretching beyond territorially defined boundaries of citizenship.

My findings also lead me to underscore the way that responsibilities are constructed through the sociality of emotions. For example, feelings of discontent, resentment and scepticism toward the political rationalities deployed by the Singaporean state are prone to produce vacuous conceptualisations of citizenly ‘responsibilities’, and even deliberate attempts by citizens to evade or subvert state-endorsed ideals. In contrast, attitudes emanating from feelings such as sincere appreciation, genuine gratitude, and a sense of ownership and belonging are likely to produce desires to contribute that would resonate on a personal level.

Writing about the relationship between the ‘local’ and the ‘global’, Massey (2004:10) argues that ‘the geographies of responsibilities’ are forged through identities constructed by embodied relations that extend geographically and historically. Hence she takes issue with the ‘persistence of a geographical imaginary which is essentially territorial and focuses on the near rather than the far’ (ibid, 10). Instead she advocates that the notion of responsibilities should be tagged onto the wider relations on which we depend. While there is much that I would agree with Massey, a caveat is necessary in view of my findings. I argue that although emotional affiliations may be sustained over space and time, they are still embodied experiences and relationships that are played out in space and place.

Proceeding from this reasoning, I wish to ‘ground’ the notion of responsibilities more modestly. In the next chapter I will examine the way that personal ‘responsibilities’ towards units of social organisation (other than the nation-state) become translated onto a national level, thereby drawing overseas Singaporeans back to the nation-state.

## **5 Conclusion**

The study of transnational migration exposes the dialogical processes that construct the articulations of political citizenship. In this chapter, I focused on the political content of citizenship in terms of ‘rights and responsibilities’ from the perspectives of both the Singaporean state and Singaporean transmigrants in London. I illustrated the way that the Singaporean state constructs discourses of rights and responsibilities so that the corporeality of internationally mobile citizens is made to be at the behest of the state. However, I also questioned the ways in which Singaporean transmigrants act under and counteract state power.

With regards to the rights discourse, Singapore citizenship continued to be meaningful to the Singaporean transmigrants in my study despite their migrant status. The right of return for work and family reasons was particularly important to them. However, they expressed divided opinions over whether overseas Singaporeans should be granted special rights in their extraterritorial circumstances. Whilst one camp subscribed to territorially bounded practices of citizenship, the other utilised the rhetoric of the Singaporean state propounding

the value of overseas Singaporeans to the national community to advance their claims for new rights. However, I argue that both of these discourses work to reify the power of the Singaporean state over extraterritorial citizens.

Nonetheless, this chapter also paid attention to the fissures in the hegemony of the Singaporean state through examples revealing the expressions of ambivalent compliance, and other more overt forms of resistance and contestation by Singaporean transmigrants. In doing so, I forward the view that the spaces of transnational migration inform and shape new political mindsets and identities that contravene the hegemony of the nation-state to define the rights associated with citizenship. However, the caveat is that this takes place in ways unlikely to conform to Western models of democratic citizenship in view of the historical and geographical specificities of nationhood and citizenship.

Even though citizenship scholars have drawn attention to the shift from rights to responsibilities in political discourses, up till now there is still a lack of understanding about the way that citizens perceive the idea of ‘responsibilities’ in association with citizenship. More generally, the theorising of this concept is also relatively weak. My study makes a contribution to this gap in citizenship studies by interrogating the way that Singaporean transmigrants in London related to state-defined notions of ‘responsibilities’. I argue that despite the lack of identification or agreement about what ‘responsibilities’ represent, Singaporean transmigrants still performed their citizenly ‘responsibilities’ as a

way of being. In fact, the practice of ‘responsibilities’ takes on transnational forms of expression corresponding in many ways with the role that the Singaporean state envisions overseas Singaporeans would play for the benefit of the national community.

Nevertheless, transnational migration also provides the means to question state-defined notions of ‘responsibilities’ in three aspects: the balance between rights and responsibilities; the moralising overtone of the Singaporean state discourse; and the dissonance between national-level responsibilities and transnational realities. To this end, transnational migration enables the emergence of spaces of evasion and spaces of subversion for internationally mobile Singaporean citizens. However, the underlying issue is still whether national forms of citizenship practice could be reformulated in ways that would better suit the multiple and overlapping attachments and affiliations felt by those who lead transnational lives.

Drawing together the discussions on rights and responsibilities, I argue that compliance with the state rhetoric on the part of some Singaporean transmigrants gives meaning to the discursive power of the state through the construction of citizenship. However, transnational experiences and situations also provide opportunities for politicisation, contestation, resistance and subversion of the ideals central to citizenship, thereby disrupting the workings of the state (Marston and Mitchell, 2004). State authority is open to citizen interpretation, and transmigrancy arguably gives space to non-hegemonic

forms of interpretations that are often couched in powerfully emotive terms. Therefore, the significance of the concept of emotional citizenship for political transformations lies in the personal emotional energies that can be harnessed to the group-level and effect political citizenship change.

Based on my study, I also propose that arguments on scalar citizenship can be used to overcome political constraints by pressing for claims based on international standards (while being cognisant of historical and spatial specificities). As Halfacree (2004:398) suggests, ‘people always have some ability to resist the dominant structures of society and the practices that flow through them – to exert difference – and if this is done “widely” enough then these structures and their attendant practices will change’. For example, the change to citizenship rules for children of overseas Singaporean women may be read as a pragmatic decision taken by the Singaporean state to address population and human capital concerns, but it can be equally interpreted as a result of decades of feminist struggle for greater gender parity in the country. Hence even if the present change is only incremental, personal resistance can be linked to some broader social and political project for the future.

# 7

## **'Asian' transnational families? Singaporean citizenship decisions and regulations**

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## **1 Introduction**

Citizenship decisions on whether to return or settle are often made in view of institutional factors, ideological structures and emotional considerations in both the sending and receiving countries. In this chapter, I focus on the ‘depth’ of citizenship ties felt by the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. I draw attention to the way that family reunification concerns act as important reasons for Singaporean transmigrants to consider returning to Singapore, which in turn makes holding Singapore citizenship important to them. Through this, I argue that the processes of migration and family formation are articulated by the nation-state, and in turn articulate the nation-state. Likewise, citizenship regulations based on the nation-state framework affect personal migration decisions and transnational family formations. This discussion also illustrates the intertwining relationship between the emotional, social-cultural and political aspects of citizenship.

I develop my argument, first, by considering the Singaporean state discourse on Singaporean families. I provide evidence to support my argument that the welfare of the family unit is propounded as an integral part of the nation-building project in Singapore. In addition, Singapore citizenship is constructed in such a way that familial ties located in Singapore are capitalised upon as a means to attach internationally mobile Singaporeans to the country. In this way, the family unit is used by political actors to produce the social contract of citizenship and notions of nationhood in Singapore.



In the second part, I examine the structure of Singaporean transnational families through the narratives of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. I consider the ways in which they maintained a sense of kinship and affiliation with family members in different parts of the world, and I explicate the emotional contours of their migration experiences. I argue that despite transportation and communication advances, these modes of keeping in touch did not prove to be sufficient substitutes for physical proximity to the family. I also emphasise the significance of the extended family to Singaporean transmigrants and the emotional reasoning behind familial ties that factor into their eventual repatriation decisions.

After establishing the centrality of the extended family, I then consider the manner in which the family unit features in the migration and citizenship decisions of my respondents. I foreground the emotional ties shaped by social-cultural values, first, towards aging parents, and second, towards young children. I argue that these intergenerational considerations make it important to my respondents that they continue to be Singaporean citizens in order to live in proximity to their family members who are based in Singapore. In doing so, I propose that the family unit is an important space of affiliation that roots Singaporean citizens to the nation-state. In this section, I also highlight the social ideology and the gendered aspects of ‘Asian’ familyhood that are made apparent through the Singaporean case study.

The last part of the chapter investigates the way that citizenship regulations imposed by the Singaporean state impinge upon transnational family formations. I focus on two particular aspects of political governance over Singaporean transmigrants, namely with regards to the dual citizenship restriction and the duty of military conscription. I suggest that both of these citizenship laws exercise a technology of rule affecting the way Singaporean family formations take shape for internationally mobile citizens whose familial ties stretch across international borders.

## **2 Constructing the ‘Asian’ family in nationhood and citizenship**

In this section, I elucidate my argument that the Singaporean state discourse on citizenship is based on idealised projections of the ‘family’, which is then capitalised upon by political actors to tie overseas Singaporeans to the nation-state. In Singapore, narratives of the family are unusually tightly interwoven with narratives of the nation-state: the family is regarded as a building block of society and its wellbeing considered integral to the sustained welfare of the national community, and ultimately the nation-state itself. Since gaining formal political independence in 1965, the Singaporean state has consistently used the social organisation of the family unit to advance nation-building goals. This is most apparent in the population strategies crafted by the state to manage population growth.

In the immediate post-independence years, the family unit was the target of state propaganda persuading Singaporean families to have no more than two

children because of overpopulation concerns. By the 1980s, Singaporean families were encouraged to have three or more children instead. The policy reversal was due to an ageing population and a declining birth rate, which would have had a profound negative effect on the age structure of Singaporean society and population replacement levels. This policy stance continues to this day and has taken on renewed fervour in the form of cash and other incentives to encourage procreation (Lee, 2004). The family unit, belonging to the private sphere, is in this way, 'constructed and penetrated by the institutions and interests of the state' (Fouron and Glick Schiller, 2003:542) to partly produce the public sphere of community and nationhood.

The Singaporean state also weaves a distinctive moral discourse in which the idealised citizen subject is situated at the nexus of the Singaporean family unit and nationhood. Through state rhetoric and policy measures, the preservation of conjugal and *extended* family units is strongly encouraged in the Singaporean context. According to the Singaporean state, family units act as basic social institutions holding up the nation-state:

Families serve as an important pillar of support for the nation. At the individual level, families are the primary source of emotional, social and financial support. At the national level, they contribute to social stability and national cohesiveness as they help develop socially responsible individuals and deepen the bond Singaporeans have with our country. (MCYS, 2006)

The above statement from the website of the Ministry of Community, Youth and Sports (MCYS), the government ministry managing population and social issues in Singapore, makes clear the role of the family in Singaporean society. The family unit performs an important function by shaping the

development of ‘socially responsible individuals’ that would in turn ensure the well-being of the national community. The ministry also highlights the social role of parents and grandparents as a conduit for transmitting desirable values to the young. The family unit, particularly the links between grandparents, parents and young children, is thereby regarded as a central tenet of Singaporean society that is critical to Singapore’s continued success.

The Singaporean state further stresses the responsibility of the individual to provide care for one’s family members instead of relying on the state, in particular towards aged parents as a demonstration of personal filial piety. Although Singapore is multicultural in composition, the ruling elite espouse a Confucian-derived logic that is extended to the general population in the name of nation-building. A set of commonly shared family values for Singaporean society<sup>1</sup> promoted by the Singaporean state on the MCYS website spells out the principle of filial responsibility as:

Your parents supported and provided for you when you were growing up. So it’s natural that you should do the same for them and their parents in their old age. You shouldn’t think of this as mere duty or an obligation, but rather as the natural fruit of the close bonds between family members. (MCYS, 2006)

This principle of filial responsibility forms part of the ‘Asian familialism’ (Yeoh *et al*, 2005:309) forwarded by the Singaporean state, stressing the

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<sup>1</sup> The five values were (1) love, care and concern, (2) mutual respect, (3) filial responsibility, (4) commitment, and (5) communication (MCYS, 2006).

intergenerational nature and depth of family units. It is also tied to a broader set of state arguments underscoring the ‘Asian values’ that supposedly guard Singaporean society against the purportedly morally-degrading influence of the West (Kuah, 1997).

The principle of filial piety and family support is materialised in various social policies in Singapore. For example, young couples who choose to buy a public housing flat near to where their parents live receive special housing subsidies from the Singaporean state. The Central Provident Fund (CPF) also has a specific scheme allowing the account-holder to use the monies to offset healthcare costs for elderly parents. Hence for both ideological and material reasons, the Singaporean state envisions that the healthy functioning of Singaporean family units would produce social stability, thereby promoting national cohesion and national rootedness.

However, there is reason to believe that the expanding internationalisation of young Singaporeans creates worries amongst the political elite about whether this outflow would threaten the ‘generational contract’ (Izuhara and Shibata, 2002) on which Singaporean society is based, and ultimately the social contract of citizenship. In this regard, I argue that with the growing outflow of young Singaporeans from the city-state, the family unit is capitalised upon as an ideological means to advance policy goals and state interests. The discourses circulated by the Singaporean political elite strongly suggest that they regard

the family as an important contributing factor for creating a strong societal core to counteract the impact of Singaporean migration.

For instance, during the National Day Rally in 1997, former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong said:

In a way, we have encouraged this dispersal of Singaporeans by asking you to go regional and create Singapore's external wing. But dispersal carries a danger - if Singaporeans are not deeply rooted to Singapore through strong bonds of family, friends, community and nation, the core of our nation will unravel. Abiding bonds to family and friends and deep loyalties to Singapore are crucial in this new situation. We must never forget that Singaporeans owe one another an obligation, and the more able ones, in whom Singapore has invested the most, have a special obligation to society. We must all join hands to keep Singapore together. (Goh, 1997)

The above extract highlights that the family unit is regarded as one of the most important factors helping to root Singaporeans, particularly the internationally mobile class, to the country. The view of the Singaporean political elite is that these familial bonds would emanate beyond the family unit to cohere with notions of nation and community.

My fieldwork experiences also suggest that in the Singaporean context, national belonging is regulated by citizenship legislation and policies in conjunction with discourses of the 'Asian' family. As I mentioned in Chapter Five, during my fieldwork with relevant Singaporean government departments, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) (responsible for labour affairs) representatives whom I met at the start suggested that I should also get in touch with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) (responsible for citizenship and national security issues) and the Ministry of Community, Youth and Sports

(MCYS) (responsible for population issues, including the welfare of Singapore families). This encounter hints that for the Singaporean state, the Singaporean family is an important point for consideration alongside the impact of transnational migration on citizenship issues.

Besides that, I argue that the family unit is a key component in the construction of Singapore citizenship. The recent changes allowing overseas Singaporeans to pass the right of Singapore citizenship to their descendents project an intertwining relationship between family, nation-state and citizenship. These changes to citizenship policy place emphasis on the familial lineage behind citizenship and seek to acknowledge the ties that overseas Singaporeans and their descendents maintain with the country despite their emigrant status. The end goal is to facilitate the eventual return of overseas Singaporeans with their children so that they would become part of the Singaporean national fabric. As Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong pointed out during the National Day Rally speech in 2006:

[We] worry because if every trained and skilled Singaporean is abroad, then who is going to be here in Singapore, *jaga rumah*, [meaning] looking after the home, keeping Singapore dynamic, vibrant, beating? If we have so many people overseas but not many in Singapore, where will the next generation of Singaporeans come from? How will we get talented and skilled Singaporeans to keep this place going?... We [...] have to help Singaporeans to come back and when they are ready to come back to link them up so that they can find jobs, to link them up so that their children can get into schools and to help them to integrate back in smoothly... It takes some adjustment and some getting used to be back in Singapore and I think we can do a lot to help them to merge in... We must deal with our diaspora to make them part of the family and treat them as part of the family. (Lee, 2006)

The above speech by Lee constructs an imagery of risk to the national body if overseas Singaporeans fail to return to Singapore. Lee placed emphasis not only on the significance of the current generation of overseas Singaporeans to the community, but also the potential value of their children as the ‘next generation of Singaporeans’ (ibid).

It is also worth noting the use of the ‘family’ analogy in Lee’s speech, which I argue, insinuates emotional attachments and connotes mutual obligation as a natural outcome of familial ties. This analogy attests to the often drawn parallels between the family and nation-state as social units of organisation based on ties of belonging and attachment (Yeoh and Willis, 1999; Fouron and Glick Schiller, 2001). The speech furthermore constructs a discursive framework in which local Singaporeans are also roped into the project of drawing back overseas Singaporeans (‘we can do a lot to help them merge in’). This affirms the argument I made in Chapter Five that the logic of social control projected through the ‘Overseas Singaporeans Strategy’ extends to both local and overseas Singaporeans.

The liberalisation of rules governing the passage of Singapore citizenship from overseas Singaporeans to their children thus fulfils the goal of the Singaporean state to maintain formal ties with the Singaporean ‘diaspora’ (ibid). To this end, the state has implemented new policies to facilitate the reintegration of overseas Singaporeans and their children. For example, overseas Singaporean parents may opt to put their children in special immersion programmes so as to



familiarise their young children with Singaporean culture and the Singaporean schooling system during their overseas study breaks. Aside from that, the children of overseas Singaporeans who had received their earlier education outside of Singapore are granted special concessions in the bilingual educational system. Instead of learning their mother tongue language (Chinese, Malay or Tamil), these children may choose to pick up a foreign language as their second language (Overseas Singaporean Portal, 2006). These changes arguably have the effect of privileging the children of overseas Singaporeans over their localised counterparts. Given the recent implementation of this policy, it remains to be seen whether Singaporean parents whose children are not given such options would contest the changes to the educational policy.

The ‘carrot’ approach is, however, not the only one that is used by the Singaporean state to maintain ties with its overseas citizens. I argue that the Singaporean state also utilises citizenship regulations to govern the behaviour of overseas Singaporeans. Citizenship is constructed by the ruling elite as representative of an individual’s commitment to the country, which is a particularly salient concern given the country’s immigrant beginnings. However, the impact of citizenship regulations on the family formations of internationally mobile citizens and their subsequent migration and citizenship decisions has yet to be fully explored. I develop this aspect of my study later in this chapter.

This section argues that the Singaporean state uses the family unit as an ideological tool for policymaking and nation-building purposes. The ‘family’ in Singapore functions vertically in terms of the social role parents and grandparents play in transmitting desirable values to the young. The ‘family’ also functions horizontally in terms of regulating social relationships with other members of the national community, purportedly by nurturing balanced and socially responsible individuals. The ideal citizen-subject is regarded as an individual who contributes to the country’s well-being by fostering familial ties and relationships. With growing transmigrancy, the function of the family to bind overseas Singaporeans to the country has become even more significant. This is acknowledged through state rhetoric, policy initiatives and recent changes to citizenship legislation. Under conditions of transnationality, the question is whether the purported links between individual, family, nation and citizenship are becoming more tenuous or interlocking in tighter ways than before.

### **3 Singaporean transnational families**

The subject of the ‘family’ often featured in the conversations that I had with the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. In this section, I consider the transnational family arrangements that my respondents were part of and the ways in which they constructed a sense of being ‘family’ across international borders. I argue that the concept of transnational families should not only be considered with respect to the nuclear family unit (parents and children), but it should also include the extended family unit. My argument is made in view of

both the familial discourses constructed by the Singaporean state and in the narratives articulated by the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. This optical shift paying attention to the extended family resonates with calls within the scholarship on transnational families to re-centre the role and effects of extended family structures (Bailey and Boyle, 2004).

Far from being a recent phenomenon, transnational families have long existed in different parts of the world since the emergence of European trade. These family formations only came to known as ‘transnational’ with the subsequent development of the nation-state system (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002:12; Ho, 2002:147; Yeoh *et al*, 2002:6). Bryceson and Vuorela (2002:3) describe transnational families as ‘families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely “familyhood”, even across national borders’. As a living arrangement stretched across national borders, transnational familyhood comes into being through material bonds of collective welfare and a shared imaginary of ‘belonging’ based on past trajectories and future continuities (Yeoh *et al*, 2005:308).

In the case of Singapore, geographically dispersed household units were the norm in pre-independent Singapore during the early nineteenth century. The majority of the first-generation migrants who came to Singapore were male bachelors from India and China, and they maintained strong ties with their families in their countries of origin. Their marriage partners were usually

selected from their home villages, and more often than not, the brides would remain behind while their grooms returned to Singapore to eke out a living. It was only with the passing of the first-generation migrants that family units began to become more localised as later generations detached themselves from the sending countries and settled in Singapore (Chan, 2003). The creation of Singapore citizenship in 1957 presumably had this latter group of migrants in mind since they were more likely to embody a Malayan identity and thus more open towards taking up Singapore citizenship (see Chapter Two).

However, the transnational family units of today are fundamentally different from those in the past. The number of transnational families and the density of interactions characterising the nature of such familial relations have become more complex and pronounced than before. This is partly triggered by the multifarious and multi-directional human migratory flows made possible with easier travel and communication technologies, but also because of the global demand and supply labour market exchanges occurring under post-Fordist capitalism (Mitchell, 1997a; Ong, 1999; Nonini, 2004). Even though transnational family formations appear to be a cycle that repeats historically amongst societies with migrant roots, as Elsie Ho (2002) argues based on her study of Chinese families in New Zealand, the nation-state system and the explosion of globalisation have created social morphologies that are distinctively different from those in the past.

In my study of Singaporean transmigrants in London, I found evidence of transnational family formations. By this I am referring to arrangements in which family members sustain significant ties of kinship and attachment to one another despite living in different parts of the world. By nature of their transmigration, all of my respondents were embedded in transnational family formations in one way or another, albeit to different extents. In addition, twenty of the forty-three Singaporean transmigrants in my study were married. Half of this group were in mixed nationality marriages, but this does not preclude their partners from having significant ties with Singapore themselves since a number of the couples had met whilst living in Singapore.

In her study of Filipino transnational families, Parreñas (2005) argues that contemporary transnational family formations have a different temporal and spatial experience from the past: new technologies heighten the immediacy and frequency of contact with the geographically dispersed family members. This enables the Filipino mothers in her study to maintain an active involvement in everyday family life from afar. In the Singaporean case study, regular visitations were one method used by my respondents and their family members to maintain a sense of familyhood across international borders. Besides that, another way of maintaining family connection was by capitalising upon communication and technological advancements. Phone calls, short text messages and emails were popular and easily accessible ways for my respondents to keep in touch with family members.

Long distance communication thus helped to construct narratives of ‘a shared imaginary of “belonging”’ (Yeoh *et al*, 2005:308), such as in the case of Hugh whose family members were dispersed in North America and the Asia Pacific:

- EH: How do you keep in touch with your family?
- Hugh: With my sisters it is mainly email. For my parents we tried but the hassle of switching on the computer and everything. Let’s use the telephone. So we call every week.
- EH: What do you normally talk about?
- Hugh: Life in Singapore and whatever. Sometimes it is just fifteen minutes at least, like ‘Is anything happening at home? Nothing, fine’. Other times it’s like, ‘Did you hear this cousin is getting married?’ So [we] do keep in touch with family life at home... It’s not like [we are] out of the loop...

As Hugh’s anecdote illustrates, phone calls and emails provide a means of keeping in touch with family members across the miles. However, these means of communication did not sufficiently replace face-to-face interactions with the family in the view of some of my respondents. Hence they capitalised upon video-conferencing technology by using relatively affordable home web cameras.

Michelle was one of the persons in my study who used this technology. As a single person living in London, she found that her most important familial support was in Singapore and the web camera was an important means for her to keep in touch with them. She explained the added advantage of using a web camera (webcam) in the following dialogue:

- EH: How do you keep in touch with your family?
- Michelle: Phone, webcam. My mum is really good. I want to see my nephew quite a lot so [we use the] webcam and chat. Phone is no use because it’s only one [person]. I use the phone quite a lot but I

need to use the webcam more than I used to because of him. It’s really surreal because he interacts with me on the webcam, [but] when [I] go back [I] sometimes feel, ‘Oh no, am I some online auntie?’ When he was one we would play ‘biscuits’ over the webcam, like if you show him he would grab it from the screen.

The web camera provided a means for Michelle to maintain her role as an ‘auntie’ by constructing shared experiences with her nephew through virtual reality. Nonetheless, even though information technology enables her to mediate the physical separation with her extended family, she described the experience as ‘surreal’ and expressed anxiety about being merely an ‘online auntie’. This suggests that to Michelle, virtual reality did not act as an effective substitute for her physical absence.

Some of my respondents had family members who were dispersed in parts of the world other than Singapore and the UK, and this posed particular challenges for remaining close to family members. Hugh, who was living with his Singaporean wife in London, shared with me his experience of negotiating familial attachments:

Hugh: Oh, my family is very interesting. It’s spread around the world. My elder sister is American so she lives in California. My second sis recently moved back from Australia so I don’t know where she is now. She’s probably in Singapore. My parents are in Singapore, that much I know. So once in a while my mum takes a trip around the world.

EH: How does [this] affect [you]?

Hugh: When you are travelling that much and especially when you live abroad you lose some connection... In terms of family we do make it a point to meet up at least once a year. So for example, this December I would be going back. Every December I make it a point to go back [and] so [would] my sisters. So that is not a problem. My mum would beg to differ but... [Trails off]

Hugh’s strategy for keeping in touch with the geographically dispersed members of his family was by ‘making it a point’ to return to Singapore ‘at least once a year’.

Nonetheless, Hugh admitted ruefully during the interview that the geographical distancing within his family unit and the geographical mobility of individual family members makes it difficult for him to keep up with developments in the family (such as the whereabouts of his sister). In addition, Hugh gave hint to the emotional tugging exerted by his mother in relation to the transnational mobility of her children (‘my mum would beg to differ’), and the way she negotiates their transmigration by regularly visiting them in different parts of the world. In this sense, transnational mobility entails a personal emotional cost both to the migrant and to family members elsewhere in the world.

Although the majority of my respondents had family members who were mainly based in Singapore, they still emphasised the difficulty of maintaining a sense of ‘familyhood’. This was even more accentuated when ‘familyhood’ connotes not only the immediate members of the family but also the extended family, such as in Michelle’s case:

I am very close to my family so I can’t leave for too long. I need to see them. I keep in touch with them a lot anyway but it’s tricky. My family is very big with the extended family as well, so it’s easier for one person to go back than for thirty [of them] to come up [to London].

In her case, Michelle emphasised that she couldn’t stay away from Singapore for a prolonged period of time because she felt the need to remain ‘close’ to her



family. The quality of being ‘close’ is explained in this case as a desire for physical proximity that arises out of emotional attachment to the family. Whilst cultural geographers such as Rose (2003) and Walsh (2006) have given heed to the way that material belongings are used to reproduce ‘home’ and ‘belonging’<sup>2</sup>, my research shows that amongst Singaporean transmigrants in London, these ways of recreating ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ are considered insufficient. The family represents a site of emotional intimacy alongside which spatial propinquity to family members is deeply desired.

The above narratives underscore the importance of ‘keeping in touch’ with family members during transmigrancy. Unlike the migrant households of the past, the opportunities and means of keeping in touch are accentuated in the contemporary period. However, material objects and technologies elide the social networks and emotional textures of familyhood. In the Singaporean family unit, the multiplied fields of familyhood through extended family networks also create distinctive difficulties that over time, as I found out, impinge on subsequent migration and citizenship decisions.

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<sup>2</sup> Refer to Blunt (2005) for a full review of the work that has been carried out in this area.

#### 4 Family as a site of ‘national belonging’

The key question that I seek to answer in this section is: in what way do familial considerations mediate migration and citizenship decisions? The preceding section made clear that ‘the grounding of the body in locality means that mobility entails a cost, not simply in the economic sense, but also in physiological, social and emotional terms’ (Yeoh, 2005:412). In this section, I foreground the familial ties spelled out by my respondents compelling their eventual repatriation to Singapore.

Although work opportunities and greater social-cultural acceptance were cited as reasons for return, by far the most salient impetus for my respondents to consider repatriation was ‘for the sake of the family’ (Yeoh *et al*, 2002:1). I argue that in this way, the family acts as a unit of emotional attachment, a factor for return and thereby an important reason for holding Singapore citizenship since it allows for the right of legal return. The prominence of the family in migration and citizenship decisions begs a closer consideration of what regulates the ‘depth’ of citizenship for Singaporean transmigrants, particularly in view of the contingent, fractured and ambivalent modes of national belonging and identification that I brought up for discussion in Chapter Five.

Proceeding from what Isin and Turner (2002:2) explain as the ‘thickness’ or ‘thinness’ of citizenship, in this section, my interest is to understand what are

the key factors that constitute the ‘depth’ of citizenship experienced by the Singaporean transmigrants in my study? Through their narratives, this section highlights, first, the obligations that Singaporean transmigrants feel towards their aging parents. Second, I focus on their considerations over the care and socialisation of young children. Through these analyses, I then argue that emotional reasons and social-cultural contexts based on notions of the ‘family’ made holding Singapore citizenship important to them so as facilitate their future return to be with the family based in Singapore. The necessity of remaining Singaporean citizens was also influenced by their knowledge that Singapore has a dual citizenship restriction. The Singaporean family unit together with restrictive citizenship rules therefore act as factors regulating the ‘depth’ of citizenship ties.

#### **4.1 Obligations to aging parents**

Aging parents left behind in Singapore were often a key concern for the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. Although concern for elderly members of the family may not be unique to Singaporeans (Ackers, 1998; Ho, 2002; Aranda, 2003), what is distinctive about the Singaporean case study is the way that Singaporean familial arrangement appear to have less ‘elasticity’ (Ley and Kobayashi, 2005:123), or the quality of spreading out, compared to their transnational counterparts from other nationalities, such as the Hong Kong, Taiwanese and Malaysian Chinese immigrants in New Zealand (Ho, 2002) and Canada (Waters, 2003; Ley and Kobayashi, 2005).

In my study I found that for many of my respondents, the overseas stint – particularly in London – was seen as an essential way to accumulate the economic and cultural capital for facilitating their future career progression (see Chapter Four). In her study of Chinese immigrant students and graduates from Hong Kong, Waters (2006) posits that the active accumulation of cultural capital represents the principal means by which the middle-class reproduces its social status across generations. This trend was also apparent amongst the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. A number of them had been educated in Western universities as part of a process of ‘self-fashioning’ (ibid, 181) in order to ensure their success in the global economic arena. Their work stint in London was a step further along that trajectory.

However, what was particularly marked in the narratives of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study was that their process of self-fashioning through work was often not an individualised decision. Even though my respondents were working adults capable of making their own life decisions, many of them spoke of obtaining parental consent before making the decision to become internationally mobile subjects. This finding sheds light on the way that the Singaporean transmigrants in my study were deeply embedded in familial networks that factor into their subsequent migration decisions. Thus in spite of having obtained the approval of their parents to work overseas, my respondents often found it difficult to negotiate familial attachments and care work from afar.

Take for instance Dewi who said to me when explaining the contingency of her transmigrancy:

[Since our parents] are still able and they consent to [us] being away. You are happy and they know it. [We] make sure that we send money back. *Things you would do as an Asian child [to] make sure that they are being cared for.* But we know that at the end of the day when they are ill, you would have to go back or bring them with you. (Emphasis added)

Dewi’s narrative makes it clear that to some extent she felt she could be excused from having to provide direct care for her parents because they were still in good health and they had given their consent towards her absence. Even so, she emphasised that she still took responsibility for them in their old age by regularly remitting money back to them. To her, it was a natural act of ‘Asian’ filial piety that she was demonstrating to them. The moralistic way in which she couched her explanation closely echoes the Singaporean state discourse on practices of ‘Asian’ familialism.

Although Dewi brought up the possibility of bringing her parents to live with her in the UK, the reality is that British immigration regulations make it difficult to sponsor older relatives for migration to the country. In general, the dependent (other than a spouse or child) being sponsored has to be aged above 65 years and able to provide proof that the family member based in the UK is their main source of financial support. In addition, they have to prove that they have no other familial support in the country of origin (IND, 2006). As such, the probability that Singaporean transmigrants such as Dewi would return to Singapore in order to be with their aging parents is greater than the probability that they would relocate their family members to live overseas with them.

Many of my respondents said that the reason why they could manage international mobility in lieu of concerns over aging parents was because they had other family members in Singapore providing care for their parents during this time. Nonetheless, this did not alleviate the feelings of guilt they often experienced, which mediate their decisions to return to live in Singapore eventually. In a study of Japanese migrant women in Europe, Izuhara and Shibata (2002) reveal that some of these women experienced guilt for being unable to provide care for their aged parents; a similar intergenerational reciprocity contract lies at the back of the minds of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. Hugh said for example:

Hugh: There’s always the guilt trip of course. Now that my second sister has moved back to Singapore it is much easier than before. [However,] ultimately we do think that there is a need to stay in Singapore when your parents get older and so on. But until then I guess you might say we are padding up the CV with overseas stints and so on. London is not the best place to raise your children, so when you do have children in the future and the parents are older we might consider going back. I certainly feel that there is a guilt thing going on.

EH: What do you feel guilty about?

Hugh: For not being there when my parents are getting old. We send money back to our parents every month but that is not exactly the same. It is like, ‘What have you done?’ ‘Give you money’, that sort of thing.

In the dialogue above, Hugh explicated his feelings of ‘guilt’ for ‘not being there’ for his aging parents. This was even though he knew that his overseas work stint was justifiably for the sake of ‘padding up the CV’, and he had taken care to regularly remit money to his parents whilst ensuring that they were being taken care of by his sister.

Although Lam *et al* (2002) explain that financial support is regarded as an important aspect of transnational caring amongst Chinese-Malaysian transmigrants, to Singaporean transmigrants like Hugh, remittances were considered a poor substitute for their physical presence. In contrast to the literature based on migration from the economically less advanced countries in Asia (Parreñas, 2001 and 2005), Latin America (Mahler, 2001) and Africa (McGregor, forthcoming), financial remittances featured less prominently in the narratives of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. If money was remitted at all, this was more often a symbolic act to signify filial piety rather than out of any real need to financially support family members in Singapore. This was not only because my respondents came from Singapore, an advanced industrialised economy, but also because they usually belonged to the more privileged socio-economic spectrum of the Singaporean population. As I established in Chapter Four, their main migration motivations were rarely for financial returns alone, but were instead tied to a broader process of self-development and exploration, or because they wanted to escape from the Singaporean milieu that they felt was too stifling for their comfort.

However, as this discussion makes clear, any form of empowerment that these Singaporean transmigrants experienced through migration still had to be negotiated within the context of family expectations, loyalty, duty and obligations – which often manifests as feelings of ‘guilt’ towards aging parents. The manner in which the ‘Asian’ familial discourse shapes feelings of ‘guilt’ as

a natural outcome arising from absence also directs deeper consideration towards the power relations within the home/household (Sparke, 2004:780-781). Whilst Singaporean transmigrants often propounded ‘Asian’ family values, their narratives were also peppered with anecdotes of ‘delayed’ piety (Dewi: ‘so long as they are fine... but we know that at the end of the day when they are ill you would have to go back or bring them with you’) and accompanying ‘guilt’ (Hugh) in terms of their obligations to their parents. These examples show that the cultural politics of emotions are shaped by social-cultural relations that work in complex and contradictory ways.

The familial duties and obligations experienced by my respondents are also inflected by gendered dynamics: the female respondents were more likely to bring up the issue of immediate care work than their male counterparts. Previous research indicates that women tend to be more conscious of their responsibility for aged family members (Ackers, 1998:295). Non-Asian women, such as the Europeans described by Ackers (*ibid*), may have similar concerns that eventually prompt their repatriation. However, there is generally less cultural pressure for them to undertake immediate care work for the elderly because of the availability of state-sponsored residential care homes (although the extent differs from country to country within Europe as well).

In contrast, the Singaporean state does not have similar provisions for the majority of the population. In fact, faced with an ageing demographic, the state reiterates that the responsibility of eldercare should primarily fall on the



shoulders of family members. At the level of the community, there is also still a stigma attached to leaving your parents, or for the elderly, being placed in the care of an old age home rather than in the care of immediate family members. The double-burden of productive and reproductive work becomes aggravated for Singaporean women who subscribe, knowingly or unknowingly, to the ideology of ‘Asian’ familialism that places family interests above individual concerns, and in which deeply entrenched notions of the woman’s reproductive role still persist (Yeoh and Willis, 1999; Chan, 2000; Purushotam, 2004). The gendered dimensions of care work will be addressed again later in this chapter.

#### **4.2 Childcare and the socialisation of young children**

Besides aging parents, the familial considerations of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study often included young children. Most of my respondents did not have children even if they were married, therefore they can be categorised as ‘double-income, no kids’ (DINK) families. Only two respondents had young children and in both cases they lived with their spouses and children in London. As such, astronaut households or transnational parenting strategies as documented elsewhere were not common to the Singaporean transmigrants in my study (see Ong, 1999; Waters, 2003; Scott, 2004; Parreñas, 2005). However, concerns over young children still featured prominently during the interviews with both married and unmarried Singaporean transmigrants.

Many of my respondents had planned their migration trajectories in relation to their career and family plans. The decision to delay starting a family was usually influenced by the knowledge that there would be a lack of childcare support while they were living overseas. Most of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study were middling transnationals (see Chapter Four) and they needed the income of both spouses in order to afford the high costs of living in London. They were often disinclined towards putting their children in the local infant- or childcare centres because of the high costs of these facilities. The practical difficulties and additional expenses of employing a foreign domestic helper or *au pair* also created the perception that it would be harder to bring up a young family in London.

Take for instance Hannah who was married but said that she had delayed starting a family so as to prioritise her career ambitions. She wanted to have children only when she had reached a ‘certain point in [her] career’ because she recognised that childbirth and childcare responsibilities could be ‘detrimental’ to her career. Nonetheless, she had strategised her family plans in advance in relation to her migration strategy:

I would consider having my child here for the first two years and once schooling is a factor to go back. It is a hard decision because here we don’t have the family support, so you have to give up something for something else... If we have kids then it would be more stable and they can enjoy their grandparents, and their grandparents can enjoy them... We don’t know much about schooling here and there is some doubt about how good it is. I don’t have a lot of faith in the primary to secondary level of schooling here. I would feel better if my child is brought up in [Singapore], but I think it is a matter of familiarity because neither of us [were] brought up here.

Hannah’s strategy for migration and familyhood capitalises upon the advantages of being in two national systems. She planned to take advantage of the generous statutory work-place maternity benefits in the UK at first, and return to Singapore only when her child reaches school-going age for the quality of education there.

More importantly, Hannah emphasised the importance of the ‘family support’ that she would receive in Singapore to enable her to manage the dual demands of work and childcare. The implications of childcare support whilst living overseas were more often brought up as a matter of concern by the female Singaporean transmigrants in my study than their male counterparts. This signifies that the burden of reproductive tasks is still regarded as the domain of Singaporean women, which is similar to the findings of other studies such as Aranda (2003) on Puerto Rican migrants in the United States and Parreñas (2001) on Filipinas in Italy and the United States. In other words, the effects of transnational migration on the accomplishment of care work are greater for women than their male counterparts, and usually pose stronger reasons for return migration.

In the case of Hannah, she was adamant that when the time came for her husband and her to start a family, she would be the one to either resign from her job or take up work on a part-time basis. Her reasoning behind this decision was:

I think he is the principal breadwinner and he would probably find it more mundane to stay at home with a child.

This sentiment was closely echoed by a number of my female respondents and often tied to the belief that, first, their husbands would not be up to the task of childcare. Second, they were worried about the type of values that would be transmitted to the next generation in terms of gender roles. These attitudes, I argue, work to reinforce the gendered division of labour within Singaporean households.

As I argued in Chapter Four, migration to the UK provides a means for Singaporean women to build up and find satisfaction in their career achievements. However, the attitudes on childcare responsibilities expressed by a number of my female respondents show that gendered mindsets relegating Singaporean women to the sphere of social reproduction are still prevalent in Singaporean society. In fact, the women are often complicit in perpetuating these mindsets. This finding resonates with the work of Yeoh and Willis (1999:363) on Singaporean transmigrants in China in which they argue that gendered ideologies are ‘elaborated and reproduced in the social dialectics of “nation” and “diaspora”’ – in part by the women themselves.

Writing about the social position of Singaporean women in Singaporean society, Purushotam (2004:345-348) also reasons that the constraints that fence women into unwilling subordinate positions vis-à-vis men often come about as a result of the willingness of women to accept and work towards the achievement of gendered inscriptions. In my study, I argue that whilst

migration provides some opportunities for Singaporean women to find fulfilment in the productive sphere (see Chapter Four), the migration experience is only partially liberating in that it does not eliminate entrenched attitudes towards gender roles in the productive and reproductive spheres.

Beyond the practical concerns over childcare support, the Singaporean transmigrants in my study also expressed concern over the communication of important moral and family values to young children. The way my respondents articulated this was often in terms of the importance of transmitting ‘Asian’ values to their children. Dewi, for instance, believed that it would be easier to inculcate moral and family values in young children if they lived in a predominantly ‘Asian environment’:

When I start having a family it is always a lot simpler to bring them up in an Asian environment because of the values you share... There is definitely a common denominator when you are in your own country...

Dewi’s anecdote makes it clear that she believes it would be easier for her children to pick up ‘Asian’ values by being surrounded by people who share the same ways of thinking. However, the politics of ‘Asian values’ have been well-documented by scholars, such as Robison (1996) and Kessler (1999), who dispute the immutability of such values as the product of a distinct cultural civilisation. Instead, they point to the political nature of this ideology, which is utilised by bureaucrats, the political elite and corporate interests to advance statist and economic goals.

Despite the contested nature of ‘Asian values’, the role of extended family members in Singapore was frequently emphasised by my respondents as a means of transmitting this set of presumably organic beliefs. For example

Helen said:

I like the idea that the family [in Singapore] is quite close... I think it is important to have well-grounded, well-adjusted adults; a lot is also tied to their childhood. I personally feel that my parents are great role models and I [would] like my kids to be able to deal with older people, with their grandparents, uncles and aunts, and know their cousins.

The narrative of Helen emphasises the critical importance of creating an environment that would be conducive for young children to pick up healthy family and societal values from the adult ‘role models’ around them. In my study, I found that Singaporean transmigrants often mentioned that members of the extended family play an important socialisation role by acting as conduits for the transmission of important moral and family values to young children.

The role of grandparents was highlighted in particular by my respondents given that most of them anticipated that both parents would continue to hold down full-time jobs even when they start a family. This makes it vital for the young family to be situated in Singapore so that grandparents can help to create what

Hugh described as a ‘structured routine’ for the children:

[The children would] be able to see the familiar faces, to have the same routine everyday – breakfast, bath, naptime or whatever – all at the same time, with the same people. Grandparents can provide that. If you are working you can’t do that all the time...

During the interview, Hugh stressed that he did not expect his parents to ‘look after’ his children, but he would like them to help create a supportive and familiar environment for his children. The gendered dynamics of the division of labour within the household is made apparent when Hugh’s narrative is contrasted with the earlier narrative by Hannah who made clear that extended family members were clearly looked upon as a potential avenue for delegating care work.

Yogesh, whose children (now adults) were brought up in Singapore by their grandmother, also stressed the role that his parents had played in terms of generating a sense of familyhood for his children when they were young. Explaining what he believes is the reason for the attachment that his children feel towards Singapore, Yogesh said:

[My children] are rooted in Singapore. Their grandmother and the family are there. The link is very strong. I think somehow you need the extended family support. You can only do so much when the parents are working. The grandparents have nothing to do and they give and give... I think it will be the same with my grandchildren.

This narrative by Yogesh was infused with a sense of deep appreciation and gratitude towards his parents for nurturing his children with their time, love and concern. The role that his parents played for his children was particularly important given that both Yogesh and his wife were working professionals, and on top of that, he had frequently commuted to work in London during that period of time.

More significantly, Yogesh believes that the reason why his children were emotionally, and hence physically, attached to Singapore was because of their grandparents. Interestingly, in his narrative, Yogesh also refers to what he expects would be his future duty towards his grandchildren, which underlines the intergenerational passage of acts of familial nurture and care in Singaporean society. This point of view, often articulated by my respondents in a manner suggesting that it is a ‘natural’ way of being, strongly resonates with the Singaporean state’s discourse on familyhood.

This discussion brings into focus thus far neglected issues on caring at a distance, the cultural differences in familial relationships, and the role of extended family members (Kofman, 2004:246). The intergenerational ties linking grandparents, children and grandchildren act as important reasons for Singaporean transmigrants to consider eventual repatriation to Singapore. Singapore is seen at the site where extended family members, in particular grandparents, are located and hence the most ideal place to bring up young children. The way that attitudes towards young children feed into debates over family, identity and migration is not unique to the Singaporean case study. A study conducted by McGregor (forthcoming) on Zimbabwean professionals in Britain and their decisions to send their children back to Zimbabwe (for educational and family reasons) also foregrounds the moral markers placed over ‘African’ identity and values in contrast to the ‘West’.



However, I argue that the Singaporean context is distinctive because the narratives on family shared by the Singaporean transmigrants in my study were not limited to concerns over young children, but also towards aging parents. Both these aspects of ‘familyhood’ act as emotional factors mediating decisions to return to Singapore. As such, it was not uncommon to hear my respondents speak of their international mobility as only a temporary strategy; in the end, Singapore was where their emotional and therefore geographical attachments were situated.

#### **4.3 Intergenerational familial ties and personal citizenship decisions**

Children and aging parents are regarded both as a source of responsibility and the moral markers around which personal identity and familial belonging are demarcated. In this way, the presence of the family unit contributes to the geographical attachment of Singaporean transmigrants to Singapore. Although familial considerations also facilitate return or cyclical migration trends amongst transnational families of other nationalities (Ho, 2002; Aranda, 2003; Waters, 2003; Nonini, 2004), the thrust of this section argues that the Singaporean case study is distinctive because of the way that familial considerations act in conjunction with citizenship regulations to mediate migration and subsequent citizenship decisions.

Singapore citizenship took on added significance to many of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study because of the family unit that was located in Singapore. Singapore citizenship accords to them the right to remain in the

country indefinitely, therefore allowing Singaporean transmigrants to live in proximity to the family rather than face potential territorial and social closure as non-citizens (Brubaker, 1992:23-27). This reasoning is illustrated in Dewi’s narrative about her citizenship considerations. As highly skilled migrants, both Dewi and her husband qualify for legal residency status in the UK in the long-term. However, Dewi said that they had no intentions to apply for British permanent residency or citizenship. This was partly because Singapore citizenship was not merely a legal status; instead it represented to her the means of family reunification:

I intend to keep my citizenship. I don’t know why but I always feel that at the end of the day that citizenship [is something] you can always fall back on... Perhaps the reason why one is keeping their citizenship is not because they are keeping their citizenship, but so that they can be with their family... That is their passport to living in Singapore... to be with their family whenever they need to be, because if you give it up then you are only there on a tourist visa...

Dewi’s narrative indicates Singapore citizenship had an emotional significance that was strongly constituted by the family unit situated in Singapore. For persons like her, ideologies over familyhood are scaled to the national level and translated into citizenship practices: Singapore citizenship is regarded as the means to legal return for the sake of the family (‘passport to living in Singapore’).

In such instances, the impetus for return, the material acts of providing financial support and care for the elderly, and the practical concerns over childcare and the moral socialisation of young children, are usually explained by way of intergenerational ‘Asian’ familialism. As such, the family unit is an

important factor that emotionally attaches Singaporean transmigrants to Singapore and heightens the meaning of Singapore citizenship to them. These conceptualisations of the family in relation to nation and citizenship closely match up to the way the Singaporean state capitalises upon the family as a moralising political projection for nation-building purposes.

Familial considerations for return migration also had to be managed within the context of the nation-state framework (Yeoh *et al*, 2002:6), especially in view of the dual citizenship restriction imposed by the Singaporean state. Even if they had individually considered applying for a foreign citizenship before, this idea was usually abolished by my respondents in lieu of family considerations. For instance, Hugh had considered taking up citizenship in another country so as to give himself 'more options'. However, as I described earlier, Hugh was one of those Singaporean transmigrants who experienced a sense of guilt for not being by the side of his parents in their old age. He said:

My parents are growing old. I am the last child in the family. My parents are not that young anymore. I would definitely take care of my parents... I would not go to the extent of giving up my citizenship before I am sure that I am really out of the country. Even right now my sister has kept her citizenship despite her [American] green card. I think we all want to have the option to come back.

Hugh makes it clear that it was his parents who 'root' him to Singapore as a space of affiliation. Rather than for economic pursuits, future migration decisions for Singaporean transmigrants like Hugh appear to be tied to a desire to move closer to the family, in particular since aging parents often have difficulty relocating overseas to live with their children.

In Hugh’s case, the decision to retain Singapore citizenship was also mediated by the knowledge that Singapore has a dual citizenship restriction. Comparing citizenship to currency, Hugh related the way his parents factor into his citizenship considerations:

As a person working in finance I have several choices to make. Do I keep my investments and savings in Singapore dollars, in euros, in pounds or US dollars?... If my parents [are] not around anymore, is there a reason to keep it in Singapore dollars? I don’t know.

Hugh’s narrative clearly shows that the primary reason why Singapore citizenship mattered to him was because of his emotional ties based on the family unit in Singapore. Giving up Singapore citizenship in favour of a foreign citizenship was out of the question for Singaporean transmigrants like him who ranked familial ties above self-aspirations. The dual citizenship restriction in Singapore thereby effectively curtails the ability of internationally mobile Singaporean citizens to make alternative citizenship choices, but as I will make clear later in this thesis, this regulation actually impinges on the realities of their transnational lives.

In her study of Chinese transnational families based in America, Ong (1999:113) argues that Chinese familial dispersal tactics are used to facilitate the accumulation of economic and cultural capital whilst accruing the rights to foreign citizenships. This particular conceptualisation of citizenship has been taken up by other scholars. Nonini (2004:41), for example, forwards the idea of ‘citizenship by purchase’ to connote the way that citizenship is traded like a commodity in nation-states governed by the logic of disciplinary neoliberalism.

Based on his study of Chinese-Indonesian businessmen in Australia, Nonini (ibid) adds that considerations for the welfare of the family were an important reason why these businessmen chose to invest in businesses in Australia so as to obtain Australian citizenship rights. This was even though the different business and social-cultural milieu in Australia created difficulty for these businessmen to generate profits and sustain their businesses there.

Likewise, Waters (2003 and 2006) provides evidence from her study of Chinese immigrant families in Vancouver to press the point that educational considerations for the children were the reason why families chose to undertake international relocation, even if it means that spouses or parents and children have to live apart. In these case studies, the family acts as an important factor contributing to the ‘purchase’ of foreign citizenships so as to provide the rights to a better living and educational environment.

However, the findings from this Singaporean case study reveal that notions of perceived familial responsibility based on social-cultural values have the capacity to tie transmigrants to particular national contexts instead. The combined effects of concern over young children and aging parents often prompt Singapore transmigrants to return to Singapore, rather than carry out the type of transnational parenting or long distance caring strategies undertaken by migrants from other national and ethnic backgrounds – such as the Hong Kong, Taiwanese and Malaysian Chinese (Ong, 1999; Ho, 2002; Lam *et al.*, 2002; Waters, 2003; Ley and Kobayashi, 2005); Latinos (Hondagneu-Sotelo

and Avila, 2003); Filipinos (Parreñas, 2001 and 2005); and African Zimbabweans (McGregor, forthcoming).

Compared to the contingent and fractured sense of national belonging, and the ambivalent or weak sense of national identification that I found in my study (see Chapter Six), it appears that the most important factor contributing to the ‘depth’ of citizenship ties with Singapore is the family unit. I argue that the ‘stickiness’ of the family as a unit geographically rooted in Singapore, rather than being spread out in different parts of the world, helps to constitute the ‘depth’ of citizenship felt by overseas Singaporeans towards the country. Returning to Singapore for the sake of both young children and aging parents makes holding Singapore citizenship important. This is constituted in particular by emotional reasons and the social-cultural relationships based on ‘Asian’ values. The manner in which these familial discourses take shape on a personal level also resonates with the Singaporean state discourse on the responsibilities of Singaporeans towards their family members, and by extrapolation, to the national community.

Predicating the ‘depth’ of citizenship on the family unit, however, has implications for the nation-building project in Singapore. This strategy assumes the cohesion of Singaporean families, but with changing family contexts – such as rising separation rates, the greater diversity of household types and accentuated transnational family formations – the sustained effectiveness of

tying Singaporean transmigrants to Singapore through the family is open to question.

## **5 Impact of citizenship regulations on transnational family formations**

In this section, I elucidate the ways in which citizenship regulations affect the formation of transnational family units. I focus in particular on the impact of the dual citizenship restriction and the national service liability in Singapore (also see Chapter Five). In doing so, my key argument is that whilst the dual citizenship restriction curtails the ability of Singaporean transmigrants to maintain family ties across national borders, the national service requirement inadvertently creates the conditions for transnational family formations to take shape. Either way, the citizenship regulations imposed by the Singaporean state to govern the conduct of Singaporean transmigrants have contradictory effects on the realities of their transnational lives and family formations.

### **5.1 Dual citizenship issues**

Although the Singaporean state recognises the ties that overseas Singaporeans hold towards Singapore, it also insists on a singular mode of national allegiance that is exclusionary for those who lead transnational lives. I spelled out earlier the ways in which practical, emotional and social-cultural considerations accentuated the importance of Singapore citizenship to the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. Viewed alongside the constitutional rule forbidding Singaporean citizens from simultaneously exercising the rights under foreign citizenships, the significance of the family unit situated in

Singapore effectively makes Singapore citizenship the only choice for internationally mobile citizens.

The dual citizenship restriction has its origins in the time when Singapore citizenship was created in 1957. At that time, the rule was deemed necessary in order to ensure that the migrants who took up Singapore citizenship had relinquished their ties of attachment with their countries of origin and would be committed to the embryonic nation-building project in Singapore (in anticipation of Singapore’s political independence). In other words, the new citizens were thought to have transplanted themselves wholly from one part of the world to another, and in the process, ideally shedding their other ties of attachment and allegiance. The usefulness of the dual citizenship restriction in the social landscape of contemporary Singapore – marked by a backdrop of enhanced global travel and communication technologies – is, however, more debatable.

Earlier studies have shown that the everyday world of citizenship as lived experience is intensely political and oftentimes departs from the ‘isotropic’ models of citizenship rules and regulations prescribed by policymakers (Mitchell, 1997a; Nonini, 2004; Leitner and Ehrkamp, forthcoming). In the Singaporean case study, the restrictive citizenship policy in Singapore is often incongruent with the lived realities of Singaporean transmigrants whose core familial units are dispersed in different parts of the world. This was most likely



to happen in the case of Singaporean citizens who are married to non-Singaporeans.

Take for example Helen who has a European partner. Although the couple live in the UK, the family of her spouse was settled elsewhere in Europe. Helen believes that her family obligations would eventually pull her back to live in Singapore and her partner would accompany her. Hence it was important to her to continue to be a Singaporean citizen so that she would have the right to return. Nonetheless, reflecting on the dual citizenship restriction in Singapore, Helen said:

It is just a gut instinct I have, based on my cousins and all who have given up their citizenship. If they had a choice, if they could keep that window open, yes they would have loved to, but they [couldn't]... I think it is very sad... When a person gives up the citizenship it is always a hassle to come and re-qualify as a citizen or something afterwards, whether it is easy or not... It is currently this kind of economy, this kind of world where people are juggling international relationships and international jobs. For exactly this variety of reasons it would make things much easier for individuals if there was dual citizenship.

Helen's argument hinges on the realities of living in a world characterised by 'international relationships and international jobs'. Based on the experiences of her cousins and friends, she underscored the emotional costs ('it is very sad') of relinquishing Singapore citizenship and the difficulties of re-applying for Singapore citizenship. Hence she did not intend to follow the same path that they had trod.

During the interview with Singaporean policymakers, I asked whether former Singaporean citizens who had relinquished their Singaporean citizenship would

be eligible to apply for Singapore citizenship again. Their answer was affirmative but they qualified that the applications would be considered on a ‘case by case basis’ (personal interview in 2005). However, this claim was often regarded with suspicion by the Singaporean transmigrants in my study when I broached the subject with them. Consider Lydia’s response for example when I asked if she would consider giving up her Singaporean citizenship to apply for a British citizenship through her British spouse:

- Lydia: No. Singapore is extremely vindictive. I have [heard of] lots of cases where people gave up citizenship and [wanted] to go back, but they [were] treated as second-class citizens. I am quite conscious from that perspective that giving up citizenship in Singapore is quite a dangerous thing... If all things fail you might want to go back one day... There was a widow who had ‘A’ levels only. She gave up her citizenship to migrate to Australia to be with her husband. Sadly her husband died in a fire... She tried to go back to Singapore in her forties... She was offered a work permit only. I think that is really vindictive.
- EH: Don’t you think [...] a highly qualified person like yourself would possibly not have problems like that?
- Lydia: Yes, but it is still vindictive.

Lydia’s story highlights the vulnerability of Singaporean women in mixed nationality marriages and their subsequent citizenship decisions. Most of the Singaporean women in mixed nationality marriages in my study said that they would not give up their Singaporean citizenship to apply for a foreign citizenship. As Dina puts it, Singapore citizenship represented a ‘backup’ in case their marriages did not work out and they wanted the right of legal return to Singapore (see Chapter Five). Significantly, none of the seven married male respondents in my study – even the sole male respondent who had converted to Singapore citizenship after marrying a Singaporean woman – mentioned this concern during the interviews.

What also stood out in Lydia’s narrative was her perception that the Singaporean state would be ‘vindictive’ in the way it treats those who have given up their Singaporean citizenship for a foreign citizenship. This sentiment was not uncharacteristic of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study and it draws attention to the apparent disjuncture between citizen perceptions and state discourses. By attributing the human quality of being ‘vindictive’ to the body of the state, it suggests a belief that the Singaporean state would be malicious towards those who had rescinded on their Singaporean citizenship. This analysis of the corporeality of the state serves as one platform to undermine the opaque power of the state reified through state legislation and policies, which are often legitimised as rational, objective and pragmatic solutions to national problems (Marston, 2004; Mountz, 2004).

Whilst the dual citizenship restriction may achieve the intended goal of ensuring Singaporean citizens adhere to an exclusive citizenship policy in favour of the Singaporean state, I contend that its effectiveness for future generations of Singaporeans may be more limited. The dual citizenship restriction creates complications for children of Singaporean citizens who have acquired the right to a foreign citizenship in addition to their Singaporean citizenship. Their foreign citizenship right could have been acquired through the non-Singaporean parent or because they were born and had grown up in a foreign country.

My research suggests that although Singaporean transmigrants welcomed the liberalisation of citizenship rules for children of overseas Singaporeans, they also said that the policy would be of little use to their overseas-born children given the existing restriction on dual citizenship. Deborah who has a British spouse emphasised the limited value of the changes to the citizenship rules:

It doesn't make any difference to me because they do not allow dual citizenship. There's no point giving [my children] Singapore citizenship because all that means to me is I am denying [them of] British citizenship... They might spend some time [in Singapore] but chances are they would spend more time here or somewhere in Europe or the States... If dual citizenship was allowed there's every chance that they would be both British and Singaporean, but because it's not allowed and I have to choose... It doesn't matter so much when they are children, but it's more like once they start work if they have a British passport they can go anywhere in Europe to work. They can easily go to Australia to work because UK has a lot of bilateral agreements with Commonwealth countries. Also it's not that difficult to go and work in Singapore if you are British as long as you are professional. It's a lot more difficult for Singaporeans to come to work [in the UK] even if you are professional.

Deborah believed that the dual citizenship restriction contradicts the transnational lifestyles that her children were likely to lead. Besides that, she also pointed out the advantages of a British citizenship over the Singapore citizenship for her children in terms of work mobility. Her narrative draws attention to a broader tension in the citizenship strategy forwarded by the Singaporean state amidst neoliberal discourses: the Singaporean state's goals to accrue economic advantage for the city-state by drawing in human capital may be undermined by the dual citizenship restriction in Singapore, which impedes the international mobility of Singaporean citizens and deters foreigners from taking up Singapore citizenship.

As this discussion shows, the dual citizenship restriction – in conjunction with familial attachments based in Singapore – effectively serves as a technology of rule curtailing the citizenship decisions of internationally mobile Singaporean citizens. However, such legislation creates practical and emotional difficulties for those with sustained transnational family attachments, and in addition represents economic costs to Singapore in terms of the potential human capital loss. Therefore, the dual citizenship restriction in Singapore has contradictory effects on the personal, familial and national levels.

## **5.2 National service liability**

Like the dual citizenship restriction, the compulsory military conscription policy in Singapore aims to impose a singular mode of allegiance on Singaporean citizens. However, whilst the dual citizenship restriction is apt to curtail transnational family formations, the national service regulation indirectly creates the conditions for transnational family formations to take shape instead. When I was carrying out the ethnographic component of my research, I came to know of family situations in which the persons involved had been compelled to undertake transnational family strategies as a result of the national service requirement in Singapore that their non-Singaporean spouses could not fulfil for various reasons. Although these are individualised cases, I argue that they shed light on broader issues to do with the incongruence between state-based practices of citizenship imposed by national governments and the lived realities of transnational individuals.

Significantly, due to the seemingly isolated nature of these cases, some of my informants requested that I should not mention the details of their situations in my written work. This reflects their anxieties about being identified by the Singaporean state, thereby potentially causing problems for the pending or uncertain legal residency status of their family members. As I argued in other parts of this thesis, such sentiments are revealing about the nature of the social contract between the Singaporean state and its citizens. In view of the above research conditions, I will only use one example to illustrate the complications caused for family formations when non-Singaporean spouses are unable to fulfil the national service requirement in Singapore.

In the process of carrying out this research, I came to know the case of a Singaporean woman whose application for her husband to be granted a spousal permit in Singapore was refused on the basis that he had previously given up his Singaporean permanent residency status without serving national service. As a second-generation permanent resident, he had been duty-bound to fulfil his national service if he wanted to retain his legal status in Singapore. However, at that time he was about to go overseas for further studies and he was unsure of his return to Singapore after that. Thus he made the decision to forfeit his Singaporean permanent residency status instead. However, a number of years later he married his Singaporean wife. Upon graduation, the couple wanted to return to set up home in Singapore since both of their families were living there.

Unexpectedly, the husband’s application for a spousal permit was rejected, and so was his later application for an employment pass to work and live in Singapore. This was even though he possessed the requisite skills set and his employer in Singapore had been willing to sponsor his employment pass application. According to his wife, his applications were repeatedly refused on the grounds of his national service record. Hence when his social visit visa eventually expired, he had to return to his country of origin. Their children who were both attending Singaporean schools live in Singapore with their Singaporean mother as her dependents. The young couple intend to appeal the decision made by the immigration and citizenship authorities, failing which they would have to move as a nuclear family unit to another country. However, this would bring about the geographical separation of the extended family unit against their personal preferences.

The case that I described above exemplifies the way the national service legislation in Singapore can create circumstances leading to unplanned transnational family formations. These unwanted transnational family strategies are likely to cause emotional stress for the migrants and their ‘left-behind’ families, particularly in view of the earlier arguments I made stressing the significance of intergenerational ‘Asian’ familial ties to Singaporean transmigrants. It is striking that the cases I know of were all related to Singaporean women who had married non-Singaporeans, thus hinting at the gendered contours of Singapore citizenship. Even though both male and female Singaporean citizens have the right to sponsor their spouses for residency in

Singapore, foreign-born wives of Singaporean citizens are not liable for national service and thus face less difficulty migrating to Singapore. In contrast, the spouses of Singaporean women are more likely to negotiate a complex terrain of citizenship regulations in order to qualify for citizenship status in Singapore.

The national service requirement in conjunction with the dual citizenship restriction also affects the citizenship choices of the children of Singaporean citizens. Consider for instance Thomas who had the right to Singapore citizenship through his father, but gave it up for an European citizenship (obtained through his mother). At that time he had been holding permanent residency status in Singapore and was required to serve national service as a second-generation Singaporean permanent resident. When I asked him why he chose to give up his Singaporean permanent residency, and by implication the right to Singapore citizenship, he said:

Thomas: Partly stupidity and partly immaturity. When I was eighteen, nineteen, I got a letter from MINDEF<sup>3</sup> telling me to register for NS. I talked to my dad and he said, 'Do you see yourself living in Singapore' and I said, 'No'. He said, 'It is okay'... I didn't think that maybe there were some benefits to doing NS. I could have learnt a lot of things from NS... Nobody explained and [there was a] lack of information. I should have been more mature to ask for such information and talk to people...

EH: Would you have made a different decision if you had the information then?

Thomas: Yeah, I think I would have... It would [have given me] more choice [over whether] I want to work [in London] or go back to

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<sup>3</sup> MINDEF is the acronym for the Singaporean Ministry of Defence, which manages military conscription in Singapore.



Singapore. It is just easier and won't be so difficult. Now it is a bit of a loophole and it is difficult.

During the interview, I found that Thomas spoke about the time that he spent in Singapore with fondness and he was as adept at turning on the Singaporean accent as any locally born and bred Singaporean. His parents were still living in Singapore and he visits them at least once a year. Giving up his right to Singapore citizenship had been a difficult decision for Thomas and he clearly looked upon it with regret now that he found it was harder to return to live with his parents in Singapore.

The experience of Thomas illustrates the way that the national service requirement in Singapore compels some individuals to undertake transnational family arrangements despite their personal preferences. For Thomas, the decision to choose the foreign citizenship was linked in no small part to his understanding that Singapore had a dual citizenship restriction anyway. He said that if he had been allowed to keep both citizenships, he would have been more willing to fulfil the national service requirement in Singapore.

One of the topmost concerns amongst Singaporean transmigrants regarding citizenship decisions for their children is the national service requirement for sons of Singaporean citizens. As I mentioned earlier, Deborah wanted her child to hold Singapore citizenship only if the child did not have to serve national service (see Chapter Six). Oscar expressed similar sentiments when I

interviewed him and he used his own national service experience to back his argument:

[Male Singaporean citizens] waste three years of their life instead of being in university getting a degree. For me where I am working now, I am at least four years behind my peers. Maybe it is not a big deal in the big scheme of things but you must admit that it slows you down. All this rubbish about going back every year to do reservist, I think it is a waste of time. Granted Singapore has to have an army but I don't subscribe to contributing to all that... How it can be reconciled I don't know, but go get somebody else's child and not mine.

Oscar's transnational situation accentuates his sense of disadvantage compared to his non-Singaporean peers who did not have to undergo national service. In view of his own experience, Oscar was reluctant for his male offspring to be held liable for national service and he was open to the idea that his children might take up another citizenship.

Transmigrancy provides an escape valve for the children of overseas Singaporeans, like Deborah and Oscar, from fulfilling the citizenship obligations to which their localised Singaporean counterparts are bound. These children of Singaporean transmigrants may return to work and live in Singapore via other visa categories in the future, thus possibly incurring the indignation of those who do not have such recourse. As such, transnational migration not only has the potential of accentuating class differences for this generation (Guarnizo, 1998), but also has implications for the social cohesiveness of the next generation of Singaporeans. Nevertheless, bearing in mind my argument on the significance of 'Asian' familial ties to the Singaporean transmigrants in my study, the individual desire to circumvent citizenship regulations – even if for the sake of the children – would have to be

weighed up against the emotional stress of sustaining other familial relationships from afar.

This discussion makes clear the implications of the military conscription policy in Singapore for (transnational) family formations. It demonstrates that the national service liability in Singapore compels transnational family strategies when a member of the family is unable or unwilling to fulfil the national service duty required of Singaporean citizens and second-generation permanent residents. Viewed alongside the earlier discussion on the dual citizenship, I argue that citizenship regulations imposed by the Singaporean state on internationally mobile citizens have contradictory effects on family formations. On the one hand, the dual citizenship restriction limits the ability of Singaporean transmigrants to sustain transnational family ties. On the other hand, the national service requirement forces others to undertake transnational family strategies even if it entails considerable emotional costs to them and their families.

## **6 Conclusion**

National discourses, legislation and policies operate in distinctive ways to shape the behaviour of internationally mobile citizens, but these technologies of rule are often incongruent with transnational lifestyles, including family arrangements. This chapter argued that Singaporean transmigrants tend to translate the state rhetoric on familial and national responsibility to a personal level through their verbalisations of filial piety, obligations to family members

and concerns over the socialisation of young children. They carry these emotional and social-cultural considerations into their transmigrancy, which in turn influences their subsequent repatriation and citizenship decisions.

I further suggested that aspects of emotional citizenship intertwine with the political regulations governing the concept and practice of Singapore citizenship to influence citizenship decisions. For example, the dual citizenship restriction works in conjunction with familial obligations to circumscribe the ability of Singaporean transmigrants to make alternative citizenship choices. These analyses provide a counter perspective to the ‘flexible citizenship’ (Ong, 1999) thesis proposing that family ties are used instrumentally by internationally mobile citizens for the accumulation of capital. Instead, the Singaporean case study shows that the family unit functions as an important factor contributing to the ‘depth’ of Singapore citizenship.

Nonetheless, national-level citizenship regulations have contradictory effects on internationally mobile citizens and their family formations. Whilst the dual citizenship restriction impedes the ability of some Singaporean transmigrants to sustain transnational familial ties, the national service requirement compels others to undertake transnational family strategies. In other words, restricted rights and state-enforced responsibilities hinder the ability of Singaporean transmigrants to enact what they believe are their personal responsibilities towards the family. Thus, my findings in this chapter augment the scholarship on transnational families by, first, foregrounding the significance of the

extended family and ‘Asian’ familial ties. Second, my work illuminates the ways in which exclusionary political citizenship regulations affect the emotional and social worlds of individuals belonging to transnational families.

However, a more fundamental issue that needs to be addressed when the ‘depth’ of citizenship is predicated on the family unit is the implications of changing family contexts (Bailey and Boyle, 2004) for notions of citizenship. In the Singaporean case, fragmented family structures or the inability to sustain enduring family ties due to unwanted geographical dispersion may erode the meaning of Singapore citizenship to Singaporean transmigrants. Hence, rather than merely enforcing exclusivist and legalistic citizenship rules, I propose that efforts should be made to resolve the tensions between the increased demands made by Singaporean transmigrants for extraterritorial forms of citizenship practice (e.g. allowing dual citizenship) and the challenges posed by these developments to the nation-building project in Singapore.

Throughout this chapter, I also paid attention to the ways in which discourses of family, migration and citizenship have gendered and/or produced gendered effects. The female Singaporean transmigrants in my study had greater concern over eldercare and childcare than their male counterparts. Some Singaporean females choose emigration a means of escaping from patriarchal family and state structures (Kuah, 1997:62). However, it is the communitarian environment of tight familial networks and the strong social support found in Singapore that later draw these women back to the country. As the family and

home are defined as women’s domains and the site of national wellbeing, the women themselves also become committed to the ideas and imagery that construct the nation (Fouron and Glick Schiller, 2001). The citizenship regulations in Singapore also have gendered implications. For example, the national service requirement makes it trickier for the spouses of Singaporean women to qualify for citizenship status in Singapore compared to the spouses of Singaporean men who do not have to deal with such complexities. The gendered contours and effects of migration and citizenship that I outlined in this chapter signal that there is potential for studying these issues in greater depth in the future.

Finally, this chapter synthesises the themes in the preceding two chapters that considered the emotional and political aspects of citizenship. By foregrounding the way that notions of ‘Asian’ familial duties and obligations shape emotional attachments to the family unit, and then the impact of political regulations on citizenship decisions, I illustrate the mutually constituting relationship between the emotional, social-cultural and political aspects of citizenship. This conceptualisation of citizenship provides a fuller understanding of citizenship formations and transformations, thereby making a distinctive contribution to the scholarship on citizenship.

# 8

## **Critical interventions: Debating transnational migration and citizenship**

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## **1 Introduction**

Transnational migration opens up new avenues to think through citizenship as a distinct spatial and socio-political formation (Painter and Philo, 1995; Marston and Mitchell, 2004). My thesis has advanced this argument by engaging in theoretical debates generated from my study of highly skilled Singaporean transmigrants in London. My research aims were, first, to examine the ways in which Singaporean transnational migration informs understandings of highly skilled migration. Second, I wanted to explore the dynamics of the mutually constituting relationship between transnational migration and citizenship (trans)formations.

In the next section, I provide a summary of my thesis and the ways in which I have attended to my research objectives. Section Three then focuses on the significant themes of my thesis and its contributions to the scholarship on transnational migration and citizenship. I also foreground the manner in which my research advances understandings of gender and the politics of cosmopolitanism in relation to transnational migration and citizenship. Following that, I discuss the methodological interventions that emerged from my research with respect to qualitative research methodologies. Finally, I elucidate the contributions of my research to geographical perspectives of transnational migration and citizenship in terms of mobility, space, place and scale.



In Section Four, I reflect on the significance of my study for citizenship developments in the Singaporean nation-state. Based on my research findings, I make several inferences about the way that the future social and political landscape in Singapore may evolve in the context of growing transnational migration and the accompanying complexities for the concept and practice of Singapore citizenship. I also elucidate the policy issues uncovered by my study and the policy recommendations arising from my research. Then the final section contemplates some research aspects that my study has not yet taken up, and the directions in which this work on Singaporean transnational migration and citizenship (trans)formations may be further developed.

## **2 Summary**

In seeking to understand the relationship between transnational migration and citizenship, I have paid special attention to the brokering role played by the British and Singaporean states to regulate migration and citizenship. I also studied migrant negotiations of the way these states frame migration and citizenship, particularly with respect to the ‘everyday’ and ‘emotional’ aspects of transnational migration and citizenship.

In Chapter Four, I addressed my first research objective on the ways in which Singaporean transnational migration informs understandings of highly skilled migration. This chapter illuminated the immigration and citizenship strategies used by the British state to pursue global economic competitiveness. I also provided a profile of the visa categories of my respondents in order to develop

an argument drawing attention to migrant agency and changing migration strategies and trajectories.

My analysis demonstrated that Singaporean transmigrants, usually individuals with high levels of educational qualifications or skills, were likely to be channelled into forms of middling transnationalism whilst working and living in London. I then discussed their migration motivations so as to understand why these ‘highly skilled’ Singaporean transmigrants became middling transnationals in London. This chapter also focused on the experiences of Singaporean women migrating to London to be with a partner. I argued in particular that despite experiencing an initial de-valorisation of their skills sets, a number of them developed new and satisfying career trajectories in London.

From Chapter Five onwards, I attended to my second research objective, namely to explore the mutually constituting relationship between transnational migration and citizenship (trans)formations. Chapter Five focused on the subject of national membership as one of the key components of citizenship. My empirical analysis in this chapter, first, compared the extraterritorial constructions of citizenship by the Singaporean state with the perceptions of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. By deconstructing the meaning of citizenship to my respondents, I established that my respondents often narrated citizenship in terms of their feelings of ‘belonging’ to Singapore. Using their narratives of ‘belonging’, I forwarded the concept of ‘emotional citizenship’ to underline the emotional aspects of citizenship, as well as the subjective and

contingent nature of citizenship. I highlighted that a strong sense of ‘belonging’ to Singapore should not be conflated with a solid notion of national identity or identification with the overseas Singaporean community. Instead, this chapter emphasised that my respondents had mixed attitudes towards what they considered was a nebulous ‘Singaporean identity’. My analyses in the chapter also brought to light the politics of differentiation taking place on a personal level towards fellow overseas Singaporeans and within the Singaporean community associations in London.

In Chapter Six, I studied the impact of transnational migration on the rights, duties and obligations associated with Singapore citizenship. I demonstrated that the Singaporean state discourse emphasises ‘responsibilities’ over ‘rights’ whereas my respondents had varied perspectives towards the notion of ‘rights and responsibilities’ in the Singaporean context. I argued that, on the one hand, citizenly compliance gives meaning to the political content of citizenship (in terms of ‘rights and responsibilities’) and reinforces the legitimacy of the Singaporean state. On the other hand, alternative meanings of citizenship arising from transnational experiences also challenge the power of the state to perpetuate hegemonic definitions of political citizenship. In developing this argument, I emphasised the emotional intensities underpinning political citizenship and its significance as a potential mobilising force for political change.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, I examined the factors constituting the ‘depth’ of citizenship. My argument centred on the significance of the extended family unit situated in Singapore that made holding Singapore citizenship important to my respondents. I built my case, first, by demonstrating that the narratives of my respondents about transnational family arrangements reflected a deep desire for spatial proximity to family members. Second, I brought to the forefront the significance of ‘Asian’ family values in terms of obligations towards aging parents and concerns about young children. Third, I showed that these familial concerns and the dual citizenship restriction in Singapore worked in conjunction to shape the decisions of Singaporean transmigrants to retain Singapore citizenship. However, my chapter also brought up the contradictory effects of Singaporean citizenship regulations on the lived realities of Singaporean transmigrants and their family arrangements. I argued that whilst the dual citizenship policy restricted the ability of Singaporean transmigrants to maintain transnational family ties, the national service regulations had the opposite impact of creating unwanted family arrangements stretching across national borders.

### **3 Theoretical and methodological contributions**

This section focuses on the theoretical and methodological contributions of my study, particularly with respect to the scholarship on transnational migration and citizenship. I spell out the significance of my study for the nascent scholarship on middling transnationalism (in relation to highly skilled migration). Then I consider the manner in which my research advances existing

understandings of citizenship, namely with respect to the emotional, political and social-cultural dimensions of citizenship. I also elucidate the contributions of my work for theoretical perspectives on gender and the politics of cosmopolitanism (in relation to transnational migration and citizenship). Although my empirical findings are centred on the Singaporean case study, I argue that this research has broader implications for theoretical formulations of transnational migration and citizenship (trans)formations.

### **3.1 Transnational migration**

In highlighting the polarised focus on transnational elite and low-paid labour migration, my study of Singaporean transnational migration has sought to make several contributions to the emerging scholarship on middling transnationalism. My argument proposing that the Singaporean transmigrants in London are mostly ‘middling transnationals’ is anchored on research findings revealing that, first, despite high levels of educational qualifications and professional credentials, these individuals often encounter a period of difficulty finding employment in London. During this time, the emotional challenges they face are also distinct from their transnational elite counterparts. The Singaporean transmigrants who move to London usually lead relatively frugal lifestyles (in terms of housing and other expenditure) compared to when they were living in Singapore. In this way, I argue that they belong to the middle social and economic spectrum of migration, and the specific issues and challenges they face should be given due attention. These findings strongly suggest that the optic on highly skilled migration should be broadened to

consider persons who possess a high level of skills or expertise, yet take undertake migration routes to London resulting in outcomes that are not categorically associated with the transnational elite.

My study also emphasises the need to consider migrant motivations in order to gain a fuller picture of the migration experience. The migration motivations of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study indicate that there is a need to move beyond skills and class as indices of migration. In this regard, I argue that my research findings corroborate Conradson and Latham's (2005a) hypothesis that notions of self-development and exploration are significant factors propelling personal migration. Even amongst Singaporean women who had moved to London for the sake of a spouse, narratives of the 'self' featured prominently in the interviews that I conducted with them.

In addition, my thesis makes a distinctive contribution to the scholarship on middling transnationalism by arguing that aside from aspects valorising the 'self', it is important to keep in view the institutional and societal factors influencing migration decisions. In developing this argument, I demonstrated that the postcolonial background of Singaporean society coupled with contemporary state propagated discourses of 'cosmopolitanism' act as factors contributing to migration decisions. For some Singaporean transmigrants, it was the attraction of 'Western' cultures that encouraged them to move to London so as to accrue cultural capital; for others, it was the intention to challenge 'racialised' stereotypes privileging 'Western' workers over

Singaporean workers that propelled their migration. Thus in the Singaporean case study, notions of class, ‘race’/ethnicity, nationality and ‘cosmopolitanism’ intersected in complex and contradictory ways to trigger emigration.

Second, I pointed out that negative perceptions of the Singaporean state and society also compel the migration of Singaporean transmigrants who desire to escape from what they perceive to be a stifling and controlling living environment. Even so, later in the thesis, I highlighted an inverse institutional factor contributing to return migration decisions. The institution and ideology of the ‘Asian’ family were cited as important reasons for Singaporean transmigrants to consider eventual repatriation to Singapore. Drawing together these two empirical aspects of my research, the key point that I want to emphasise is the importance of taking into account the way that institutional and ideological structures are constructed by various social actors – including the state and the migrant – to shape decisions on migration and citizenship.

In light of the above arguments, I also foreground the range of changing migration strategies and trajectories that migrants undertake over time. The fluxes that occur during the migration trajectory should not be neglected since snapshot perspectives generate only limited understandings of the migration experience. I provided evidence for this argument by comparing the visa profiles of my respondents with their narratives of migration, thereby giving an insight into the way they utilised various visa categories to incrementally extend their stay in London.

Whilst time is an important aspect of migration, spatial contexts are equally significant in the constitution of migration outcomes. In this regard, I argue that the mobility of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study was socially and culturally embedded in specific space and time – whether in terms of their age, ethnicity, class or nationality. Even as internationally mobile subjects they were corporeally emplaced in ways that were worked and reworked during and through their transmigrancy (and non-transmigrancy). The manner in which the educational histories of some of my respondents featured in my study exemplifies this argument.

Having been educated in the UK, these overseas-educated Singaporeans find it hard to fit in with Singaporean society upon their return to Singapore. The friendship networks they had previously built up in the UK became reasons for and factors enabling them to return to the UK instead. Nonetheless, as I made clear later in the thesis, these Singaporean transmigrants carry with them the cultural and social identifiers marking them as ‘different’ in British society, even as their overseas experiences simultaneously differentiate them in Singapore. These multiple refractions of identity difference corroborate findings based on other study contexts, such as the research that has been carried out by Yeoh and Willis (1998 and 2005b) on Singaporean transmigrants in China; Mitchell (1997a, 2004a and 2004b) and Waters (2003) on Hong Kong and other Chinese immigrants in Canada; and Nonini (2004) on Chinese-Indonesians in Australia.



### 3.2 Citizenship (trans)formations

By deploying empirical findings to generate theoretical understandings, my thesis has made a vital contribution to the mostly normative and philosophical approaches that are more characteristic of citizenship studies (Lister *et al*, 2003). The ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth interviews and discourse analysis aspects of my research offer important insights into the way the British and Singaporean states are reformulating their migration and citizenship policies to pursue global economic competitiveness.

This thesis provides two sets of perspectives on migration management: first, on the way that the British and Singaporean states are proactively pursuing immigrants with desirable qualifications and skills. Second, my thesis highlights the initiatives taken by the Singaporean state to connect with overseas Singaporeans so as to encourage them to remain committed to Singapore, and to contribute to the sustained progress of the nation-state. The Singaporean case study shows that these two sets of perspectives are inter-related. The simultaneous inflow of foreigners and outflow of Singaporean citizens have an impact on the nation-building project in Singapore and the way that Singapore citizenship is being adapted to contemporary demographic and economic trends. In addition, the factors triggering the migration of Singaporeans to London and the way that their mindsets are shaped through exposure to British politics and society, affect personal decisions of whether to return to Singapore and the meanings of Singapore citizenship to them.

Extrapolating from this observation, I argue that migration flows between sending and receiving societies should be studied as a single field of analysis in order to gain a fuller picture of the relationship between transnational migration and citizenship.

Importantly, my study of Singaporean transmigrants in London focuses on the way that internationally mobile citizens engaged with the meanings of citizenship, thereby ‘grounding’ citizenship from their perspective. I argue in particular that my respondents often attributed multiple and conflating meanings to the concept of citizenship, even though belonging, allegiance, rights and responsibilities are actually distinct aspects of citizenship. This finding demonstrates the importance of ‘unpacking’ citizenship in order to understand the power relations that structure the concept and practice of citizenship.

Furthermore, this thesis introduces the concept of ‘emotional citizenship’ to foreground the emotional intensities that underpin citizenship. Arguing that the emotional aspects of citizenship have been thus far neglected in the citizenship literature, I highlight this aspect of citizenship through an analysis of the way that ‘belonging’ comes to the fore in constructions of citizenship during transnational migration. However, I also qualify how the idea of belonging in association with citizenship is contested in terms of its contingent and subjective nature. In the Singaporean case study in particular, the idea of ‘belonging’ to Singapore was intrinsically shaped by the way that my

respondents experienced ethnic differentiation within and outside of Singapore by fellow Singaporean citizens. These ethnic cleavages of the overseas Singaporean community manifest at the personal as well as the community level, thereby problematising the construction of a coherent trans-‘national’ community.

The concept of ‘emotional citizenship’ is also relevant for understanding the political aspects of citizenship. My thesis suggests that interpretations of the political content of citizenship are often couched in emotive terms, which attest to the way the emotional underpinnings of citizenship give meaning to political and social structures. Thus, I argue that ‘emotional citizenship’ has the potential to harness the agency of citizens – through feelings of anger, frustration, expectation and hope – towards political change. Besides that, the discussion on rights and responsibilities ‘grounds’ political citizenship from the perspective of citizens. This contributes in particular to the lacuna of knowledge on the way that citizens themselves perceive citizenly ‘responsibilities’. By comparing the state and citizen constructions of these aspects of political citizenship, my work helps to reveal and challenge the power differentials within and perpetuated by the concept and practice of citizenship.

Although my thesis valorises the significance of ‘emotional citizenship’, this focus on the emotional should not be at the expense of the political and social-cultural aspects of citizenship. In fact, I argue that there is an intertwining

relationship between these three faces of citizenship. Through the example of Singaporean transnational families, I establish the emotional, institutional and ideological factors prompting my respondents to eventually return to Singapore. The intention to repatriate makes it important for them to retain their Singaporean citizenship as a means of living in proximity to family members – including the extended family – in Singapore.

My study shows that their intention to repatriate was often explained in terms of ‘Asian’ familial ties, which I argue is a reflection of the social-cultural identity promoted by the Singaporean state in its construction of nationhood and citizenship. The notion of ‘Asian’ familial ties was expressed by my respondents, first, as filial piety towards aging parents, and second, as concern over the upbringing of young children. Given the dual citizenship restriction in Singapore, the need to retain the legal right of return to Singapore through Singapore citizenship curtailed the freedom of my respondents to choose a foreign citizenship. Hence, I advance the argument that the Singaporean family acts as a space of emotional affiliation augmenting the exclusivist model of citizenship in the Singaporean case-study.

Nonetheless, my thesis also argues that citizenship regulations, such as the national service requirement, can create the conditions for unwanted transnational family arrangements to take shape in some situations. For example, I highlighted the difficulties faced by Singaporean women whose foreign spouses could not fulfil the national service duty for Singapore

citizenship, as well as the concerns of overseas Singaporean parents who did not want their sons to be bound by the military conscription rule. The above empirical findings on the Singaporean family unit make an important contribution to the developing literature on transnational families.

### **3.3 Gender, transnational migration and citizenship**

Debates on gendered roles, identities and outcomes have featured prominently in this thesis. I began by drawing attention to recent feminist debates (Kofman and Raghuram, 2005) problematising earlier research that focused on the personal and career sacrifices made by women moving with a partner to another country (Yeoh and Khoo, 1998; Yeoh and Willis, 1999; Boyle, 2002). Likewise, my thesis highlights how female Singaporean transmigrants, even those who had moved for the sake of a relationship, utilised migration in creative ways to embark on new and fulfilling career trajectories. My goal is not to discredit the scholarship revealing the ways in which migrant women are marginalised and discriminated against in the workforce, but to underscore the existence of flexible and multiple forms of femininities.

When put in a comparative light with research that has been carried out in other country contexts, my UK-based research illustrates the manner in which state regulations influence migration outcomes. Research carried out in China (Yeoh and Willis, 1999 and 2000), Singapore (Beaverstock, 2002) and the United States (Beaverstock, 2005; Purkayastha, 2005) reveal that the ability of female spouses to work was most likely to be curtailed by the receiving state's

immigration rules. In contrast, the female transmigrants in my study had greater leeway to negotiate their work lives because of the relatively liberal immigration regime and flexible labour market in the UK. However, this perspective should not neglect the other axes of discrimination faced by migrant women, such as household power relations, the devaluation of academic and professional credentials, and the need to build up new professional networks (Purkayastha, 2005).

The issue of household relations with respect to gender roles is an important theme in my research. In my discussion of the political aspects of citizenship, I noted that ‘responsibility’ was often associated with allegiance to a country in the view of my male respondents. This, I suggest, is an outcome of their national service experience in Singapore. In contrast, the female respondents were prone to see their ‘responsibility’ as nurturers within the family unit, thereby helping to promote social and national stability. In this way, the women themselves subscribed to and perpetuated the gendered ideologies performed in the home, workplace, nation-state and extra-territorially. This argument has already been elaborated by Yeoh and Willis (1999 and 2005a) in their work on Singaporean transnationalism in China.

However, besides augmenting this body of knowledge through my study of Singaporean transmigrants in London, my research makes a distinct contribution to feminist knowledge by spelling out the way that Singaporean women are discriminated against by citizenship regulations. This argument is

most clearly reflected in the national service requirement for male Singaporean citizens. The national service requirement as a citizenship regulation makes it more complicated for foreign-born husbands of Singaporean women to qualify for Singapore citizenship than for foreign-born wives of Singaporean men. The national service requirement also has implications for the next generation of Singaporeans: it appears that overseas Singaporeans are more willing for their daughters than their sons to have Singapore citizenship. The key argument that I want to make here is that Singaporean women, through the cultural construction of gender roles and the practical realities of citizenship as practice, are not equal social agents with their male counterparts in the Singaporean state. This argument based on the Singaporean case study signal the need for other researchers to pay special attention to the ways in which state and migrant practices reproduce patriarchal relations during transnational migration, particularly through the concept and practice of citizenship.

### **3.4 Politics of cosmopolitanism**

My research findings on Singapore have also advanced the scholarship on the politics of cosmopolitanism. I argue that the intersection of ethnicity and nationality in the light of migration histories and contemporary migration processes in Singapore sheds light on a distinctive politics of cosmopolitanism, or ‘cosmopolitics’ (Robbins, 1998a:9). In particular, I highlight the way that the contemporary state-sponsored ‘cosmopolitanism’ discourses in Singapore interlock with postcolonial discourses. The intersection produces a hierarchical

yet complex placing of ethnicities and nationalities within the informal ‘racial’ hierarchy in the Singaporean workplace and broader Singaporean society.

Although the scholarship of Yeoh (2004 and 2006) and my earlier personal research (Ho, 2006) have both explicated the classed dimensions of immigration discourses in Singapore (‘foreign talent’ versus ‘foreign worker’), this study highlights the ways in which the configurations of ethnicity and nationality propel ‘classed’ Singaporean migration to other countries instead. Singaporean migration, usually of the well-educated and middle- and upper-classes, arguably reflects two contradictory attitudes circulating in Singaporean society. As I explained earlier, whilst one set of attitudes shapes Singaporean migration in ways that reinforce existing stereotypes about ethnicity and nationality, the other set of attitudes utilises migration to challenge hegemonic representations of ethnicity and nationality in Singaporean society. Both of these attitudes, are nevertheless, tied to the Singaporean state’s economic-driven project to shape Singapore into a ‘cosmopolitan’ global city.

This thesis also reveals another manifestation of the politics of cosmopolitanism, this time amongst the overseas Singaporean community in London. Although the Singaporean transmigrants in my study pursued a ‘foreign’ experience in London, they simultaneously differentiated themselves from the foreign ‘Other’ (such as through ethnicity that was regarded as a marker of moral values). At the same time, Singaporean transmigrants were prone to differentiate the personal ‘self’ from fellow overseas Singaporeans



who were seen as lacking a cosmopolitan mindset and way of life, indicated in terms of language/accent, cultural capital and behaviour traits. These observations substantiate my argument that even within the category of overseas Singaporeans, there are gradations of ‘cosmopolitanism’ and ‘non-cosmopolitanism’.

These politics of cosmopolitanism, I further argue, contribute to the fracturing of the overseas Singaporean community in London alongside other politics of identity (such as socio-professional interest, ethnicity, political affiliations, age group and the length of stay in London). Significantly, the politics of participation in the construction of an overseas Singaporean community also reflect the extent to which the Singaporeans transmigrants in my study wanted to engage with the Singaporean state extraterritorially. Therefore, my empirical findings problematise, instead of taking as natural, the interconnections between national identity and extraterritoriality. My study is conscious of the differentiations within trans-‘national’ social formations that impede the creation of a coherent transnational community. In a comparative perspective with the research that has been carried out on Singaporean transmigrants in China (Kong, 1999a and 1999b), these findings generate theoretical reflections suggesting that transnational communities have particular manifestations in space and time.

### **3.5 Methodological aspects**

My research methodology capitalising upon the strengths of ethnography has supplemented the work of other geographers, such as Clarke (2004) and Walsh (2005), who employ ethnography in innovative ways to research transnational migration. As a Singaporean studying her fellow Singaporean community in London, I had the experience of being an ‘insider’ engaging in ethnographic fieldwork for an intense and sustained period of time. As I explained in Chapter Three, my participant observation knowledge gave me the advantage of ‘reading’ non-verbal narratives conveyed during the in-depth interviews that might have otherwise puzzled the uninitiated. This experience generated a distinctive set of research interpretations and provides me with the expertise to develop and champion ethnographic perspectives as a viable and complementary qualitative research methodology for transnational migration and citizenship studies.

In particular, my work makes an important contribution to the study of citizenship not only by ‘grounding’ the perspectives of internationally mobile citizens through empirically informed work, but also in paying attention to both the verbal and non-verbal meanings of citizenship. I argue that the Singaporean transmigrants I interviewed tend to enact ‘self-censorship’ whenever the conversations moved to politically-tinged issues. Their silences, reticence and qualified responses, however, contributed to my analytical understanding of the way Singaporean transmigrants perceived themselves in relation to the Singaporean state. These practices produce the everyday cultural meanings of

Singapore citizenship. Such fieldwork encounters also illuminate the intense and political research relationships between myself – the researcher – and the persons I was studying in terms of: the way they saw me; the way I positioned myself in relation to them; and the way we were products of and simultaneously producing the processes of Singaporean transnationalism and the meanings of Singapore citizenship.

### **3.6 Geographical perspectives**

One of the recurring themes in this thesis has been the way that geographical concepts – such as mobility, space, place and scale – are employed and deployed in discourses and narratives of citizenship in relation to transnational migration. I now pull together the disparate strands to assemble a coherent picture of the way that geographical perspectives help in understanding constructions of transnational migration and citizenship. While doing so, I also pay attention to the way in which ‘time’ is implicated in ideas of mobility, space, place and scale.

Examining the Singaporean state discourse on nationhood and citizenship, it is apparent that both mobility and scalar narratives are used to construct elements of ‘risk’ that bolster the political elite’s governing legitimacy. This is presented in terms of the danger to the national community when citizens in transmigration feel an eroding sense of belonging to Singapore and experience weakening obligations to the national community. Another element of risk constructed by the Singaporean state is in terms of the impact of globalisation

and ‘Westernisation’ on Singaporean society. Although debates over ‘Asian values’ have been invoked in Singapore since the early 1990s as a backlash to ‘Westernisation’, in this age of advanced globalisation and transnational migration, the distinctiveness of ‘Asian values’ are summoned by the political elite with greater urgency than before. The articulation and re-articulation of such ideologies over time attest to the construction of the state as a particular historical and geographical configuration. Following on from the framing of ‘risks’ to the nation-state, the Singaporean state also evokes the ideas of place – in terms of roots, family and home – so as to present a ‘solution’ to the risks invoked.

Such ideas of ‘place’ were also raised by the Singaporean transmigrants in my study. They framed their construction of citizenship on ideas of belonging and Singapore as a space of affiliation. Their transnational mobility and situations accentuated these meanings of Singapore citizenship to them, thereby creating what I term ‘emotional citizenship’. In this way, it can be seen that mobility is still anchored in space and place. The scalar configurations in their narratives should also be underscored. This is framed in terms of the importance of the family unit and associated ideas of social reproduction, which in turn translate into the production of national belonging and citizenship as the political-legal basis of that social membership. The above observations augment my argument that the emotional, political and social-cultural aspects of citizenship should be regarded as mutually constituting parts.

The scalar ideas – in terms of the personal, local, national, regional and international/global – that underpin the narratives of my respondents show that citizenship practices can reinforce the Singaporean state’s ideological and governing power. However, equally, citizens may use scalar ideas to press claims for rights or to elide the state’s version of ‘responsibilities’. Through my study, I argue that the scales ‘below’ and ‘above’<sup>1</sup> the national – namely personal emotions, local everyday experiences and international standards – are useful for understanding and challenging the hegemonic processes that give meaning to citizenship. Although until now, citizen actions in the Singaporean context have not been usually immediately visible in the public domain, this should not be equated with a lack of citizen action. In fact, there is usually a period of gestation before perceptible political and social changes set in.

Marston’s (2000) study of the way in which American women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century became politically empowered citizen subjects is a case in point. She notes that greater political empowerment proceeded from the gradual reconstitution and reclamation of the social geography of daily life. This took place during the turn of the nineteenth century when substantial economic, political and spatial transformations were taking place. The women’s movement drew on new conceptualisations of the home and the household that were popularly disseminated through texts, such

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<sup>1</sup> I am aware of the debates problematising the delineation and hierarchical placing of scales as units of analysis (see Chapter Two) as well as the more recent argument in favour of eliminating the idea of scale (Marston *et al*, 2005).

as magazines, guidebooks and pamphlets. The cumulative effects of these material and non-material factors eventually brought about a paradigm shift that saw American women instated as formally and legally recognised citizens.

#### **4 Empirical reflections**

Returning to the empirical example of Singapore, even though a perceptible paradigm shift of citizenship empowerment has yet to take place in post-independence Singapore, we should not neglect the less visible modes of citizen contemplation, action and reaction such as those that I have studied in this thesis. In fact, I would postulate that it was a string of seemingly mundane events that culminated in historical change for Singapore back in 1965, beginning with the congregation of likeminded individuals based in London – the former imperial centre – that then grew into the formation of the anti-colonial Malayan movement and the later creation of the Malayan Forum. The Malayan Forum provided the foundation of what came to be known as the People's Action Party (PAP). The party eventually became a key player in the events leading to the formal independence of Singapore, following which the PAP has managed to entrench its hegemonic power in the Singaporean social and political landscape till this day (Chua, 1995; Hill and Lian, 1995).

In the context of modern-day Singapore, individual subject narratives (such as those shared in my thesis), letters to the press and even closed-door ministerial dialogues in which overseas Singaporeans raise their concerns to representatives of the Singaporean state, are ways for Singaporean

transmigrants to make known their opinions about citizenship and political governance in Singapore. Expatriate and returning Singaporean transmigrants have already started to press for political change through, for example, the creation of web-logs (blogs) promoting civil and reasoned discussions of political and social developments in Singapore<sup>2</sup>. The manner in which citizen action would play out in the Singaporean context is still open to speculation, but the multiplicity of scale in this day and age means that there are multiple opportunities for resistance and transgression (Marston, 2000:228). Transnational experiences and situations provide interstitial spaces of resistance that are in a sense, out of reach of the Singaporean state.

Carrying out this research has reworked my own views towards citizenship, reinforcing to some extent my belief in the importance of political accountability through citizenship practices. However, at the same time, this work has enhanced my awareness of the different opinions towards the state-

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<sup>2</sup> The potential mobilising power of blogs should not be understated, as evidenced in a controversy in Singapore over the suspension of a local Singaporean newspaper columnist who wrote under the pseudonym, 'Mr Brown'. Mr Brown became well-known in Singaporean society for the social commentaries that he brought from his personal blog and wider 'blogsphere' into the domain of journalism. His suspension from work was due to a satirical article he wrote on the high costs of living in Singapore, which was publicly criticised by a high-ranking bureaucrat for encouraging cynicism amongst Singaporeans (*Today*, 3 July 2006). The suspension of Mr Brown sparked an unusual demonstration of public support for the columnist from about thirty Singaporeans who, after having received a text message urging a show of protest, donned brown attire at a central train station in Singapore during an agreed time (*Today*, 22 July 2006). This public demonstration was considered illegal under Singaporean laws, which require any public assembly of more than five people to have obtained a police permit. However, police action was not taken against the protestors in this instance.

citizen relationship in Singapore, and the need to harness these differences in complementary ways to effect overall positive change. Based on my research findings, it appears that most of the Singaporean transmigrants in my study plan to return to Singapore (or at least Asia since it is closer to ‘home’) because of the pull of emotional ties, even if to some extent, they feel dissatisfied with the political aspects of Singapore citizenship. In which case, the question at hand would be whether these migrant social actors could create the capacity for changes to Singapore citizenship governance (Smith and Bakker, 2005) in the future. It is important to qualify, however, that the way in which citizenship evolves in the Singaporean context need not necessarily follow the trajectories of the liberal Western-centric citizenship traditions.

One possible scenario is that the spectrum of overseas Singaporeans who comply with the Singaporean state’s definition of citizenship and the state-citizen relationship would help to reinforce the legitimacy of the existing regime. However, another possible scenario is the Singaporean state’s strategies for citizenship hegemony would backfire and become the target of resistance instead (Sparke, 2004:781). In which case, if perceptible citizenship governance change is to ensue from citizen action and pressure, then a degree of politicisation and mobilisation by overseas citizens needs to take place. The state’s response towards politicised and mobilised overseas Singaporeans also needs to be factored into the equation.



Given the dispersion of overseas Singaporeans, their growing numbers and the state's interest in this spectrum of the population, it is unlikely that the Singaporean state would cut off all ties with them to quell dissent. However, taking into account the relatively comfortable political, economic and social state of affairs within Singapore, and the divided opinions toward political governance within the overseas Singaporean community (based on my research findings), it is difficult to imagine a level of mass mobilisation that would create extreme conditions for revolutionary change.

Thus, the most likely scenario is that the Singaporean state would continue to respond in an informed manner to the needs and wants of its overseas citizenry, and continuously negotiate the rules of engagement to co-opt sectors of overseas Singaporeans into the extraterritorial nationhood project. In this regard, my research illuminates several policy issues that I believe would be of interest to Singaporean policymakers. For example, my research highlights that the dual citizenship restriction in Singapore tends to be incongruent with the transnational lives of overseas Singaporeans. Aside from that, the dual citizenship restriction also stands in the way of encouraging foreigners with desirable skills to take up Singapore citizenship, thereby contradicting the initiatives of the Singaporean state to facilitate the naturalisation of foreigners.

There may be negative ramifications of allowing dual citizenship in view of the animosity of Singaporeans towards the 'Foreign Talent Strategy', as well as the possibility that such a policy would accentuate cleavages between

internationally mobile Singaporeans and their less internationally mobile counterparts. Nevertheless, the risk of generating dissatisfaction should not serve as an excuse to ignore the issue. One possible solution is the implementation of a dual nationality policy, which is distinct from dual citizenship (Levitt and de la Dehesa, 2003:594). Dual nationality accords a partial set of rights recognising the ties between the migrant citizen and the sending country, but it reserves other rights for citizens living within the territory. This is the policy that is upheld in countries like Mexico and India.

The second policy issue that my research highlights has to do with the national service requirement in Singapore. Over the years, some changes to the national service policy have been initiated by Singaporean policymakers: for example, the period of service has been reduced in most categories of service from two-and-a-half to two years. However, I would argue that reducing the length of national service is only a partial solution. My research findings make clear that other than the length of service, another drawback of the national service policy in Singapore is the lack of flexibility in terms of both content and implementation.

First, the existing national service policy requires all able-bodied male Singaporean citizens (including second-generation permanent residents) to undertake military training (although some may be later transferred to the police or civil defence service); exceptions are made only for persons with certified medical conditions. During the interviews that I conducted, a number

of my male respondents said that military training was a waste of their time given that they are unlikely to capitalise upon those skills in their everyday lives. I suggest that instead of compulsory military training, national service recruits should be given options to serve in alternative civilian services, such as is the case in Germany. This policy change would also resolve debates about whether Singaporean women should be drafted for national service and undergo military training like their male counterparts.

Second, the current implementation of the national service policy in Singapore generally requires male Singaporean citizens from the same age group to serve national service upon the completion of their pre-tertiary or polytechnic education. Although some Singaporeans may request deferment of their national service, this concession is usually only granted to persons who have obtained government scholarships to study overseas. I would argue that given the varied routes of education and work that Singaporeans now undertake, there should be room for greater flexibility in terms of the time frame of national service.

Implementing the above recommendations may make the national service requirement in Singaporean appear less daunting to both local and overseas Singaporeans, as well as for naturalised Singaporean citizens who desire to contribute to their adopted country through national service. In this way, the *de facto* discrimination towards spouses of Singaporean women who cannot

quality for Singapore citizenship due to the national service requirement may also be circumvented.

However, an underlying issue that remains to be addressed is whether the idea of ‘national service’ is still desirable in contemporary Singapore. First, it is necessary to consider whether the use of military technologies relying on specialist knowledge and expertise means that the compulsory military conscription rule in Singapore has become obsolete? Second, in line with my research findings, the notion of ‘national’ service may be anachronistic to the feelings of multiple belongings and notions of allegiance experienced by Singaporean transmigrants. In such cases, tying ‘national service’ to Singaporean citizenship status would not only prove to be a contradictory experience for Singaporean transmigrants, but also disadvantage the Singaporean state in cases where individuals prefer to relinquish their Singaporean citizenship instead of complying with the national service requirement.

Aside from the dual citizenship restriction and the national service issue, other policy issues that have been revealed through my research include the overseas voting regulations set up by the Singaporean state, the territorial limitations of the Singaporean Central Provident Fund, and the provision of appropriate forms of state assistance to young Singaporean parents living overseas and for repatriating Singaporeans. Whilst my current research illuminates citizen perceptions that could help to inform policymaking, the formulation of fitting

solutions to these issues requires further study that I intend to undertake in the future.

More importantly, the possibility that the Singaporean state would re-invent itself to accommodate the overseas citizenry does not negate the importance of thinking and acting politically on the part of the overseas citizenry. This is so as to continue to interrogate and hold accountable the institutions and practices of the Singaporean state to those who give it the mandate to govern. The emerging landscapes of migrant citizenship practice may be less visible in comparison to the publicised extraterritorial initiatives of the Singaporean state, but as my study shows, even state-defined practices of citizenship are becoming important spaces of contestation and transgression. On another level, thinking and acting politically is also critical for just social relations to take place between individuals and groups. This is because, as Marston (2004:13) argues, ‘what we imagine ourselves and others to be in relation to the world is absorbed into, refracted through and reproduced by state practices; practices that reflect hegemonic notions and beliefs that end up sustaining racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of oppression’.

## **5 Future research developments**

As I complete this phase of my research, there are still a few questions that remain to be answered. For example, why did I not encounter more former Singaporean citizens who have given up their citizenship? How would their narratives provide findings that are useful to my research? If there had been

more time to carry out my fieldwork, would I have encountered more Malay-Singaporeans in London? Would this outcome change my view on the differentiating power of ethnicity in the Singaporean case-study? In the broader context, would these ‘absent’ observations have developed my arguments on ‘belonging’, ‘emotional citizenship’ and the politics of trans-‘national’ communities in a different direction?

Also, why were none of the Singaporean men in my sample married to non-Asian wives and even more strikingly, why had none of the Singaporean men taken up the citizenship of their foreign wives? Would my study results be different if more Singaporean women with children in London had been willing to be interviewed? Would answers to these questions shed new light on the debates pertaining to Singaporean masculinities and femininities, and therefore advance feminist understandings of gendered roles and identities in another way?

An interesting issue that I would have liked to investigate further is to find out more about Singaporean citizens who possess both Singapore citizenship and a foreign citizenship without the knowledge of the Singaporean immigration authorities. A few of the Singaporean transmigrants that I encountered in London had mentioned that they knew or they had heard of Singaporeans with dual citizenship on the quiet. In spite of my persuasive efforts and promises of anonymity, they did not agree to share their contacts with me. I presume that this reluctance reflects their anxieties of causing complications for the

individual in question if they gave away too much information. This research encounter, nonetheless, contributed to my analytical understanding of two sets of relationships: between the Singaporean state and citizen; and between myself as a researcher and the persons I was studying.

In terms of future research directions, there are several areas in which this research could branch out. For example, in view of the recent interest in transnational families, carrying out follow-up research on ‘left-behind’ family members – such as parents or older children who have been placed in the care of Singaporean boarding schools – of Singaporean transmigrants would shed new insights for scholarship in this arena. The experiences of Singaporean transnational families can be usefully compared to the existing work on transnational families of other nationalities and ethnicities (Ong, 1999; Parreñas, 2001 and 2005; Ho, 2002; Waters, 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 2003; Nonini, 2004; Ley and Kobayashi, 2005; McGregor, forthcoming). Alternatively, conducting a follow-up study of Singaporean transmigrants who have returned to live in Singapore would produce useful findings adding to understandings of whether their presence in Singapore reinscribes formulations of citizenship in one way or another. This research would further develop the literature studying the impact of return migration on sending countries (Lorente *et al*, 2005).

Another research area worth pursuing would be to compare manifestations of Singaporean transnationalism in another part of the world with my findings

based on the UK and with the work of Lily Kong, Brenda Yeoh and Katie Willis on China. Although my initial research proposal had been to undertake a comparative study of Singaporean transmigrants in London and Sydney, my project was eventually limited to London as advised by my academic advisers in view of the time and practical constraints of the PhD endeavour. Nonetheless, the comparative aspect of Singaporean transnational migration can be developed in future research. Australia, America and Canada are a few countries that would be relevant in terms of their attractiveness quotient to Singaporeans who move for reasons to do with study, work or quality of life. The immigration and citizenship regimes of these countries are comparable with the UK case study, but also display distinctive areas of difference that would show up fruitful empirical and theoretical insights on transnational migration and citizenship (trans)formations.

Moving away from the focus on Singapore, one could also carry out a comparative study into transnationalism from another source country. China, for instance, is seeing a similar outflow of highly skilled Chinese nationals in search of an overseas education or work exposure. The ramifications for the Chinese economy and citizenship governance are issues that have yet to be closely examined in rigorous academic research. Conducting comparative research in China, which has a majority Chinese population and a top-down style of political governance like Singapore, would refine theorisations of highly skilled migration and citizenship governance in a transnational world. As this study based on Singaporean transmigrants in London shows, the



experiences of citizenship by specific people in particular places illuminate the potential impact of emerging and new spaces of citizenship.

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# APPENDIX I<sup>1</sup>

## LIST OF RESPONDENTS

Name	Sex	Age group	Marital status	Ethnicity	Country of citizenship	Visa in the UK	Duration in the UK <sup>2</sup>
Gladys	F	Forties	Married	Other	Singapore	Ancestry visa	20 years
Charles	M	Sixties	Married	Chinese	United Kingdom (former Singaporean citizen)	British citizenship	30 years
Paul	M	Seventies	Married	Other	United Kingdom (with Singaporean permanent residency)	British citizenship	N.A.
John	M	Twenties	Single	Other	Other	EU visa	4 years
Prem	M	Forties	Married	Indian	Singapore	Permanent residency	10 years
Ajay	M	Forties	Married	Indian	Singapore	Permanent residency	5 years
Usha	F	Thirties	Married	Indian	Singapore	Permanent residency	5 years
Dina	F	Thirties	Married	Indian	Singapore	Permanent residency	3 years

<sup>1</sup> The names used here are pseudonyms and some personal information, such as the respondents' age and duration of stay in the United Kingdom, are only approximate figures. I have withheld the precise information in order to protect the identities of my respondents because of the potential political sensitivities associated with my research. For this same reason, I have not stated the occupations of my respondents or the country in which they hold citizenship unless it was Singapore or the United Kingdom. Such information may cause my respondents to be easily identified within the Singaporean community.

<sup>2</sup> The duration of stay in the United Kingdom (UK) is an approximation up till the period that I carried out the interviews (May 2004 to October 2005). The figures provided do not include previous years of study in the UK unless this was consecutive to the period of work.

Dorothy	F	Forties	Single	Chinese	Singapore	Permanent residency	10 years
Lydia	F	Fifties	Married	Chinese	Singapore	Permanent residency	5 years
Yogesh	M	Forties	Married	Indian	Singapore	Permanent residency	20 years
Rina	F	Thirties	Married	Other	Singapore	Permanent residency	6 years
Deborah	F	Thirties	Married	Chinese	Singapore	Spousal permit	2 years
Rachel	F	Thirties	Married	Chinese	Singapore	Spousal permit	3 years
Hannah	F	Thirties	Married	Chinese	Singapore	Spousal permit	8 years
Nadia	F	Thirties	Married	Other	Singapore	Spousal permit	5 years
Luke	M	Twenties	Single	Chinese	Singapore	Student visa	2 years
Kathy	F	Forties	Single	Chinese	Singapore	Student visa	10 years
Dewi	F	Twenties	Married	Malay	Singapore	Working holidaymaker	2 years
Helen	F	Twenties	Married	Chinese	Singapore	Working holidaymaker	2 years
Irene	F	Twenties	Single	Chinese	Singapore	Working holidaymaker	1 year
Lionel	M	Twenties	Single	Other	Singapore	Working holidaymaker	1 year
Alan	M	Twenties	Single	Chinese	Other (with Singaporean permanent residency)	Work permit	10 years
Bee Huay	F	Twenties	Single	Chinese	Singapore	Work permit	10 years
Fabian	M	Twenties	Married	Chinese	Singapore	Work permit	2 years
George	M	Twenties	Single	Chinese	Singapore	Work permit	4 years
Janice	F	Twenties	Single	Chinese	Singapore	Work permit	2 years
Hugh	M	Thirties	Married	Chinese	Singapore	Work permit	4 years
Ian	M	Thirties	Married	Chinese	Singapore	Work permit	2 years
James	M	Twenties	Single	Chinese	Singapore	Work permit	5 years
Michelle	F	Twenties	Single	Chinese	Singapore	Work permit	10 years
Oscar	M	Thirties	Single	Chinese	Singapore	Work permit	3 years
Mark	M	Thirties	Unknown	Chinese	Singapore	Work permit	Unknown
Yingying	F	Thirties	Married	Chinese	Other (with Singaporean permanent residency)	Work permit	4 years
Marcus	M	Thirties	Single,	Chinese	Singapore	Work permit	1 year
Martha	F	Twenties	Single	Chinese	Singapore	Work permit	6 years

Felix	M	Thirties	Single	Chinese	Singapore	Work permit	4 years
Isaac	M	Thirties	Single	Chinese	Singapore	Work permit	2 years
Nathan	M	Twenties	Single	Chinese	Singapore	Work permit	6 years
Olivia	F	Twenties	Single	Chinese	Singapore	Work permit	3 years
Patricia	F	Thirties	Single	Chinese	Singapore	Work permit	8 years
Steven	M	Twenties	Single	Chinese	Singapore	Work permit	5 years
Xavier	M	Twenties	Married	Chinese	Singapore	Work permit	7 years
Suhua <sup>3</sup>	F	Twenties	Married	Chinese	Other	Work permit	4 years
Andrew	M	Thirties	Married	Other	United Kingdom	British citizenship	N.A.
Sarah	F	Forties	Married	Chinese	Other	Permanent residency	20 years

<sup>3</sup> The respondents in the shaded boxes did not identify themselves as 'Singaporean' but they had significant links with Singapore that makes them relevant persons for my study (see Chapter Three).

## APPENDIX II

### SAMPLE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

#### A. Migration process

1. When did you come to live in London?
2. How did you come to work in London?
3. Why did you choose to work overseas? [F/up: why London?]
4. What sort of formal procedures did you have to go through, if any, to work here?

#### B. Singapore/London

1. What does Singapore mean to you now that you are overseas?
2. Being away from Singapore, do you still keep up with what is happening in Singapore, such as current affairs?
3. What are the ways that you stay in touch with family and friends in Singapore?
4. How does it feel being a Singaporean in London? [Culture, race etc]
5. Do you keep in touch with other Singaporeans in London?
6. If yes, what sort of things do you normally talk about or what activities do you do together? If not, why?

#### C. The meaning of citizenship

1. Citizenship is often regarded as a legal status, but what do you think citizenship means to you?
2. What do you think are some of the most important rights and/or privileges of citizenship?
3. What do you think are the responsibilities of a Singaporean citizen?

#### D. Citizenship in the context of transnational migration

1. As a Singaporean overseas, would you say you are exercising your rights/privileges, or fulfilling your responsibilities?
2. The Singaporean government highlights a need for overseas Singaporeans to remain committed and contribute to Singapore in the future. What are your views on this?
3. Have you considered obtaining permanent residence in a country outside of Singapore? Why?
4. Have you considered giving up your Singaporean citizenship for a passport from elsewhere? Why?
5. Recently there have been some changes to citizenship policies for overseas Singaporeans. First, the Parliament will soon grant the passing of citizenship by descent to children born to Singaporean parents who were themselves born overseas and citizens by descent. What do you think of such a policy in terms of encouraging Singaporeans and their children to remain citizens?
6. In the past, only children of Singaporean men could automatically qualify for citizenship. This will change soon since Parliament has approved the bill to allow children born to Singaporean women overseas to qualify for citizenship automatically as well. What do you think would be the impact of such a policy?

#### E. Alternative conceptions of citizenship

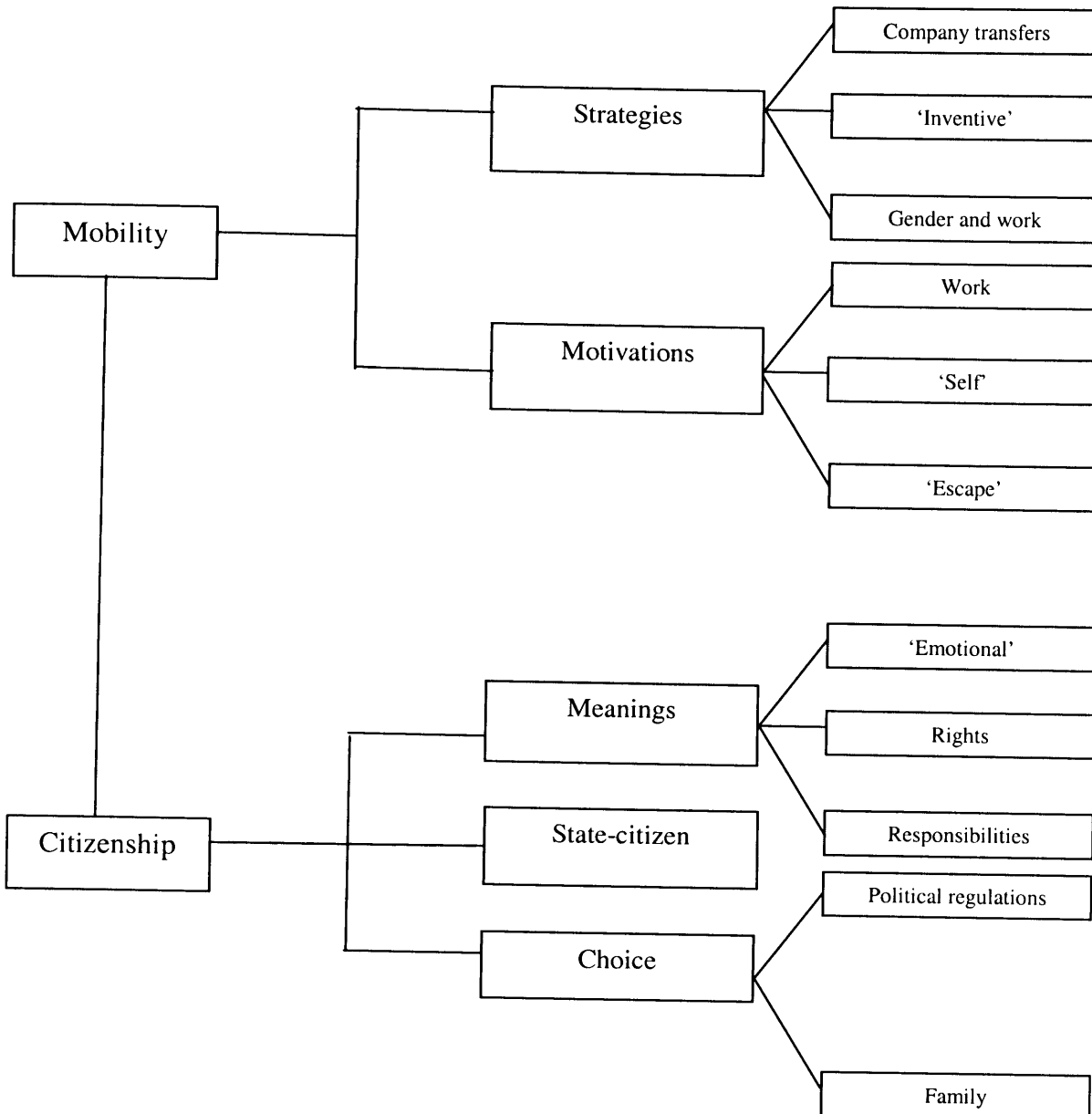
1. Currently Singapore does not allow for a dual citizenship policy. Would you like to see such a policy put in place?
2. Personally, would you take up dual citizenship? Why?
3. Do you see yourself more as a citizen of the Singaporean nation-state, or more of global, cosmopolitan citizen?
4. If you could change things, what would your ideal form of citizenship be?

### APPENDIX III

## FLOWCHART OF SELECTED ATLAS-TI CODES

1<sup>st</sup> Hierarchy Code

2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Hierarchy Codes



## Other Atlas-Ti codes

### Mobility

Identity  
Local/global  
Challenges  
Networks  
Cosmopolitanism – meaning  
Cosmopolitanism – contradictions  
Cosmopolitan couples

### Citizenship

Belonging  
Community  
Children  
Ethnicity/relations  
Gendering  
Dual citizenship  
Alternative forms  
Overseas wants  
Postcolonialism  
'Self-censorship'

### Transnational families

Aging parents  
Young children  
'Asian' values  
Maids  
Country/citizenship  
Gender roles

### Interview relationship

Positionality  
Ethics  
Issues