STAND UP FOR SINGAPORE?
GAY MEN AND THE CULTURAL POLITICS
OF NATIONAL BELONGING IN THE LION CITY

BY

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DISSERTATION
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011

Urbana, Illinois

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Abstract

This dissertation ethnographically examines how Chinese-Singaporean gay men articulate their aspirations for national belonging within a recalcitrant state and its nation-building programs. These men expose the artificiality of the nation and its categories of belonging. Even as the state compels them to submit to its call for economic and biological (re)productivity, it also chastises them for their allegedly excessive individualism. Yet, in the corporeal spaces of everyday life, they navigate a social landscape structured by the very real practices of an authoritarian state that criminalizes their sexuality. By ethnographically charting how gay men comply with and resist discourses and practices that position them both inside and outside their nation, I argue that the illiberal state achieves its political legitimacy by successfully convincing citizens that only it can secure Singapore's continuous economic growth. I further assert that within Singapore's strongly communitarian political framework, gay citizens who stress their commonalities with their non-gay counterparts tend to attain more social acceptance than those who focus solely on their sexuality.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people, without whom this dissertation would have been impossible. First and foremost, I thank my friends and fieldwork consultants in Singapore: Aaron Neo, Alan Ang, Alex Au, Bianca, Brian Ho, Bryan Choong, Charmaine Tan, Chris Low, Clarence Singham, David Chein, Dinesh Naidu, Eileen Lee, Ernest Yeo, Gary Lim, Han Lai, Harry Tan, Haz, Ignatius Low, Jazy Chen, Kelvin Wong, John Poh, Ken Hong, Kenneth Chee, Khalil, Lee Chor Pharn, Lee Nam Khim, Leow Yangfa, Nick Deroose, Nick Lam, Otto Fong, Peter Ong, Rayman Som, Roger of “Vincents” Bar, Roger Winder, Sham, Roy Tan, Russell Heng, Sylvia Tan, Terence Leong, Thomas Tan, Tim Chan, Toh Boon Hwee, Xian Hongjun, Yasser, and others whom I might have forgotten by mistake. Without the insights into everyday gay life in Singapore you gave me over the many years, my dissertation would never have taken flight.

I should also mention the anonymous reviewer at the Wenner-Gren Foundation. No thanks to you and your mean letter, but I still finished my fieldwork and dissertation anyway. Maybe you had forgotten your time as a graduate student, but I put in a lot of time, effort, and emotions writing my proposal. Do not shred it as if it were chattel.

Next, I would thank my four advisors – Associate Professor Martin F. Manalansan IV, Professor Emeritus F. K. Lehman, Professor Janet Keller, and Associate Professor Alejandro Lugo. I could not have succeeded without your immense and invaluable guidance over the years. I would also like to thank the Department of Anthropology at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign for the funding it provided me for summer research in 2005 and 2006. Of course, I must thank the members of the dissertation-writing class that later became an informal writing group – Prof. Alma Gottlieb, Karin Berkhoudt, Isabel Scarborough, Angela Glaros, Elizabeth Spreng, and Julie Williams. “As is known to all” (performs hand gesture), dissertation-writing is a painful task best tackled among friends, and you “park people” definitely eased my agony. Lastly, I would also like to thank Ethel Hazard. You steadied my hand during my first rocky years in graduate school, and you were right. Not only did I catch up, I overshot.
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Chapter 1: “We, the Citizens of Singapore …”

Stand up for Singapore
Do the best you can
Reach out for your fellow men
You've got to make a stand
Recognize you can play your part
Let it come right from your heart
Be prepared to give a little more
Stand up, stand up for Singapore
  by Hugh Harrison

We, the citizens of Singapore,
pledge ourselves as one united people,
regardless of race, language or religion,
to build a democratic society
based on justice and equality,
so as to achieve happiness, prosperity
and progress for our nation.
- *Singapore National Pledge* (1966)
  by Sinnathamby Rajaratnam

*IndigNation* and the Unofficial Pink Picnic

“Singapore,” sociologist Laurence Leong (1997: 142) writes, “appears to be the last frontier in the Asian region for positive gay and lesbian developments.” While repression and sexual perversions characterize orientalist discourses (Screech 2000: 759), Leong’s assertion remains not entirely ungrounded. Of all its Asian neighbors, Singapore shares the dubious honor of having laws that specifically criminalize male homosexual acts with Malaysia and Brunei. Section 377A of the Singaporean Penal Code punishes such acts with jail sentences of up to two years, and provides a legal justification for the systematic social discrimination that gay Singaporeans experience. This Section reads:

> Outrages on decency
> 377A. Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or abets the commission of, or procures or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to 2 years (Source: [*Singapore Statutes Online*]).
When consenting heterosexual couples perform the same oral or anal sex, however, these acts shed their criminality. Singapore's politicians made this distinction during a heated public debate in 2007 when they overhauled the Penal Code to correspond laws with contemporary social values. Strictly speaking, 377A punishes only male homosexuality. A most likely apocryphal tale I heard long ago traces this bias to Queen Elizabeth I (1533 – 1603 CE). When this British monarch's counselors asked her whether they should criminalize female homosexuality as well, she rejected the suggestion by reputedly insisting that “women don't do that.” Whatever the law's origins may be, Singapore's current Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong promised that he would not enforce it – he retained it for its symbolic value only. Nevertheless, the very act of retaining 377A cast all gay and, by extension, lesbian Singaporeans as second-class citizens.

The juridical inequality and the resulting social injustice that 377A engenders stand out starkly in the light of the two epigraphs above. In the first, I present the opening stanza of Stand Up for Singapore, a nationalistic song that radio and television stations often play beginning late May as citizens prepare to celebrate National Day on August 9. Grandiose in wording, the song rouses Singaporeans and exhorts them to give their heart, body, and soul for their country's betterment. The second epigraph reproduces the National Pledge made by the live audience of the National Day parade and, more commonly, by school-going children nation-wide during every weekday morning assembly in all levels of education from kindergarten to junior college (the equivalent of the high school in the United States). Penned in 1966 by a former Deputy Prime Minister and reflecting the tumultuous ethno-politics of that era, the pledge calls on citizens to work towards a unified Singapore by setting aside differences in their ethnicity, language, and religious faith, but conspicuously not their gender and sexual identities. The sharp incongruity between the legal and sexual exclusions of 377A and the unifying call of the two epigraphs provokes questions about cultural and sexual
citizenship in Singapore. Do gay men reconcile their sexuality with the anti-sodomy law? Do they see themselves as Singaporeans and proclaim their patriotism? By answering these questions in this ethnography, I shed light on the larger dynamics of the state and the meanings of belonging in Singapore.

In recent years, gay men began to publicly assert their cultural and sexual citizenships. Angered by the criminalization of their sexuality and other acts of state-sponsored discrimination in the past, local gay rights activists began organizing a series of gay pride events called *IndigNation* in 2006. Occurring in August every year to coincide with the country's National Day, *IndigNation* highlights the socio-legal discrimination that LGBT Singaporeans face daily to their otherwise-unaware straight counterparts, while registering their desire to become full-fledged members of the Singaporean nation. Over *IndigNation*'s short history, the Unofficial Pink Picnic became a popular event among participants. LGBT rights activists named the picnic after the rosy hue partly because of its historical association with homosexuality and, more importantly for the activists, because of its symbolic patriotism. What better way to assert one's national belonging than with a color that combines the red and the white of the national flag? Picnic participants don pink clothing and gather in the Botanic Gardens on National Day itself to share an afternoon of food and laughter. In the atmosphere of stigma, fear, and prejudice that 377A created, the UPP and other public statements of homosexual citizenship encourage non-attending gay men and lesbians not to hide their sexualities in public spaces. They also show straight Singaporeans that their fellow gay and lesbian counterparts are no more perverse or abnormal than they are.

After missing the first two picnics, I went to the one in 2009. Two of my gay friends offered me a ride to the Botanic Gardens together with their straight friend and their two dogs. Caught in El Nino's warm embrace, Singapore's already tropical weather assailed us with unusually hot and humid ferocity the moment we left the cool, air-conditioned respite of
the car. It did not take us long to spot the picnickers, their pink t-shirts standing out vividly against the green of the picnic grounds. They brought an impressive spread. As we laughed at the antics of my gay friends' very frisky dogs, we shared, often with complete strangers, pasta salad, fishballs, curry puffs, carrot cake, honey-sweet mangoes and Japanese grapes, cocktail weiners, and roasted chicken. “I'm disappointed,” I lamented jokingly to another friend who did not organize the picnic, “where are the agents from the Internal Security Department? It's just not fun without them.” “I know,” he agreed emphatically. The day just before the inaugural Pink Picnic in 2007, the picnic's organizers received a government letter denying them permission to use the Botanic Gardens for the event. According to some insider information the would-be organizers received later, the order to issue the letter came from the rarified heights of government. Someone, widely believed to be an intensely homophobic but otherwise liberal and brilliant legal scholar of human rights, had called in favors to stop the picnic. Unfazed, the organizers decided to not organize the picnic. Instead, they announced that interested parties could still gather on their own accord. Surely, individual agency did not require official permission. The Unofficial Pink Picnic that nobody organized has since become a regular IndigNation feature.

A gay picnic does not have the same political impact a gay pride parade does. Nevertheless, the political powers-that-be still regarded the UPP as a threat. My friend claimed that during the inaugural picnic, he saw two men, dressed all in black, conspicuously observing and taking photos of the event. “Come on! They'd got to be ISD agents,” he said, “why else would a Chinese man be there with a Malay man?” In a country as racialized as Singapore, this pairing did seem unlikely. I asked how the picnickers dealt with the government interlopers. “Some annoyed lesbians went up and took pictures of them,” he laughed. “They really should send more competent agents. Last year, they sent someone obviously tasked to count how many of us there were. He actually walked among us and
counted,” he continued as he mimicked the agent by repeatedly jabbing the air with his index finger in a counting motion. “All we had this year were two fundamentalist Christians. There was a straight couple, and the man wore black bermudas. Did you see them? They took photos of us, so I got Ali to go up and take their pictures in return. They ran away immediately.”

The above ethnographic vignette illustrates the fault lines of distrust that mark present-day Singapore. The numerically dominant Chinese share an uneasy relationship with the Malays, just as the state treats its gay and lesbian citizens with suspicions. Since the country's independence in 1965, the dominant People's Action Party (PAP) has attempted to inculcate a sense of national belonging in Singapore's immigrant society. They do so through a series of socio-cultural and politico-economic policies designed to turn the citizens' cultural orientations away from their ancestral homelands and inward at Singapore. This includes celebrating National Day with *Stand Up for Singapore* (1984), *One People, One Nation, One Singapore* (1990), *Home* (1998), *Shine for Singapore* (2008), and other nationalistic songs. Yet, other state policies undermine this nation-building project. For instance, public housing policies make it easier for the Chinese to buy and sell apartments, leading the non-Chinese to question their place in society as citizens (Chua 1997). These policies also encourage the formation of the procreative hetero-patriarchal family, so they allocate grants and priority in housing assignment to heterosexually married couples. Yet, because they stipulate neither a time limit by which couples must produce children nor penalties for infertility, they trigger questions as to why gay citizens should pay taxes to fund policies that do not benefit them. Coupled with the criminalization of homosexuality, public housing policies cast doubt on the value of citizenship among gay men and lesbians.

In 2003, gay and lesbian citizens received some respite when the Prime Minister announced that the government would now employ them as civil servants, provided that they
openly declare their sexuality. Yet, as Weiss (2005: 272) writes poetically, “the blush soon faded from Singapore's pink spring.” In 2007, parliamentarians voted to retain the criminality of homosex while legalizing the same acts for consenting straight couples. Despite all this discrimination, gay citizens demonstrate that they want to claim their space in Singapore. The Unofficial Pink Picnic proves this strong patriotism with its nationalistic symbolism. How then can we make sense of this desire to belong amidst the country's self-contradicting assemblage of nation-building processes, anti-sodomy laws, pro-natalist policies, and seemingly gay-tolerant state attitudes? Do gay men react to the state's vision of proper reproductive masculinity and femininity? Do they also challenge the state's hegemonic notions of family, citizenship, gender and sexuality, or do they re-inscribe these notions?

To engage these questions, I will first examine why Singapore attained, in the words of cultural studies scholar Audrey Yue (personal communication), a seemingly queer, self-contradicting state of “modernization without modernity.” In the short time span of less than 50 years since it became an independent nation-state, Singapore solidified its nodal position in the global network of capital and information flows (Chang, et al. 2004). It accomplished this largely because historical contingencies forced the PAP leaders to adopt economic developmentalism as their state ideology immediately upon independence. Economic robustness is often associated with modernity that transcends the old and the backward. Yet, these same leaders also style themselves illiberally as Confucianist junzi, morally superior scholar-officials mandated by heaven – in this case, popular elections – to govern a citizenry they discursively construct as too incompetent to rule itself (Barr and Skrbiš 2008). They further cement their political claims by conflating the PAP with the nation-state and the country, such that what are in actual fact party interests often masquerade as national ones instead. Consequently, critics of PAP governance risk appearing as critiquing Singapore itself. Economic prosperity provides the PAP leaders with much of their political credibility, so they
vigorously liberalize the economy in the name of pragmatism – sometimes with detrimental effects on the citizens – to maintain the party's hold on power. To this end, they also jealously guard control of the economic developmentalist discourse and other possible discourses of nationhood.

In particular, homosexuality poses an ideological challenge to the PAP. All the major ethnic groups in Singapore – the Chinese, the Malays and the Indians – have same-sex practices embedded within larger social structures of age, ethnicity, class, and gender in their respective cultural histories (Hinsch 1990; Peletz 2009; Vanita 2002). In sharp contrast, the modern gay identity calls for individuals to disregard these structures, be true to themselves, and to come out so their inner selves can match their outer ones. The PAP leaders object to this asocial individualism. They claim it runs counter to both the communitarianism that they profess to contain the socially disruptive effects of the country's rapid modernization (Chua 2003a), and the hetero-patriarchal family that they promote as the bedrock of society and the economy (Heng and Devan 1992). In this light, I argue that seemingly homophobic state policies are really more heteronormative in nature, as they suppress homosexuality only as a side-effect of promoting hetero-patriarchy. They do not stem from a religiously informed position that regards homosexuality as sinful, but rather from a philosophically informed communitarian one that frames it as an expression of excessive self-indulgence. It is this unbridled individualism that state officials try to contain, as I demonstrate in Chapter 3 with examples that feature heterosexual citizens.

Arguing for the communitarian rationale in state policies, however, does not negate the considerable disadvantages that these policies place on gay citizens. After all, these policies deny them full-fledged citizenship and reinforce popular misconceptions of homosexuality as perverse and immoral. This means that in their homes, workplaces, and other spaces of everyday life, gay citizens must conscientiously negotiate the meanings of
their sexuality through strategies that range from suppressing their sexuality, to linguistic subterfuge tactics, and to coming out completely to their friends and family. In recent years, LGBT rights activists invoke principles of cultural and sexual citizenship to proclaim their loyalty to Singapore and to challenge state constructions of their sexuality. In doing so, they unsettle the PAP's ideological work by conceptually untangling the party from Singapore the geographical territory, and from Singapore the nation-state. Surprisingly, they do not always receive support from the very people that they help. While some gay men hold back for fear of state retaliation, others become homonormative by trading their public rights as citizens for the privileges of private consumption (Duggan 2003).

I make three critical anthropological interventions in documenting Singapore's citizenship processes. Firstly, political economists fail to adequately explain how the illiberal PAP could have produced a modern economy whose vitality rivals that of many liberal democracies. After all, modernity implies a transcendence of one's authoritarian past. Some scholars try to explain the PAP by framing Singapore in increasingly complex typologies. For example, Diamond (2002) locates the country as the sole occupant of the category of "hegemonic electoral authoritarianism" in his scheme. Others ignore and/or dismiss as false and ineffective the PAP's many ideological attempts to secure legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens (Sim 2006). Neither complex typologies nor the rejection of the PAP's ideological attempts explains how the party can be both stable and legitimate at the same time. The state policies towards reproduction and homosexuality crystallize the political tensions between the PAP's need for control and its need to appear liberal to secure political support. In exploring these policies, I argue that while Singaporeans (especially those from the educated middle class) find the PAP electoral and governance strategies ethically dubious, even irksome, they nevertheless tolerate the PAP because its leaders promised and continue to deliver a high level of economic well-being. This suggests a certain level of pragmatism
among the citizens – they do not mind giving up some citizenship rights if they become materially comfortable in return.

Secondly, I highlight the specificities in gay men's lives. Although feminism took root in anthropology to rectify the silencing of women's voices in classical ethnographies, its theoretical outlook left gender studies closely associated with women's studies. This resulted in the analytical category “man” as a stand-in for the universal category of humanity, as if culture does not inform men's lives at all. Consequently, “very few within the discipline of the 'study of man' had truly examine men as men” (Gutmann 1997: 385, emphasis in original). Some notable English-medium ethnographic exceptions include Boellstorff's (2005) study of gay Indonesia, Kong's (2009) study of gay men in Hong Kong, and Peletz's (2009) study of gender pluralism in early modern Southeast Asia. To address this scholarly imbalance, I focus only on gay men and not lesbians in my study. By highlighting the strategies meaningful within local rubrics of society and masculinity that gay men deploy to negotiate Singapore's gay-unfriendly social landscape, I locate my work within studies of non-normative masculinities vis-à-vis regimes of reproductive underpinnings of national belonging and citizenship.

Lastly, I provide ethnographic instantiations of the sexual citizenship concept. While Evans (1993) pioneered its theorization in material terms, cultural geographers such as David Bell and Jon Binnie (2000, 2004) still dominate its study. This study reveals that “perverse” gay men and lesbians make only “partial citizens” (Richardson 1998: 88). They owe the state taxes, must obey its laws, etc., but they cannot and will not channel their sexuality towards the “good” goal of emotionally fulfilling procreation to form the state-idealized nuclear family (Rubin 1989). Hence, state officials deem them undeserving of the full range of rights and privileges that their “good” heterosexual counterparts receive. As a result, some queers privatize their sexuality to trade their duties as “good citizens” for the rights to consumption.
Calling this exchange “the new homonormativity,” Duggan (2003) highlights the dangers of pitching rights claims around the right of access to the trappings of heteronormative privilege. By assimilating, one forgoes the right to critique the possibility and desirability of the types of sexual citizen one can become. Only recently did anthropologists begin to incorporate the concept of sexual citizenship into their work (e.g. Castle 2006; Parikh 2004; and Phillips 2008). By studying sexual citizenship in Singapore, I illuminate the limits and possibilities of the concept, and ultimately show how the state's disciplining of the unruly sexed body underpins citizen-state relationships.

Cultural and Sexual Citizenship

Focusing only on gay men for reasons that I explained earlier, I invoke citizenship concepts to frame my exploration of national belonging in Singapore. In his seminal essay where he analyzes the development of legal citizenship in Britain from civil to political to social rights from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, Marshall (1950) claims that a full citizen must possess all three kinds of rights. He further links this possession to social class. This definition reveals a number of modern citizenship's key characteristics. Firstly, Marshall reveals the concept's inherent exclusivity. Typically, states grant membership only to those individuals who satisfy their membership criteria. Secondly, states may bestow citizenship arbitrarily, even when a citizen has done nothing to deserve it. For example, one becomes a citizen of the United States simply because she was born there, or because her parents are themselves US citizens. Lastly, citizenship buffers against the material and social inequalities that capitalism inevitably produces. Seeking to maximize profits, the capitalistic market place has little provisions against unemployment, work-related injuries and illnesses, old age, an individual's social (ir)relevance, and other vagaries of life that a worker must endure. The redistribution of rights and material wealth implicit in citizenship offsets the negative
consequences of an unregulated market (Turner 2009).

While acknowledging the utility of Marshall's theory, scholars also criticize it on several grounds. Firstly, it fails to analyze coherently and consistently the causal mechanisms that produced an expansion of citizenship (Alexander 2006). It does not explain how this expansion is driven by ethnic discontent in the United States, and by efforts to minimize class inequalities to gain access to housing, education, social security, and other basic resources in Britain (Shklar 1998). Secondly, it treats citizenship as a uniform and coherent concept, and fails to explain how citizenship forms vary across different historical trajectories. For instance, the evolution of citizenship in Europe differs from citizenship in East and Southeast Asia. Thirdly, the theory assumes a somewhat homogenous society where regional, cultural and ethnic divisions pose less import than those of social class. Such a claim is not even tenable in Marshall's native Britain, an island that the British share with the Welsh, the Scots, and the Irish, much less the rest of the ethnically complex world. Fourthly, the theory says little about citizen duties and obligations. It assumes a passive citizenry that the state protects from the market's uncertainties through a system of universal social rights, but does not question how these social rights transform from mere formal claims to effective forms of entitlement (Turner 2009). Fifthly, critics question the limits of the buffer that modern citizenship provides against the free market's vagaries, arguing that it neither altered the basic structures of inequality in capitalism (Mann 1987), nor improved the position of women in society (Siim 2000).

Lastly, Marshall's legal definition of citizenship maps national belonging directly onto membership in nation-states. However, such a theoretical framing became overly simplistic in a globalizing world of rapid cross-border flows of people, capital and information. Indeed, scholars now see citizenship as a set of cultural and social processes rather than simply a political status, or a juridical contract of rights, entitlements, and obligations between
individuals and the state (Shafir 1998). Crenshaw (1995), Lister (1998), Williams (1991), Yuval-Davis and Werbner (1999), and other feminists and critical race theorists complicate the notion of universal citizenship further by highlighting the inflections that race, gender, class, sexuality, and other categories of difference make upon one's understanding of citizenship.

Marshall's theory attracted many critiques, but this does not mean that we should dismiss legal citizenship as a static category, or simply a status whose conferring depends on the fulfillment of certain legal requirements. Daniels (2005) reminds us that the cultural values and aspirations of a nation-state inform the legal criteria and opinions concerning membership in that entity. As the values and aspirations change over time, so do the criteria and opinions. The laws that first allowed, then banned, and ultimately reinstated Asian migration to the United States from the eighteenth to the twentieth century illustrate this cultural-legal connection. This link also identifies citizenship as central to the studies of governmentality by focusing on the constitution of the human subject vis-à-vis itself and constellations of power (Donzelot 1979). Furthermore, the lack of formal citizenship does not automatically result in a lack of cultural citizenship either. Some people who do not fulfill the formal requirements of citizenship may still develop a sense of belonging as they are partially incorporated within society (Chavez 1998; Flores 1997).

Cultural citizenship provides my second anchoring concept. Such citizenship refers to the extra-legal emotional ties that bind one to her country. Within anthropology, two scholars wield particularly strong influences in the development of cultural citizenship studies. Working among US Latinos, Rosaldo (1997) envisions citizenship as a people-driven and continually expanding process of inclusion and enfranchisement. To him,

cultural citizenship refers to the right to be different (in terms of race, ethnicity, or native language) with respect to the norms of the dominant national community,
without compromising one's right to belong, in the sense of participating in the nation-state's democratic processes (Rosaldo 1994: 57).

Ong (1999) critiques Rosaldo for privileging the agency of subordinated groups too much. Indeed, voluntary grassroots associations may hinder the development of inclusive and participatory social relations just as well as fostering them (Hefner 2001). Ong (1996) takes a more top-down approach, and treats cultural citizenship as a process of subject formation where civil institutions socialize newcomers and integrate them into the nation-state. She demonstrates a primary concern with the regimes of governmentality in her study of flexible citizenship practices among Hong Kong elites (Ong 1999). She does so again in her study of how Cambodian-Americans locate the twin processes of being made and self-making in institutional webs of power (Ong 2003). Formulated in either Rosaldo's or Ong's way, cultural citizenship proves against the anti-citizenship demands that autochthons in Africa (Austen 1992), Europe (Caestecker 2000), and elsewhere make to “purify” their nations of allochthonic “strangers.” However, neither Rosaldo nor Ong conceive of dominant majorities and their qualitative citizenship. Referring to Fijian and Malaysian “natives,” Daniels (2005: 8) notes that

although members of such groups are conventionally thought to be the default citizen-members of national communities, they may also develop a sense of second-class citizenship or marginalized first class citizenship due to particular social and political policies or processes.

Hence, full membership in a dominant group does not automatically guarantee cultural belonging.

More recently, Siu (2005) combines both Rosaldo's and Ong's approaches in her analysis of diasporic citizenship among Chinese-Panamanians. Recognizing that people often belong to more than one political community, and that such multiple memberships make citizens “multi-layered” (Soysal 1994; Yuval-Davis 1999), she analytically separates
citizenship from both the territorially and conceptually bounded nation-state and the concept of a singular loyalty to a particular collective. This enables her to conceptualize citizenship as being subjected to global forces even as it operates within nation-state boundaries.

Related to cultural citizenship, sexual citizenship provides the third concept that orients this dissertation. Arising out of the politics surrounding state apathy over the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States in the early 1980s, sexual citizenship poses “a deliberate challenge that any notion of the political being must recognize, and attend to, the simple yet often-ignored fact that humans are undeniably sexual” (Brown 2006: 874 – 5). Armstrong (1994), Evans (1993), and others note that in many democratic countries, sexuality informs judgments on whether groups or individuals can participate in public life in a responsible and desirable manner. Those whose sexual proclivities that society deems suspect, dangerous, or otherwise undesirable may find politicians and policy-makers curtailing their civil rights to define the nation's moral geographies. As such, figures as diverse as the single mother, the prostitute, the errant father, gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, the pervert, and the pornographer have all been demonized as "bad citizens” in different times and in different ways to delimit normal and desirable behavior (Knopp 1995). The state's punishment of perceived sexual deviance highlights the liminal status of gay men and lesbians as “partial citizens” (Richardson 1998: 88) who cannot marry, foster children, serve in the military in the same capacity as straight soldiers do, and receive legal protection from harassment and discrimination.

In this light, the debate among intellectuals and activists over sexual citizenship revolves around the balancing of state-granted rights as pay-off for one's responsibilities to the state (Bell and Binnie 2000; Evans 1993; Hubbard 2001; Richardson 2000; Weeks 1998). To some critics, sexual citizenship as a campaigning platform has been overshadowed by the need to secure rights (especially to consumption) in exchange for duties as a “good citizen”
who relegates her sexuality to the private sphere. Calling this exchange “the new homonormativity,” Duggan (2003) highlights the dangers of pitching rights claims around the right of access to the trappings of heteronormative privilege. By assimilating, one forgoes the right to critique the possibility and desirability of the types of sexual citizens one can become.

Others, especially geographers, consider it essential to examine issues of citizenship in terms of space because ideas of citizenship concern the appropriateness of one’s behaviors in particular spheres of civil life (Smith 1989). Binnie and Valentine (1999) argue that the ways Euro-American societies organize space help to naturalize heterosexuality. These societies do so by simultaneously saturating spaces of work, leisure and consumption with images and behaviors that encourage people to adopt heterosexual identities and performances (Nast 1998), while disciplining those who transgress the sexual and spatial order with social and legal codes of conduct (Elder 1998). Such policing ranges from the formal sex zones that policy-makers set up to contain the sexed, unruly bodies of prostitutes, to the informal (but potentially deadly) homophobic abuse that gay men and lesbians risk attracting if they display public homosexual affection, friendship or desire. Similar behavior by heterosexual couples go often unremarked and unpunished, so this policing reveals the aggressive hetero-patriarchy supporting civil society that poses a high barrier to entry to those society judged as “immoral” (Adler and Brenner 1992; Namaste 1996; Valentine 1993).

Lastly, academics and activists most commonly associate sexual citizenship with non-normative practices and identities, most notably those of LGBT communities. Consequently, some confuse sexual citizenship with LGBT or even queer citizenship. Such thinking perpetuates the sexualization of non-normative groups while de-sexualizing the normative ones (Bell and Binnie 2006). This thinking also obscures the fact that the contours of sexual citizenship have already been heavily heteronormalized. Those who campaign for same-sex marriage, for example, model their claims upon the idea of the romantically bonded opposite-
sex couple not only as the legitimate form of adult intimate relationship, but also as the basis of society. As such, Bell and Binnie (ibid.) insist that any further theorizing of sexual citizenship must include both normative and non-normative heterosexualities in the intellectual conversation.

**Research Methods**

To examine the dynamics of cultural and sexual citizenship in Singapore, I conducted a number of summer fieldwork projects there from 2004 to 2006. I returned again in August 2007, for a total of 17 months this time, to do my dissertational research. Over the years, I built a network of informants, many of whom have since become my friends, but I faced difficulties in my initial attempts to know them. I hardly knew anyone from the gay social circles when I first started. Nobody answered the advertisements for volunteer interviewees that I placed on online mailing lists either. These advertisements rarely worked, I realized later, because they were the fieldwork equivalent of the cold call. The basic snowball method that fieldworkers use to expand their informant networks also proved ineffective at first, because it requires the researcher to have a core group of consultants to start the snowball rolling. In anticipation of the field research that I would do, however, I joined several gay-oriented email lists and off-line social groups even before I began my doctoral studies. The friends that I made in these groups later formed my first informant pool.

During my dissertation research, I participated widely in the activities that local gay groups organized. These activities ranged from the political (e.g. IndigNation events), to the professional (e.g. business seminars organized by a local gay net-working group), to the entirely social (e.g. potluck dinners, watching movies, picnicking, and taking leisure trips to neighboring Malaysia). A local gay group, TheBearProject, organized the bulk of these social activities. I befriended the men (and, on rare occasions, the women) of this fat-friendly group
earlier, partly out of personal interests and partly due to a previous project that investigated the discursive formation of hyper-masculinity and fatness among gay men. These men, in fact, formed the majority of my informants. Altogether, I interviewed 29 men. 27 of the men self-identify as gay and two as straight. As I discussed earlier, I did this to address the bias in gender studies where men typically stand in for humanity and lose their male voices. My informants come from a range of different social and demographic backgrounds. Most of them were in their late 20s to mid-30s at the time of the interviews, although a small number was older. The majority also reported middle-class backgrounds, albeit to different degrees. They hold jobs ranging from multi-media designers and trainee teachers, to university researchers and retired CEOs. Most also claim Chinese ethnicity. These various biases probably stemmed from informants' tendencies to befriend others of a similar social background, which in turn influenced the type of informants I got to know through the snowball method that I used.

As for the interviews, I conducted them mainly in Singlish, a creole that Singaporeans in their 20s or younger often learn at home and spoken as a pidgin by others in their 40s or older. Reflecting its origins in the language contact between the English of Singapore’s British colonizers and the diverse languages of the colonial subjects, Singlish syntax resembles that of the southern varieties of Chinese. The lexicon consists mostly of English words, but Malay, Hokkien, and Cantonese (the latter two being popular southern Chinese languages in Singapore) made significant contributions. To a lesser extent, so did South Asian languages such as Tamil and Hindi. As a grammatical description and socio-linguistic analysis of Singlish go beyond the scope of this dissertation, I highlight its main features instead. Kang (1992/93) characterizes Singlish by its use of local expressions (e.g. *kena arrow* = to receive an onerous task); code mixing/switching (e.g. *You siao ah? = Are you crazy?*); discourse particles that modify a sentence’s meaning or tone but not its
grammaticality (the most famous being *lah*, a particle that simultaneously asserts a position and entices solidarity); and direct translations from local languages. An example would be *You see me no up*, from Mandarin *Ni kan wo bu qi*, meaning *You look down on me*.

Platt and Weber (1980) regard Singlish as a speech continuum that ranges from the basilect to the mesolect to the acrolect, with each lect corresponding to the educational background and socio-economic status of its speakers. The higher the lect, the closer Singlish resembles Standard English. Kang (1992/93) also characterizes Singlish as domain-sensitive. State officials demonize it as sub-standard English and try to eradicate it through the annual Speak Good English Movement (Rubdy 2001). Consequently, local writers have yet to compose any significant piece of literature entirely in Singlish. However, local movie-makers often incorporate Singlish lexemes and phrases into their work. Reflecting the popular nature of the language, most Singaporeans remain generally well-disposed towards this creole (Kang 1992/93), especially when they use it in such familiar and intimate domains of talk as the interviews I conducted. In more formal contexts, Singlish (especially in its basilectal form) is only acceptable for the less educated. My informants come mainly from educated backgrounds, so we conversed largely in mesolectal and acrolectal Singlish.

I received my formal graduate education in the United States, but my own biographical background positions me as a so-called “native” anthropologist in multiple ways. Like most of my informants, I am Singaporean by birth and nationality, male, Chinese, gay, and fluent in English, Mandarin and Singlish. Sub-ethnically, I am also Cantonese and I speak the associated language, a variety of Yue Chinese widely understood in Singapore. My privileged position enabled me to befriend my consultants and establish the rapport necessary for successful fieldwork relatively easily. I could empathize with my informants' anxieties that rose from living with the sword of Damocles of an anti-sodomy law, not knowing if the sword will ever drop despite the Prime Minister's promise to not enforce the law. Having
returned to live in the family home each time I got back to Singapore, I also understand how restrictive hetero-patriarchal housing laws and exorbitant real estate prices greatly inform my informants’ decision to live with their parents. Like my consultants, I am also frustrated at times from having to hide my sexuality from my family and to subordinate my adult self to parents who still at times treat me as if I were still a child.

I do not deny that being a Singaporean on so many levels aided me greatly in my fieldwork. However, I echo Kirin Narayan (1993) in cautioning against exoticizing the figure of the “native” anthropologist as a bearer of the stamp of authenticity to such an extent that it overshadows commonalities or complexities. The heterogeneity inherent within any given cultural system or society immediately calls into doubt any claims one may make of being an authentic insider (Aguilar 1981; Messerschmidt 1981). Indeed, my friends already call me cheem (Singlish for “complicated”) or “Professor Tan” in jest sometimes, even before I earn my doctorate. This indicates that my overseas graduate education set me apart from them. Furthermore, sub-cliques exist even within small groups like TheBearProject where a core group of about twenty members attend its activities regularly. One of these sub-cliques, for example, go to drink and sing karaoke regularly. This group hardly ever an invitation to me to partake in these activities, partly because I never signaled a desire for them, and partly because I rarely drink. Like the act of sharing food (Carsten 1995), the act of drinking together creates a sense of camaraderie among the participants, so my abstinence shut me out from the bar-room conviviality.

Other barriers to entry into gay bars exist. For instance, my limited expendable income as a graduate student makes me feel uneasy being in the bars at times. Unlike the United States where they function as a crucial locus of socialization outside of the home and the workplace for all social classes, gay bars in Singapore bear a distinctively middle class flavor. The refreshments they sell, even soft drinks, cost S$10 (about US$7) or more. I
remember paying for a glass of Coke at a bar once with a S$10 note. To my surprise, the bartender took the money and did not give any change back! Another time when I investigated the formation of the cluster of gay businesses in Singapore's Chinatown, my friend Eileena brought me to three lesbian bars after she found out I never went inside one before. To minimize cost, we only bought one drink each at each bar we went to. At one watering hole tucked into a non-descriptive corner on the second floor in a row of low-lying shop houses, the owner nearly denied us entry because she operated her business as a woman-only space. She allowed gay men in – and only gay men, she stressed emphatically – if they were celebrating a special occasion such as a birthday. Even then, they must be accompanied by women. I did not dress “gay” enough for her, apparently, and I had already celebrated my birthday a month earlier. Luckily, Eileena happened to be a well-known figure in the local lesbian social circles. Giving Eileena face, the bar owner let us in. Inside, Eileena told me that women-only spaces provide important respite to lesbians tired from the stress of living in patriarchal Singapore. Not only must they fend off unwanted advances from straight men who mistake them for straight women, gay men can also behave insensitively around them by unwittingly passing misogynistic remarks. She claimed that as a result, some lesbians developed a sense of antipathy, even misandry, towards gay men. Some gay men, she insisted, also feel the same towards lesbians. The above examples illustrate that while Singaporean bars that cater to gay men and lesbians offer rare spaces where their clientele can congregate and socialize across ethnic boundaries in relative safety from the surveillance of family and state (cf. Bell 1983), they can also exclude in terms of class, gender and sexuality. For example, transitioning transgenders may find their presence unwanted because their sexual in-betweenness unsettle normative notions of sex and gender that gay men and lesbians adhere to (Valentine 2007). More importantly, the examples show how being a “native” anthropologist guarantees neither immediate access to ethnographic information nor
A Preview of the Dissertation

Having discussed the main concepts that frame my research, I now outline the chapters that make up the rest of the dissertation. In Chapter 2, I present a brief history of nation-building in Singapore as a prelude to the discussions in the following chapters. Using race as a theoretical frame, I trace the development of key features of present-day Singaporean citizenship through the country's history as 1) a thirteenth-century CE port in the Sumatra-based kingdom of Srivijaya; 2) a British trading port (1819 – 1963); 3) a British colony on the verge of independence (1941 – 1965); and 4) finally, as an independent city-state (1965 – present). As I do so, I advocate a new theory of ethnonormativity to address the inadequacies of modern race theories that Winant (2000) observes.

In Chapter 3, I discuss theories of nationalism and the nation-state, and the challenges they face from globalization. I consider how the PAP leaders use state apparatuses to socially engineer Singaporeans into citizens who strengthen both Singapore's position as a modern city-state and the leaders' claim to political legitimacy. I thematically divide this myriad of citizen-making policies into three groups. The first group seeks to transform citizens into living embodiments of their officially designated race and culture. This involves the heavy racialization and linguistic standardization of a previously exuberant but messy ethnoscape, the result of which determines the languages a citizen speaks, the kind of socialization she undergoes, and possibly even her occupation and place of residence. The second group aims to maximize the citizens' economic productive capabilities. These policies all demand the formation of neo-liberal citizen-subjects with highly flexible work ethics. However, the rapid implementation of these strategies produces national discourses that reflect Singapore's uneasiness with modernity. The last group portrays the biologically fecund Singaporean as a
citizen archetype to alleviate the country's dismal birth rates. Consequently, state policies privilege the formation of hetero-patriarchal and extended families over other family types.

In Chapter 4, I compare (neoliberal) theories of citizen-state relationships with those of the Confucianism that PAP leaders espouse. Next, I argue that Singapore's economic developmentalism produces immense wealth for the country, and much symbolic power and political credibility for the PAP leaders (Chua 1997). However, these leaders can only maintain their ideology by suppressing all non-state nationhood discourses. This creates an affective gulf between the PAP and the people, such that citizens think it shames them to heed the citizen-making policies (Lim 1994). Insofar as PAP leaders conflate their political party with Singapore as both the geographical territory and the nation-state, this divide also effectively inhibits the development of patriotism among the citizens.

Next, I examine alternate discourses of sexual citizenship that LGBT rights activists put forth. After a brief discussion of the anti-sodomy law and its socio-legal impact on gay male lives, I examine the rapid expansion of gay spaces and LGBT rights discourses within the last two decades. This includes the emergence of Chinatown as a locus of popular gay culture; the rise and fall of the Nation series of gay circuit parties; and the controversial public campaign in 2007 to decriminalize homosexuality. I argue here that while these rights discourses raise public awareness of the socio-legal injustice that gay men face, their ideological focus on pre-social individual rights remains antithetical to the Confucianism that state officials use to justify their pro-family stance. This explains why LGBT rights activists continues to produce limited success vis-à-vis the state.

In Chapter 5, I turn to individual gay men themselves to see if they negotiate the everyday meanings of their homosexuality and their relationships with the seemingly monolithic state. I begin by discussing theories of gender, gender performance and masculinity, paying particular attention to those discourses that make sense to the Chinese
men who form most of my informant pool. I question the meanings carried by the sexual identity “gay” that overlap with and differ from those borne by local labels that index non-heterosexuality. Next, I consider the culturally meaningful strategies that gay men use to negotiate their sexuality and their relationships with the state, and to evade familial and state surveillance of their sexuality. I do so in the two key citizen-making sites of the home, and compulsory military service. In the home space, I contrast Cartesian concepts of selfhood with local ones. I do so to interrogate the relevance of “coming out,” arguably the central ritual in the Euro-American gay identity-formation process, in Singapore. Wary of the trauma and direct confrontation inherent within the open declaration of one's homosexuality, many of my informants decided not to “come out” but to “go home” with their boyfriends instead (Chou 2000). In the military, I argue that while gay recruits can find its highly heteronormative spaces very trying, they can have much room to maneuver in, provided that they measure up to the standards of masculine performances that the military has set.

I conclude my dissertation in Chapter 6. After summarizing how PAP leaders claim and retain their political legitimacy, I discuss possible avenues of future research on cultural and sexual citizenship in Singapore. I also predict what may happen to the local LGBT rights movement there in the near future.
Chapter 2: A Short History of Nation-Building in the Lion City

Figure 1: Map of Modern Southeast Asia (Source: Singh and Than 2008: inside cover)

Introduction

In this chapter, I present a brief history of nation-building in Singapore to set the stage
for the discussions in the later chapters. Although Singapore has a semi-mythical past that archeologists ascertained, most histories trace the country's origins to its modern founding as an entrepôt by Sir Stamford Raffles of the British East India Company. Like other colonial powers the world over, the British justified their territorial expansion in terms of their supposed racial superiority. These racial discourses not only shaped the relationships between all racial groups in the colonial port, they continue to profoundly configure what it means to be Singaporean even after the city became an independent nation-state. Hence, race makes for an excellent conceptual frame for the following historical discussion. Yet, existing racial theories remain inadequate. Racially based distinctions persist in spite of the scientific affirmation that race lacks a biological basis, and the many state-sponsored racial reforms designed to overcome such distinctions. Hence, I propose to forward a new theory of ethnonormativity to better address these conceptual shortcomings.

Towards a New Racial Theory of Ethnonormativity

I begin by first tracing the origins of “race” as a concept. By “race,” I echo Winant (2000: 172) and define it as “a concept that signifies and symbolizes sociopolitical conflicts and interests in reference to different types of human bodies.” Classical scholars such as Hannaford (1996) and Poliakov (1965 – 1985) generally agree that while ethnic prejudice existed in Greek, Roman, and early Christian thought, a concept truly equivalent to that of “race” did not. To the Greeks and the Romans, a civilized person differed from a barbarian not by his skin color, but by his residence in the cities and his ability to participate in public life. Indeed, the early Christians celebrated the conversion of “barbaric” Africans as evidence of the universalism of their faith (Snowden 1983). This acceptance of black people developed in the fifteenth century into a negrophilia centered partially on the mystical Prestor John, a non-European Christian monarch first identified with India but ultimately with Ethiopia. His
prescribed role was to aid European Christians against invading Muslims (Devisse 1976; Pieterse 1992). This negrophilia did not last. When Ethiopia failed to impress the Portuguese who arrived there from India in the sixteenth century, it was gradually relegated to the fringe of the European imagination.

Yet, scholars remain uncertain of the etymology of the term “race.” Most modern English dictionaries assume that “race” has a Latin root by tracing it to Italian, but no scholarly consensus exists. Fowler (1926 [1962]) claimed that he knew of no known Latin terms from which “race” could have descended. Dover (1951) argued that “race” came from the Arabic ras (meaning “chief head, origin, or beginning) and entered English via Spanish (as raza) and other Romance languages. The earliest Spanish dictionary, the Tesoro de la Lengua Castellana o Española that Covarrubias Horozco ([1611] 2006) compiled, identifies raza as pertaining to the threads in a weave of cloth and, more specifically, to the “caste or quality of authentic horses” branded with an iron for recognition. This latter definition suggests that “race” originally had something to do with animal husbandry. Trevor (1951), on the other hand, contended that “race” derived (through the Italian razza) from the Latin ratio, an accusative form with meanings similar to such classificatory terms as “kind”, “species,” and “nature” (see also Spitzer 1948).

More importantly, Trevor (1951) argued that as a term denoting a group of plants, animals, or persons connected by common descent or common features, “race” entered the English lexicon no earlier than the sixteenth century. The earliest use of the term he knew of occurs in Dunbar’s 1508 poem The Dance of the Sevin Deidlie Synnis, where the poet refers to the “backbytarris of sindry racis.” Such use, however, remained rare at this point in time. The English only began using “race” as a technical reference to human groups in the seventeenth century. One use referred to characteristics or qualities, including one’s inherited disposition or temperament, common to certain types of persons. Hence, John Bunyan refers
to a race of saints in his 1678 *Pilgrim's Progress*. Various learned men, in attempting to describe and classify different human groups, used “race” in a second manner by occasionally interchanging it with “species” as a general mode of describing people (Smedley 1999). As such, “race” had fuzzy semantic boundaries at this point in time and did not denote biologically inherited qualities as it does now in American English.

The biological shift in the semantics of “race” did not occur until the Europeans started colonializing other parts of the world in earnest in the eighteenth century onwards. To justify the un-Christian-like domination of non-European peoples during their territorial expansions, colonial powers turned to philosophical and scientific discourses that naturalized purported differences in humanity between colonizers and colonized. During the formative years of their discipline as a professional field, anthropologists aided this scientific racism by elaborating typologies and techniques to classify and operationalize the various discrete “races” of man (Baker 1998; Gailey 1994; Smedley 1999). They often did so in what Wolf (1994: 4) calls “bio-moral” terms that correlated objective physical measurements with the subjective European values of civilized humanity. Kipling's transparently racist 1899 poem *The White Man’s Burden* reflects this false sense of European cultural superiority. Here, he cast the colonial project as the Europeans' noble duty to uplift the “new-caught, sullen peoples, / half-devil and half-child” among the colonized subjects. Yet, contradictions riddled scientific racist discourses right from the beginning. On the one hand, European thinkers imagined culture as a learned principle of psychic unity that universalized human mental and psychic capabilities. On the other, they reserved rationality and cultural perfectability only to themselves. Indeed, Europe's sense of self was defined in oppositional relations to the invented primitive savagery of the colonized Other (Pandian 1985; Trouillot 1991).

In the British Empire, a series of crises at the turn of the twentieth century that questioned its viability further cemented the semantic changes. On the international front,
Germany, the USA, and Japan began to challenge British global hegemony. Domestically, the rise of feminism, decreasing population growth rates (mostly among the middle and upper classes), and the revelation of physical inadequacies among army recruits during the Boer War (1899 – 1902) all contributed to a rising fear that national degeneracy had taken hold firmly. These national anxieties provided fertile ground for the rise of eugenics that promised to fix British racial “superiority” permanently in one’s own body. Especially tasked as “guardians of the race,” mothers guided their children’s (especially their daughters’) developing sexuality towards reproducing the British race, and away from the highly undesired goal of pleasurable promiscuity. Discursively, human sexuality became essentially and naturally related to love and procreation. In contrast, promiscuous sex became sub-humanized (given its “lack” of love and the “human” side of sex), purposeless (seeking immediate gratification rather than the long term satisfaction of love and procreation), and unclean (Bland 1982).

About the same time, however, others challenged the idea racial determinism. Boas and his students revolutionized anthropology by shifting the explanation of human social variances away from physical causes to cultural ones. Boas, for instance, critiqued mainstream ideas of heredity by proving that the cephalic index and other bodily measurements varied across generations according to changes in nutrition. Outside of the discipline, the anatomist T. Wingate Todd demonstrated the absence of racial differences in the development of black and white brains (Rankin-Hill and Blakey 1994). Du Bois (1899) built a strong base of empirical data to argue for the democritization of racial relations. Consciously viewing Chicago as a laboratory, the Chicago School of sociologists focused on crime, slums, poverty, and other often-racialized social problems. Examining race from both its micro and macro aspects (Blumer 1958; Park 1950), these studies definitively refute the racial biologism that characterized earlier racial theories to assert the socially constructed
nature of race.

After World War II, scientific racism was further discredited because of its unwholesome war-time associations with fascism. Post-war racial theories aimed to democratize racial relations, and they showed three theoretical tendencies. As Winant (2000: 178) explains:

*Ethnicity*-based theories were generally the most mainstream or moderate. They saw race as a culturally grounded framework of collective identity. *Class*-based theories understood race in terms of group-based stratification and economic competition. *Nation*-based theories perceived race in the geopolitical terms largely given by the decolonization process so prominent in the postwar era. They focused attention on issues of peoplehood and race unity, rootedness, citizenship and irredentism (emphasis in original).

Nevertheless, problems plagued all three theoretical orientations. All three, for instance, showed signs of reductionism that conceptually subordinated race to the more supposedly more “real” social structures of ethnicity, class, and nation. Furthermore, none can sufficiently explain why racial discrimination endures, albeit now in a less obvious manner because of its post-war stigmatization, despite the many state-led reforms designed to eradicate it (Winant 2000).

Other more specific issues also troubled the three types of theories. *Ethnicity*-based theories suggested that discrimination would diminish with increased contact, integration and assimilation of different races, as well as the establishment of more racial equality laws for jobs, housing, education and other crucial social domains. These theories, however, were severely contradicted by persisting obstacles to integration and the injustice of racial minorities being forced to assimilate majority cultural norms. Even England, France, and other Western liberal democracies exclude despite their rejection of the racial hierarchies of the past. Taking a differentialist approach to these theories, they adopt exclusionary policies that hinder racial pluralization and integration in the name of defending “national culture”
In contrast, class-based theories argued for racial strife as symptomatic of larger class conflicts. These theories presupposed the existence of well-defined racial stratification and inter-group competition in the post-war world. It also required both inter-racial solidarity and affirmative action-like programs to ameliorate the effects of discrimination (Wilson 1996). However, growing class inequalities within racially defined groups saps the group of both its political and cultural cohesion to weaken the case for affirmative action. Recalcitrant commitments to racial privileges also limit the socio-political gains generated by the economic redistributions of affirmative action plans (Winant 2000). Lastly, international and intra-national heterogeneity cast doubt on nation-based theories, especially after post-war economic globalization triggered unprecedented migration and advances in tele-communication technologies. Transnational forms of racial awareness remain, but now take the form of diasporic identities (Appadurai 1996; Lemelle and Kelley 1994; Siu 2005). Such transnational racial solidarity lack the strong unifying political will that marked pan-continenalist and non-aligned movements. Consequently, nation-based theories have degenerated into crude forms of cultural nationalism that brought about the genocidical wars in Rwanda and the Balkans (Winant 2000).

To explain the persistence of racial discrimination in the current moment when most state governments nominally profess anti-racist beliefs, any new theory must satisfy certain conditions. As Winant (2000) points out, such a theory must 1) recognize the comparative/historical dimensions of race; 2) account for both the micro and macro aspects of racial signification and racialized social structure; and 3) acknowledge the political terrain of the current moment where old forms of racial and gendered domination have been radically changed by the various civil rights movements of the 1960s. The racial formation theory that Omi and Winant (1994) formulated begins to address these issues. Treating race
as a social construct, this theory argues for the inherent instability of racial meanings; treats these meanings as the results of the interactions between larger social, political and economic forces that combine discursive elements with structural ones; and views these interactions as different sequences of interpretations articulated by many agents who operate on various scales (Winant 2000).

Working with the racial formation theory as my basis, I propose here a new racial theory that I call ethnonormativity. Ethnonormativity draws heavily upon from two theories related to sexual normativity. I define the first theory, heteronormativity, as a set of deeply rooted (and often taken-for-granted) beliefs that groups people into two (and only two) distinct and complementary genders of “man” and “woman.” Treating heterosexuality as the normal sexual orientation everyone should have, it aligns biological sex with its normative gender identities and gender roles, and stigmatizes those who violate the heterosexual *habitus* as abnormal and perverse (Rich 1980; Warner 1991). As for the second theory, homonormativity, Duggan (2003: 50) defines it as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.” In other words, homonormativity refers to politically complicitous attitudes where individuals from sexual minorities acquiesce to the racism and heterosexism of the existing racial and gender orders in exchange for material well-being.

Ethnonormativity combines the above two normativities in the analysis of racial relations. It recognizes that no matter how natural a particular racial group's social, political and/or economic dominance may appear, that group must work to create and continuously reproduce that dominance, or risk losing that hegemonic position. These racial formation processes should be evidently clear in the following historical discussion. Unlike racial
formation theory, however, ethnonormativity also includes the possibility of individuals from racial minority groups deliberately adopting the dominant racial group's cultural practices for perceived ideological and/or material gains. This assimilation can be fairly innocuous. Although the increasing use of veils by Muslim women in Java can be read as an appeal to an Islamic, non-Western modernity (Brenner 1996), it can also be read as an attempt to emulate the Arabs and their “purer,” more orthodox form of Islam. However, assimilation can also have consequences as fatal as language death. Arguing for the use of ethnicity as an analytical lens for language shifts, Kulick (1992) argues that such shifts occur when a people link their vernacular language with a stigmatized ethnic identity and start to abandon that identity by giving up their minority language in favor of the language of the dominant group/s. In East Sutherland, for instance, socially ostracized Irish fishermen gave up their Gaelic for English to better assimilate into the surrounding population (Dorian 1981).

Pre-Colonial Singapore (before 1819)

Now that I have outlined the theory of ethnonormativity, I shall now use it to frame the analysis of Singapore's history of nation-building. Such histories typically locate the country's modern founding as a British trading post in 1819. In reality, a trading settlement already existed near the mouth of present-day Singapore River since at least the thirteenth century CE. According to the Sejarah Melayu (or The Malay Annals), a Srivijayan prince called Sang Nila Utama founded and ruled Singapura (or “Lion City” in Malay) from 1299 to 1347. While hunting for deer one day in the nearby Riau Archipelago, he spotted a beach shining like brilliant white cloth in the sun on the island of Temasek across the sea. He decided to visit the island, but stormy weather forced him and his retinue to land at the mouth of the present-day Singapore River. Travelling further inland, he spotted a strange-looking animal with a red body, black head and white breast. The magnificent creature moved swiftly
into the dense jungles, prompting him to ask what manner of beast he just saw. His chief minister replied he spotted a lion. In truth, Sang Nila Utama probably saw a Malayan tiger as lions are not indigenous to Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, he took his sighting as a good omen. When he founded a new trading port on the island later, he named it after the great cat.

Sang Nila Utama and his descendants ruled Singapura until 1401, when invaders from the Java-based empire of Majapahit forced the prince's great grandson Parameswara to flee to Melaka. There, Parameswara founded the famous sultanate named after the place. Archeological excavations conducted on Fort Canning Hill, known as Bukit Larangan or “Forbidden Hill” in Malay, confirmed local Malay beliefs about the hill as the site for Sang Nila Utama's palace. Digs conducted on other sites near the Singapore River also ascertained the existence of a regional trading hub called Temasek that dates back to the tenth century CE. The Singapore River sites yielded gold armlets that came from the Majapahit Empire (late thirteenth to early sixteenth century CE) and Chinese glass beads, pottery shards and coins. The coins originated from China's Song dynasty (960 – 1279 CE) (Low 2004).

**Colonial Singapora (1819 – 1959)**

By the time Raffles arrived in Singapura in 1819, the former regional trading hub had been reduced to a fishing village in the Sultanate of Johor. Despite strong objections from the British East India Company, Raffles wanted to set up a new trading post to challenge the Dutch monopoly over the highly lucrative spice trade originating from the Moluccas. Raffles chose Singapura because of its deep natural harbor. Its strategic geographical location at the southern terminus of the Straits of Malacca along the China-India trade route also made it an ideal location for a port for Southeast Asian jungle products. The Sejarah Melayu's favorable description of Singapura further convinced Raffles of his choice, a fact that most people still under-appreciate (Miksic 2004). Having aligned himself politically with the Dutch, then-
Sultan of Johor Tengku Abdul Rahman would never agree to a British base in Singapura. Yet, he did not have a solid claim on the throne. His elder brother, Tengku Hussein, should have become the sultan when their father died in 1812. Tengku Hussein was away getting married in Pahang at that time (Figure 2), so he could not attend to the dying sultan to legitimize his claim on the throne as local customs dictated. Tengku Abdul Rahman became sultan instead. Taking advantage of this political feud, Raffles offered Tengku Hussein both official British recognition of his status as Johor's legitimate ruler and a generous yearly stipend of £5000 (a princely sum of several hundred thousand pounds in today's economy). In return, Tengku Hussein allowed the British to colonize Singapura, which Raffles renamed Singapore. Both parties ratified this treaty on 6 February 1819 (Turnbull 1989).

Naturally, Raffles' move incensed the Dutch. Insisting that Raffles intruded into their sphere of influence, the Dutch threatened to reclaim their territory by force. Tensions persisted until the signing of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824. Besides granting the British access to the Moluccas, this treaty also established clear boundaries of influence between the two colonial powers. It relegated Sumatra and the Riau Archipelago to the former, and Peninsula Malaya to the latter. The Dutch withdrew their opposition to Singapore, and exchanged their control of Melaka for that of the British port at Bencoolen in Java. With the Dutch threat now neutralized, Singapore grew rapidly. In 1821, the new cosmopolitan town boasted a population of some 5,000 inhabitants who comprised of 3,000 Malays, more than 1,000 Chinese, about 600 Bugis from what is now Sulawesi in Indonesia, and a smattering of peoples who traditionally traded in the region. These included Indians, Armenians, Arabs, and Europeans (especially the Greeks). By 1867, the population mushroomed to more than 81,000, of whom 65 percent (or 55,000) hailed from China (Turnbull 1989). This established Chinese numerical dominance on the island. This growing population lived in an ethnically segregated city that Raffles deliberately planned to keep the British from their non-European
subjects (Figure 3). This town plan reflected both a “divide and rule” policy that maintained British ethnonormative hegemony (Abraham 1983; Cham 1977; Stenson 1980), and Raffles' own belief that enclaves facilitate the development of occupational niches associated with particular ethnic groups. Such a belief originated from Southeast Asian urban planning traditions (Reid 1993), traditions that he undoubtedly learnt during his tenure as the Governor of Bencoolen. Such early urban planning gave rise to the government district, and the major ethnic quarters of Chinatown and Kampong Glam (for the Malays) in present-day Singapore.

Figure 2: Map of Colonial Malaya (Source: Hirschman 1986: 335)
The Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 also hastened the British take-over of Peninsular Malaya, a process already in progress given the strong political influence that British planters wielded in many areas there. One such planter, for example, negotiated successfully with the Sultan of Kedah for the British to lease Penang. Furthermore, the British controlled the India-based production of opium, a commodity much sought after in Malaya. In 1826, they re-organized Singapore, Melaka, Penang and the adjacent Wellesley Province on the mainland into a single administrative unit called the Straits Settlements. Singapore became the capital of this new unit. Over the next 50 years, the British built “British Malaya” where they came to indirectly rule the rest of the peninsular through a series of complicated political maneuvers. Indirect rule maximized the effectiveness of colonial rule, while minimizing its
costs by incorporating local officials into its structure. Thus, it saved the imperial government the cost of setting up and staffing an entirely new administration. The British also hoped to forestall any possible revolts by accommodating local customs (Crowder 1964).

In 1896, the British made Kuala Lumpur the capital of the Federated Malay States (FMS) that they organized from the states of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, and Pahang. Officials from Singapore and Kuala Lumpur jointly administered the FMS. The British called the other five states of Johor, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, and Terengganu the Unfederated Malay States (UMS) (Figure 2). Although the British wielded much influence in these states, they never did so to the same degree as the Straits Settlements and the FMS. The main difference between the FMS and the UMS laid in the degree of political power their sultans retained. FMS sultans relinquished their political power, and acted only with the due consent of their respective British Residents. UMS sultans, in contrast, retained their autonomy (Turnbull 1989).

The British administration of the diverse ethnic groups living in Malaya strongly influenced how present-day Singaporeans understand “race” as a citizenship category. For example, the CMIO model that the Singaporean state officials now use to classify citizens as “Chinese”, “Malay”, “Indian,” or “Others” originates from the census categories that the British used. First conducted in the Straits Settlements in 1871, these censuses employed categories in increasing numbers and complexity over the years. This growth reflected not only an expanding awareness of the immense variations among the colonized subjects, but also a critical shift in the meaning of “race” from that of “sharing the same characteristics” (see Chapter 2 of Smedley 1999 for the etymology of “race”) to one that denotes different inherent capacities when eugenics became popular at the turn of the twentieth century (Bland 1982). The modern CMIO model inherits this idea of biological potentiality from the old censuses. When applied in its current rigid form, it determines what a citizen speaks, the
socialization process she undergoes, and possibly even where she lives. I will discuss the social implications of the CMIO model on Singaporean citizenship further in Chapter 3.

We can also trace the origins of certain racial stereotypes that circulate now in present-day Singapore to the colonial period. In the eyes of the colonial administration as well as many present-day Chinese Singaporeans, Malays suffer from “traits of complacency, indolence, apathy, infused with a love of leisure and an absence of motivation and discipline” (Rahim 1998: 49; see also Hussein Alatas 1977). In truth, this stereotype originates from colonial British thought. Hirschman (1986) argues that the Malays historically lacked a niche for wage labor. Peasants typically engaged in small-scale farming and fishing for sustenance, and worked in tin mines belonging to their chiefs and sultans only under duress. The likelihood of peasants running away to the under-populated frontier limited excessive oppression, but frequent confiscation of surplus produce by the aristocrats provided the peasants with little incentives to produce more and accumulate to maximize profits. When the British arrived, they improved peasant life somewhat by outlawing debt slavery and absorbing the Malay elites into a pension scheme that made them less dependent on peasant labor. However, accounts of life in British tin mines and plantations by Blyth (1947), Sandhu (1969), and others paint a dismal picture of high mortality rates, low wages, and entrapment in debt cycles. Not surprisingly, few found such work appealing enough to abandon their traditional means of livelihood. Having just developed their own Calvinism-informed Protestant work ethics at that time, the colonial administrators interpreted the lack of the same beliefs among the Malays as indicative of an indolent pleasure-seeking nature. They branded the Malays as such and depicted them discursively as living in backward villages, despite evidence that shows the peasants as capable of economic entrepreneurship when it made sense to do so (Rudner 1970; Lim 1977).

In sharp contra-distinction to the figure of the “lazy” Malay stands that of the
“hardworking but materialistic” Chinese. To counter the unavailability of cheap and abundant labor from the Malays, the British administrators authorized the massive in-migration of Chinese and Indian laborers. Indeed, Hirshman (1986) argues that the British depended almost entirely on the Chinese for their economic base. Taxation on such popular Chinese pastimes as gambling and smoking opium, and Chinese economic interests in tin-mining formed the main sources of revenue for the colonial administration. Nobody denied Chinese entrepreneurship, but this quality generated both European admiration and resentment. Walter Anderson, a merchant in Singapore, commented that

[the Chinese] are, as a race, capable of civilization of the highest kind. They are at once laborers and statesmen. They can work in any climate, hot or cold, and they have great mercantile capacity ... we are pleased to see them flocking [to Malaya] as they do in thousands” (quoted in Kratoska 1983: 76 – 7).

Newbold (1839 Vol. 1: 10), however, derided Chinese wealth because of the competition that the Chinese pose to European economic interests: “Whenever money is to be acquired by the peaceful exercise of agriculture, by handicrafts, by the opening of mines of tin, iron ore or gold, amidst savage hordes and wild forests, there will be found the greedy Chinese.”

The ethnic segregation that characterized colonial Singaporean society helped perpetuate the above stereotypes. As immigrants, the Chinese and the Indians bore a sojourner mentality. They had far more interests in striking it rich in Malaya and returning home in glory than in learning about or making social connections with other ethnic groups that they came into contact with. Chinese expansion into the highly lucrative tin-mining industry also brought them into direct competition with the Malay chiefs that occasionally broke into fights that pitted one Chinese-Malay coalition against another (Khoo 1972). Lastly, colonial land policies tended to dissuade the Chinese and the Indians from leaving the urban areas and the tin mines to go into subsistence agriculture (Kratoska 1982; Lim 1984), even as
they encouraged the Malays to remain in their rural villages by granting them reserve land as natives (Hing 2000). Some Malay intelligentsia also manipulated colonial racial discourses to strengthen the Malays’ claims on the land (Manickam 2009). Others actively fostered the idea that the Chinese really did not belong to local society, no matter the length of their residence, and that only the British and the Malay aristocrats should have access to full participation in political and administrative roles (Hirschman 1986). These policies strengthened the ethnic segregation idea and reified British ethnonormativity, but more importantly, reflected a deeper antagonism the British felt towards the threats to their economic expansion in Malaya.

In theory, schools could have helped to break down ethnic divisions by providing valuable opportunities for structured inter-ethnic interactions. Yet, the British saw education as a welfare expense and a possible source of social discontent. As such, they opened English-language schools in urban areas attended usually by European, Peranakan, and Malay aristocratic children. Graduates from the latter two groups typically worked as interpreters and clerks in the colonial administration. In this capacity, they served as crucial intermediaries between the colonizers (who did not always have the necessary linguistic and cultural training) and the colonized. In particular, this cultural brokering role suited the Peranakans well because, as products of marital unions between Malay women and Chinese men who settled in Melaka in the early fifteenth century, they had already been acculturated to both the Malay and the Chinese worlds (see also Clammer 1983 for his challenge to the idea of Chinese-Malay inter-marriages produced the Peranakans).

Children from the other ethnic groups went to the schools set up by their respective communities. They did not not because the English-medium schools refused to admit them. Rather, their parents seldom planned to stay in Singapore on a long-term basis, so it made more sense for them to go to community schools instead. These institutions featured both ethnically homogenous classrooms and non-standardized curricula oriented towards their
homelands in China, India, and Malaya (Hirschman 1986). In short, colonial Singapore functioned as a Furnivallian plural society, where “there was a racial division of labour. All the various people met in the economic sphere, the market place; but they lived apart and continually tended to fall apart unless held together by the British Government” (Furnivall 1948: 123).

The British also adopted a generally relaxed stance towards sexual matters in Singapore. As Stoler (2002) points out in her case study of Dutch Batavia, the Dutch colonial office initially sent young male officers to its outposts alone and without their wives. This policy propped up the illusion of the ever-virile and powerful white man in the eyes of the colonized, while reducing operation costs. Had the wives gone along, the colonial office would have to pay officers higher salaries so that they could maintain a respectable middle-class lifestyle. It would also lead to the proliferation of a lower-class European settler population that would contradict white prestige. The head colonial office, however, remained fully aware that the heat, the dust, the solitude, and the general lack of intellectual stimuli in the colonies made life there very miserable. Officers might try to relieve their ennui and sexual frustrations by visiting prostitutes, despite the associated moral degeneracy, and risk exposure to potentially debilitating venereal diseases. Worse, in the eyes of the head office, the officers might even turn to each other for sexual release. Finding a suitable safety valve to release these pent-up tensions challenged the colonial administration. As the Dutch East India Company's first governor-general famously noted in the early 1600s: “Everyone knows that the male sex cannot survive without women” (quoted in Taylor 1983: 12).

The British faced similar problems. Like the Dutch and other European colonial powers, they found their solution in concubinage despite the obvious contradictions it presented to their Christian values of monogamy and marital fidelity. “Concubinage” indexes the extra-marital co-habitation between British men and colonized women, but glosses, in
reality, a wide range of social arrangements including sexual access to a local woman, and demands on her physical labor and legal rights to the children that she bore (Taylor 1983). The concubines cooked and cleaned (often as live-in servants) to keep the men physically and psychologically fit for work. They should not distract or urge the men to get out of line, nor should they impose the heavy responsibilities that British family life would otherwise demand. Despite their importance in maintaining the British Empire, concubines could not marry the men they made arrangements with. Marriage would confer white privileges onto them, and blur the colonizer/colonized distinction that the British wanted to maintain (Hyam 1990). Instead, concubines were liable to dismissal without reason, notice, or severance pay. They could also be passed to other Europeans when the men departed for leave or retirement in Europe (Taylor 1983). Naturally, mistreated concubines might attempt to escape, even resorting to violence to do so (Jones 2010). Given that concubinage benefited mostly men, it came as no surprise that many important male figures supported it. Charles Brooke, the Second White Rajah of Sarawak, openly encouraged it (Reece 1985). William Farquhar, Singapore's first British Resident from 1819 to 1823, retained a Malay mistress. Even Raffles, the founder of Singapore, was also thought to have kept a Chinese concubine.

Stoler (2002) gives a seminal account of the sexual labor concubines provided to make empire-making possible. Yet, she neglects to comment on the sexual lives of the other colonized subjects (Loos 2008). Colonial regimes in Southeast Asia, Loos highlights, only kept track of and legitimized monogamous marriages involving Europeans and other elites. They did this to regulate access to the rights and privileges of the ruling class (Stoler 2002), so they intervened less in the sexual lives of their colonized subjects. For example, the British applied their laws in all criminal, commercial, and civil matters, except in arenas of religion and custom that encompassed familial and sexual issues such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and funerary practices. Hooker (2002) theorizes that the British regarded
marriage as an essential component of one's cultural identity. Had they attempted to alter such ingrained behavior, they feared it would cause rebellions that hinder governance and economic extraction. Yet, the early colonial policy of restricting female immigration, along with the male migrants' own sojourner mentality, resulted in a heavily skewed ratio between foreign male and female migrants throughout British Malaya. As a result, bachelors who sought sexual release faced a stark choice between celibacy, homosexuality, and patronizing prostitutes. Most found the first two options unacceptable. Chinese manual laborers from the Ming (1368 – 1644 CE) and Qing dynasties (1644 – 1912 CE), for example, knew of homosexuality because their literati enjoyed these practices immensely. These practices generally remained within the elite circles, because most peasants simply did not have the sexual inclination to willingly partake in what they saw as elite indulgence (Wu 2004).

To most bachelors, visiting brothels became the only viable option for intimacy. Extreme poverty in China and Japan during the nineteenth century forced many peasant families to sell their daughters, albeit often unknowingly, to prostitution rings in major cities. The ever-increasing sexual demand from the throngs of thousands of Chinese laborers and foreign sailors in Singapore fueled the growth of an extensive organized traffic in girls and young women. The British could not fully suppress this trade. Neither did they want to, as the prostitutes also serviced their lower-ranking soldiers and sailors in the army and navy who hailed mostly from the working class. From the perspective of the senior colonial officials, these men lacked both the education and the high moral standard for sexual continence (Warren 1990). In reality, they visited brothels more probably because they could not afford to marry on their meager salaries.

Unlike local marital customs, prostitution became an arena that witnessed heavy colonial intervention. Strong Victorian interests in sanitary reforms led legislators in London to pass a series of Contagious Diseases Acts between 1864 and 1869. These Acts sought to
curb the spread of syphilis, gonorrhea, and other venereal diseases, especially among the military, and they gave rise to the Contagious Diseases Ordinance in 1870. Motivated primarily by fears of high infection rates among its armed forces but lacking the *lal bazar* (or regimental brothels) operated in British India (Hyam 1990), colonial Singapore adopted the CDO and mandated official registration and health examinations for all prostitutes. In 1864, CDO officials registered 346 brothels and 2061 prostitutes. In 1871, brothel keepers and prostitutes totalled 1635 (Manderson 1996). These officials would issue cards that certify a prostitute's good health if she passed the health checks, but would send infected ones to lock hospitals for treatment. Not surprisingly, they encountered resistance from both brothel owners and prostitutes. Owners sometimes professed to retire from their occupation and closed their businesses. Prostitutes resisted by changing their names and locality, getting brothel servants to impersonate them and absconding when they got hospitalized. Alternatively, they just simply refused to submit themselves to the examinations. Ironically, the CDO officials undermined their own work. Victorian sexual mores treated any women who became infected with venereal diseases as punishable deviants. The same values did not criminalize infected soldiers, sailors, and upper-class men to protect their privacy as carriers. This moral double standards exposed the sexual prejudice the “respectable” classes harbored against the poor (Warren 1990). Puritans repealed the Contagious Diseases Act and the CDO in 1888 by successfully arguing that the Act perpetuated prostitution instead of suppressing it. Although the CDO did little to contain the spread of venereal diseases, infection rates increased dramatically in the wake of its repeal. From 1884 to 1888, hospital admissions of infected men averaged 144.28 per thousand, with over 50% of them having gonorrhea. The rates from 1892 to 1896 shot up to 434.17 per thousand, with two thirds from syphilis (Manderson 1996).

British Malaya began to deteriorate during World War II when the Japanese invaded in
December 1941. The Japanese overwhelmed the defending Allied army using superior weaponry and tactics in a campaign that lasted less than two months. For example, the British deployed Force Z, a navy fleet comprising of four destroyers and the battleships HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse, that they thought could provide an “unsinkable” deterrence to the Japanese. Commanding air superiority, however, the Japanese air force destroyed Force Z easily. Using light tanks and bicycle infantry, the Japanese advanced rapidly south to Singapore through the thick jungle terrain of the peninsula. Nicknamed the “Gibraltar of the East” by the British, Singapore also functioned as the strongest British military base in Southeast Asia. Even so, Singapore fell ignominiously in merely eight days in February 1942, partly because the British expected the Japanese to invade by sea from the south, not by land from the north. Consequently, the British positioned their large-calibre coastal guns along the island's southern coastline, and equipped them mostly with shells designed to pierce the hulls of heavily armored warships, not highly explosive anti-personnel ones (Thompson 2005). Effective use of these guns might still not prevent Singapore's defeat, but it would cost the Japanese more dearly to capture this British stronghold.

**The Road to Independence (1942 – 1965)**

The Japanese occupied Singapore for three years and eight months from January 1942 to September 1945, during which they re-named the colony Shōnantō, an abbreviation of the longer name Shōwa no Jidai ni Eta Minami no Shima (昭和の時代に得た南の島) or “Southern Island Obtained in the Shōwa Era). They claimed to liberate Singapore from colonialism, but they ruled far more harshly than the British. Terrorizing local women with rape while forcing others to become comfort women, they also carried out the Sook Ching Massacre, a systematic extermination of perceived resistant elements among the local Chinese. *Sook ching* means “purging through cleansing” in Cantonese, a variety of Yue
Chinese spoken in southern China. In this campaign, the Japanese set up designated screening centers all over the island to inspect Chinese men between 18 and 50 years old. Those who passed the inspection would receive a piece of paper indicating that they passed, or had a square marked on them in ink. Those who failed were stamped with triangular marks, loaded onto trucks, and sent for execution at such remote locations in Singapore as Changi and Tanah Merah. The Japanese had no means of determining the real anti-Japanese elements, so they selected those sent to the slaughter beaches arbitrarily. To avoid getting killed this way, one could become a secret informer for the Japanese, and point out those who did harbor anti-Japanese sentiments (quite often falsely) in exchange for safety. In this environment of fear and distrust, nobody knew who sold out and who did not. Later, the Japanese would extend the purge to the rest of Malaya. Thankfully, they had stretched themselves too thinly in the region by then, and they stopped soon after (Blackburn 2000).

Despite their cruelty, the Japanese ironically set Singapore upon the path towards self-rule. When the Japanese surrendered in 1945, the British returned to reclaim their colony. Although the local population welcomed them back jubilantly, their failure to protect Singapore weakened their ethnonormative hegemony. In particular, their defeat – at the hands of “inferior” Asian natives no less – shattered the civilizational myth of the White Man's Burden and galvanized the local intelligentsia to push for political self-determination. The growing call for independence, fueled by the emotional bonds that the Japanese rule forged among the colonized subjects, led the British to hold Singapore's first ever general elections in 1955. David Marshall won on a pro-independence platform, but he resigned a year later as Chief Minister after failing to secure complete self-rule. The British denied his request after questioning his ability to suppress growing communist influence and worker unrest it inspired. His successor, Lim Yew Hock, succeeded where he failed. Taking more aggressive measures, Lim used tear gas to disperse rioters and he also detained many key pro-communist
union leaders under the Public Security Act. Yet, these moves alienated him from a large portion of the Chinese-speaking electorate. His transfer of the administrative rights of Christmas Island to Australia in 1957 made him even more unpopular. This discontent enabled the People's Action Party (PAP) to win the 1959 general elections to form Singapore's first completely self-determined government.

Marshall, despite his brief tenure as Chief Minister, did start working towards an inclusive society built on Singaporean citizenship, multi-lingualism, and mutual respect between the disparate ethnic communities. He set up the All-Party Committee on Chinese Education in 1955 to address issues concerning the future of Chinese education and culture raised by Chinese-educated students and union leaders through insurrectionary violence. The Committee proposed to create a quad-lingual education system that aimed to emphasize equally on English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil as Singapore's four official languages. Parents could choose any of these languages to school their children in. The non-English presses accepted these suggestions, albeit at differing rates (Barr and Trocki 2002). To address the reification of ethnic boundaries that this move effected, the Committee recommended encouraging the use of Bahasa Melayu, the Malay language, as Singapore's *lingua franca*, and revising all existing textbooks to foster a locally focused Malayan consciousness (as opposed to one directed on a distant homeland) (Drysdale 1984). While these measures could not completely resolve the Chinese educational issues and the associated violence, they shifted the ethnonorm away from the British to the Malays.

The PAP continued to implement the Committee's policies after it ascended to political dominance. In 1959, the PAP leaders did not imagine Singapore as distinct from Malaya. In fact, no one else did either. Everybody thought that Singapore was too small to possibly survive as its own politically and economically independent entity, so instead of declaring independence, these leaders worked towards merging with Malaysia instead.
Malaysia had just risen out of the remnants of British Malaya to form its own independent country earlier in 1957. Merger would grant Singapore access to Malaysia's larger market and overcome the inhibitions to economic development incurred by Singapore's lack of natural resources. It would also stabilize Singapore on both the economic and domestic fronts by ameliorating social unrest induced by widespread unemployment and under-employment. To achieve this union, the PAP leaders adopted a Malaysia-centric worldview where they envisioned Singapore as the “New York of Malaysia” (*Homes for the People* p. 30).

In 1961, the PAP leaders succeeded in persuading Malaysia's Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman to approve the merger. Singapore did so formally two years later along with Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo. Despite his reservations that Chinese-majority Singapore's entry into a Malay-dominated Malaysia would exacerbate an already tense racial relationship, Abdul Rahman authorized the merger hoping that it could neutralize the communist threat in Singapore. As feared, the merger worsened the racial situation. To address the perceived Chinese dominance of the Malaysian economy, Abdul Rahman advocated affirmative action for *bumiputras* – “sons of the soil” in Malay – a group of purportedly original inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula made up largely of ethnic Malays. Mearns (1986: 76) writes:

> It is in Article 153 of the constitution that the notion of the necessity of protecting the “special position” of the Malays, or the *bumiputra*, is elaborated and given the force of legal sanction. Among other things, Article 153 provides for a quota system of opportunities in three main areas; the public service, the general economic field, and in education (emphasis in original).

These pro-bumiputra policies include making stock exchange-listed companies find bumiputras to take up a minimum 30% of equity, and allocating bumiputras comparatively more university seats to help them catch up educationally. In contrast, the PAP and its leader Lee Kuan Yew rejected Malays setting the ethnonorm, and envisioned instead a non-
communal and multi-racial “Malaysian Malaysia.” The PAP's reputation at that time as a radical socialist party also made Malaysian political leaders extremely wary of its appeal to the Malaysian electorate. When these leaders tried to organize a party in Singapore to challenge Lee's position there, Lee retaliated by threatening to field PAP candidates in Malaysia's upcoming federal elections in 1964. This threat violated an earlier agreement that Lee made with Abdul Rahman, and contributed to the 1964 Race Riots in Singapore that left 36 people dead and another 556 injured. The police also made over 3,000 arrests. Enraged by Lee's audacity and the ethnic strife he sparked, Abdul Rahman demanded unruly Singapore to withdraw from Malaysia (Turnbull 1989).

Independent Singapore (1965 – present)

In what he later calls “a moment of anguish” in his biography (Lau 1998), Lee found himself the Prime Minister of a newly independent Singapore on 9 August 1965. To this day, orthodox history still presents this moment as an expulsion. In truth, Singapore wanted to separate too. In an interview with Melanie Chew (1996), former Minister of Finance Dr Goh Keng Swee revealed that he convinced the second-tier Malaysian leadership of the need for a negotiated separation. He then won Lee over as the Malaysian leaders consulted with Abdul Rahman. No efforts are made to censor these facts, as students learn them as part of their pre-university history syllabus. Yet, the myth continues to be perpetuated, perhaps, as Barr and Skrbiš (2008) surmise, because it resonates so well with the national mythology of Singapore as an underdog that prospered in spite of the overwhelming odds.

The new state faced three immediate problems. Firstly, it must determine the citizenship eligibility of its residents. Citizenship was granted to residents, as members of a self-governing British colony, through the Singapore Citizen Ordinance in 1957. This Ordinance liberally provided for a person to obtain citizenship through one of the following
means: 1) by having parents who were already citizens; 2) by registration; 3) if she was born in the Federation of Malaya; or 4) in a country of the British Commonwealth; or 5) if she resided in Singapore for a total of 12 years. She could also become a naturalized citizen if she resided in Singapore for two years (as a British citizen) or an aggregate of 10 years in the preceding 12 years (if she were not), or after three to four years of service in Singapore's armed forces (Tan Tai Yong 2008). Upon Singapore's merger with Malaysia on 16 September 1963, all Singaporean citizens became Malaysians.

When Singapore seceded from Malaysia in 1965, the new state repealed the 1957 Singapore Citizenship Ordinance through its new Constitution. It did, however, grant Singaporean citizenship to all persons who were citizens as of 16 September 1963 by virtue of the Ordinance. Eugene Tan (2008: 76 – 7) discusses how citizenship laws now operate:

Singapore citizenship laws had remained largely unchanged since Singapore’s independence in August 1965 ... Under Article 120 of Singapore’s Constitution, a person may acquire Singapore citizenship through any one of four means: by birth; by descent; by registration or, before the commencement of the Constitution, by enrolment; or by naturalization. Citizenship in Singapore is accorded either on the *jus soli* or *jus sanguinis* principle although both are applied in a limited manner. To acquire citizenship by birth (*jus soli*), the person must be born in Singapore and either parent must be a Singapore citizen. For citizenship by descent (*jus sanguinis*), the transmission of citizenship from generation to generation was not always automatic but only available in specific instances.

The limitations that Tan mentions include not granting citizenship to a child born in Singapore to a foreign male diplomat and a Singaporean mother because of her father's diplomatic immunity. However, should the child be born to a foreign diplomat mother and a Singaporean father, the androcentric language of this clause will allow that child to claim citizenship by birth.

The economy presented the new Singapore with its second pressing issue, as its brief merger with Malaysia did not solve its severe problems of massive unemployment and under-employment. PAP leaders knew they must secure foreign investments to attain economic
stability, so they rejected the then-common wisdom of implementing import-substitution strategies. Instead, they adopted the principles of the developmental state. Low (2001: 413) defines such a state as “one which promotes long-term entrepreneur perspectives among the industrial elite comprising key business groups and resists growth-compromising demands from special-interest groups.” It does so by intentionally altering market incentives to influence producer, consumer, and investor behaviors. It also possesses a high capacity and potent capability to anticipate and to respond to external economic shocks and pressures (Low 2001). To realize their vision of the modern developmental state, state officials set up legislation to appropriate “ineffectively” used farmland for further development. They then relocated the previous tenants into public housing apartment blocks that Tremewan (1994) likens to prisons and barracks. By depriving citizens of the means to grow their own food, they produced a working class dependent on the state for shelter and on wage labor to pay for it. Squatters from inner city slums were similarly dealt with. Officials met resistance with violence by deploying the military and the police.

State leaders aided the economic transformation further by adopting English as the country's working language. They abandoned their previous Malayo-centrism in favor of a globally oriented worldview where English, as the colonial but ethnically “neutral” language, replaced Bahasa Melayu as the country's lingua franca. They also made English a compulsory school subject in 1966. Bahasa Melayu would, however, remain as the country's national language. These changes in state linguistic ideology would strongly influence on how Singaporeans understand ethnicity and culture. For instance, non-Malay-Singaporeans no longer speak Bahasa Melayu except in such ceremonial contexts as the singing of the national anthem during the morning school assembly. Few children learned English at school before 1965, but parents in the post-independence era soon realized the upward social mobility English afforded, and started to send their children to English-medium schools in
increasing numbers. By 1985, English-medium schools enrolled 97% of all students. Not 
long after, the government announced that all schools must switch to English as the medium 
of instruction. This ruling also affected Nanyang University (Nantah), founded in 1956 as the 
region's only Mandarin-medium institute of higher learning. State officials compelled Nantah 
to adopt English as a parallel language of instruction in 1975, ostensibly to help its graduates 
to find employment more easily. In 1980, it merged Nantah with the National University of 
Singapore. This dealt a severe emotional blow to its many supporters among the Chinese-
Singaporeans, as it meant that all tertiary education would be conducted in English (Mauzy 
and Milne 2002).

The rise of English indicated the country's success in its industrialization and 
modernization drives, but the political leadership feared that Singaporeans would also be 
exposed to the negative influences of westernization. Although industrialization, 
modernization, and Westernization are not always coterminous despite their close conceptual 
associations, Lee Kuan Yew still decreed in 1968 that all school-going children must also 
receive instruction in their officially designated “mother tongue,” i.e. Mandarin for the 
Chinese, Bahasa Melayu for the Malays, and Tamil for the Indians. Lee believed that the 
cultural values transmitted along with the knowledge of the ancestral language would provide 
a much-needed “cultural ballast” to resist western fads (Lee 1991). This bilingual policy 
initially failed to raise the standards of fluency and literacy in both English and mother 
tongues because, as Barr and Skrbiš (2008) report, schools did not treat it with the same 
nation-building urgency that Lee did. The state addressed this shortcoming by making it 
compulsory to pass one's mother tongue examinations to gain entry into junior colleges (the 
local equivalent of the high school in the United States) in 1980, and universities in 1981.

The state further attempted to reinforce “declining” moral values by introducing 
compulsory Religious Knowledge (RK) courses in the secondary school curriculum in 1982.
Prior to this, the PAP leaders already instituted various ethics and civics programs that schools taught in Chinese, Malay, or Tamil in the belief that instruction in the mother tongue could best transmit moral values (Ong 1979). Neither teachers nor students took these non-examinable subjects seriously. This lackadaisicality, coupled with Ong's observations that mission school teachers tended to teach these subjects more effectively because of their strong religious background, prompted the Ministry of Education to make RK courses compulsory for all upper secondary students. Each student must choose one of six options: Buddhist Studies, Bible Knowledge, Hindu Studies, Islamic Religious Knowledge, Confucian Ethics, or Sikh Studies. Students could use their RK grades for admission into junior colleges. Lee Kuan Yew, in particular, insisted that Confucian Ethics be included to promote upright moral behavior and to educate students about their cultural and moral heritage. He figured that because the family as a social unit transmits Confucian social values through the generations, Confucian Ethics presented an opportunity for Chinese students to rediscover their roots (Mauzy and Milne 2002).

Confucianism soon became caught up in issues of ethnicity and Singaporean identities. Chinese women saw the campaign as a thinly veiled attempt to subjugate them to an archaic and patriarchal code of conduct, and the English-educated Chinese saw within it authoritarian political implications (Englehart 2000). In contrast, the non-Chinese viewed the campaign as yet another state project to expand Chinese ethnonormative dominance, despite assurances from PAP leaders that the teaching of Confucian Ethics as a code of conduct (as opposed to a political ideology) makes it suitable for Singaporeans of any ethnicity or creed (Barr and Skrbiš 2008). In any case, Chinese students considered Buddhist Studies as an easier option and took that instead. Despite the disproportionate resources allocated to Confucian Ethics vis-à-vis the other RK courses – state leaders invited Tu Weiming and seven other famous Taiwanese and American Confucianist scholars to design the Confucian
Ethics curriculum – only 17.8% enrolled in it while 44.4% took Buddhist Studies (Englehart 2000). In 1989, after a six-report study that demonstrated how RK actually heightened religious consciousness and differences, the Ministry of Education finally jettisoned the program (Mauzy and Milne 2002).

In place of the RK courses, then-First Deputy Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong suggested in October 1988 that Singapore's core values should be formalized into a national ideology that would define and encourage Asian concepts of morality, duty, and obligations to society and community, in contrast to more individualistic Western modes of behavior. After two years of formulation, Lee Hsien Loong presented the White Paper on Shared Values in Parliament in January 1991. The five Shared Values are: 1) Nation before community and society before self; 2) Family as the basic unit of society; 3) Community support and respect for the individual; 4) Consensus, not conflict; and 5) Racial and religious harmony. Lee discarded the term “National Ideology” in favor of “Shared Values,” in Brown's (1993) opinion, to placate non-Chinese fears that the PAP leaders could impose Confucian values on them via a National Ideology. Brown also argued that these suspicions prompted Lee to promulgate these values via the education system rather than as a state ideology. The public reacted to the Shared Values with disinterest, but Clammer (1993, 1998) criticizes them as essentially Chinese principles in disguise that addressed neither human rights nor the socially corrupting effects of capitalism on Singaporean society. Ultimately, the Parliament approved of the White Paper, but did not endow it with any constitutional standing or legal power. Its long-term impact, if any, remains to be seen.

In 1997, the government introduced a new approach to civics called the National Education (NE) program. Considered part of the Total Defense initiative that includes the five components of defense security, civil defense, economic defense, psychological defense and social security, the NE program aims to enhance students' national commitment. Teachers
incorporate lessons about Singapore's unique historical, geographical, and demographical constraints and vulnerabilities into their pedagogy. In doing so, the program intends to foster patriotic pride and a shared sense of nationhood as students learn how their country rises up to the challenges it faces. NE also became examinable as part of the new Social Studies course introduced in Secondary 3 classes in 2001. Unlike previous civics programs, NE aims to integrate the themes of nation-building, principles of governance, and the international issues that may affect Singapore's national and economic well-being into all subjects at all levels (Mauzy and Milne 2002).

Singapore's rapidly expanding population presented the state with its last pressing issue. The immediate post-World War II period witnessed the population exploding from 938,144 in 1947 to 1,499,929 in 1957 at an annual rate of 4.5 percent. Saw (2005) attributes this growth to women marrying young, a universal desire to have large families, an accelerated decline in mortality that resulted from improving public health standards, and positive net in-migration from the hinterlands of Peninsula Malaysia. Fearing that unchecked growth would overwhelm the country's meager economic resources, officials in the newly independent state advocated family planning through anti-natalist policies. Representing a clear break from the hands-off approach towards sexuality and procreation that the British colonizers took, these policies made IUDs, condoms, diaphragms, and other contraceptives affordable and easily available. For example, six condoms cost S$0.50, while spermicide cost only S$1 per tube. Furthermore, these policies strongly advocated families to have only two children, regardless of the children's sex. Couples who already bore two or more children were urged to undergo sterilization. Clinics performed vasectomies at $5 per patient. Recalcitrant parents faced numerous disincentives. Not only did they receive fewer economic rebates, their third and fourth child also had lower priority in school admission. Overall, these policies succeeded in reining in the expanding population. The total fertility rate (i.e.
the average number of children a woman would bear over her lifetime) plummeted from 4.62 in 1965 to 2.08 in 1975.

Unfortunately, the anti-natal policy worked too well. Fertility continued to drop even after it reached the replacement level of 2.1 children. Distressed over the shrinking population, PAP leaders attempted to increase fertility through a two-pronged approach. Firstly, they began reversing their previous anti-natal stance by implementing a series of pro-fecundity policies. In 1983, Lee Kuan Yew triggered the so-called “Great Marriage Debate” when he levelled an extraordinary charge against the nation's womenfolk – he accused them of jeopardizing the country's future by becoming too individualistic and wilfully distorting patterns of biological reproduction. While university-educated women failed to produce the 1.65 children per married couple needed to replace themselves, he pointed out, their lesser educated peers reproduced too freely at 3.5 children each. Since the completion of university education indexed both superior genetic inheritance and mental faculties, Lee reasoned, this lop-sided procreative pattern would lead to Singapore's demise as a seething, proliferating mass of the unintelligent, untalented, and genetically inferior overwhelmed the tiny gifted minority within a few generations (The Straits Times 1983a). In his misogyny, Lee ignored how declining fertility characterizes all industrialized nation-states, and the fact that men share equal responsibility with women for the lowering birth rates. Nevertheless, to forestall Lee's prophecy of impending demographic doom, state leaders began offering cash awards of S$10,000 to working-class mothers who volunteered for sterilization after having two children. Those who insisted on not restraining their fertility faced increased maternity charges in public hospitals (The Sunday Monitor 1984).

Simultaneously, cabinet ministers also exhorted graduate women to marry and have children early as their national duty. Just as men bear arms during their two-and-a-half years of compulsory military service to defend the country against enemies from without, graduate
women should also bear children to reinforce Singapore from within (The Straits Times 1983b). To entice these women into motherhood, state leaders promised generous tax breaks, medical insurance privileges, and admission to the country's best schools for their children as part of the Graduate Mother Scheme in 1984. That same year, the Social Development Unit was also set up as the state's matchmaking agency for university graduates. Members of the upper echelons of the Civil Service, too, must submit highly intimate personal information on themselves and their families, including their marital status, the educational qualifications of their spouses, and the number of children they had (The Straits Times 1983c). Singapore's then-only university followed suit by altering its admission criteria to favor male over female applicants. This change reflected Lee's misguided beliefs that graduate men tended to marry and have children early (The Sunday Times 1983b), and that women's suffrage and a liberal university education inoculated women against the anachronistic patriarchal practices of enforcing a daughter's marriage regardless of her consent (The Straits Times 1983a). Lee even contemplated legalizing polygyny by revoking the Women's Charter of 1961, as he openly voiced his admiration for virile Chinese patriarchs of the past and their large retinues of wives, concubines, and children (The Sunday Times 1986).

Quite expectedly, the PAP paid dearly in the electoral polls for its blatantly discriminatory eugenic views. Although the party won 77 out of the 79 available parliamentary seats against eight opposition parties in the 1984 elections, its share of the popular vote slipped an alarming 13 percent to 62.9 percent. In 1987, state leaders introduced a new bevy of pro-fecundity measures that made no mention of targeted educational groups but rewarded childbearing in high-income families with large tax rebates and other benefits. Since a strong correlation exists between income and education levels, the re-fashioned policy echoed the Graduate Mother Scheme in its intentions (Mauzy and Milne 2002). Despite these measures and other so-called “Baby Bonus” schemes that reward child-bearing
in progressively larger monetary sums in the years to come, the PAP still failed to arrest the generally downward demographic trend. Fertility rates went up slightly during the zodiac Year of the Dragon (i.e. 1976, 1988, and 2000) when many ethnic Chinese consider it most auspicious to have children, but even entrenched cultural beliefs could not prevent the total fertility rate from hitting a dismal 1.28 in 2008 (*The Straits Times* 2009b). The “Baby Bonus” and other pro-natal schemes made the procreating Singaporean a model citizen type. I will discuss these schemes and the possible reasons for their failure further in the next chapter.

The second of the two-pronged approach to arrest demographic decline consists of relaxing immigration laws so that those attracted by Singapore's political stability and economic prosperity can become permanent residents and citizens more easily. These laws used to make the obtaining of work permits, permanent residence, and citizenship for foreigners a difficult and expensive affair. In the 1980s, PAP leaders decided that they must augment the population with new immigrants while maintaining the island's ethnic ratio. However, they did not want just any immigrant; only skilled and professional foreigners were welcomed to stay. These skilled migrants, or “foreign talents” in the local parlance, are admitted using two types of employment passes. “P” passes are intended for the highly skilled or university-educated who seek professional, administrative, managerial, or executive jobs. Entrepreneurs and investors also qualify. “Q” passes, on the other hand, are issued to those with a lower salary level and evidence of “acceptable” degrees, professional qualifications, or specialist skills. Both “P” and “Q” pass-holders can work in any economic sector. They are not subjected to levies, and they may bring family members with them (Yeoh 2004). The government actively recruits these “foreign talents” from all over the world. These efforts included sourcing in non-traditional countries like China and India, a major campaign to attract Hong Kong immigrants in the period leading up to the return of that territory back to China, and a controversial 2003 announcement to recruit openly gay civil
servants to cosmopolitanize Singapore. I criticize the latter elsewhere as an exploitative and semantically empty ploy (Tan 2009). Overall, however, these various strategies work. Between 1995 and 1999, the government granted citizenship to 39,000 immigrants and permanent residency to another 130,000. As then-Minister of Trade and Industry George Yeo observed in 2000:

> For every two babies that are born in Singapore, we bring in one foreign permanent resident. Also, one in for marriages [by a] Singaporean is to a foreigner. This has doubled in the last ten years. We have become a migrant society all over again (cited in Mauzy and Milne 2002: 191).

In sharp contrast, unskilled and semi-skilled foreigners are subjected to a range of policies designed to deny them a permanent foothold in Singapore. Admitted with work permits, they work as domestic helpers, construction site workers, road sweepers, toilet cleaners, and other menial low-paying jobs that Singaporeans no longer wish to work in. They face greater restrictions that include non-eligibility for dependent's passes to bring their spouses and children with them, security bonds that their employers must put up, and medical screenings for pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and venereal diseases every six months. Those who fail the medical tests are immediately repatriated with no exceptions. Work permit-holders also cannot marry Singaporeans. Transgressors are also repatriated immediately, which means forceful and permanent separation from their local spouses. Wong Kang Seng, the Minister of Home Affairs in 1997, said that they came only “to earn a decent living, go home and have some savings for their families.” (The Straits Times 1997) This obviates the need to create any form of social support facilities that may encourage a more permanent presence.

Despite the vast differences in treatment, low-skilled workers dominate the migrants who come to Singapore every year. In 2000, skilled workers and professionals accounted for only about 80,000 out of the 754,524 foreign non-residents (or 18.8 percent of a total
population of slightly over 4 million) working in Singapore then (Yeo 2004). The government wants the total population to eventually reach six million, so migrant workers will only become more numerous in the future. Local-born Singaporeans react to the influx of foreigners with unease. Some worry openly in the media that the foreigners will take away their jobs. Others complain that the greater number of mainland Chinese workers, brought in to make up for an otherwise shrinking Chinese-Singaporean population, sinicizes a multi-cultural Singapore because they can only communicate in Mandarin. With government officials acknowledging that the country needs these foreigners to remain economically competitive in the international arena, it becomes only more pressing for the state and the people to find better ways to socially integrate the new migrants.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced the new theory of ethnormativity to complement Howard and Winant's (1994) racial formation theory. While it recognizes the efforts that racial majority groups make to secure and maintain their social, political and/or economic dominance, this new theory also acknowledges that some members of racial minority may assimilate the cultural practices of the dominant racial group for their own ideological and/or material benefit. As such, ethnonormativity provides a cogent analytical frame for the study of colonialism, because colonial powers often justified their colonial expansion in terms of sharing the benefits of their racial superiority with their racially inferior subjects. Throughout modern Singapore history, one can see how the dominant racial group of the day attempted to maintain and extend their ethnonormative hegemony, whether it be the British and their deliberate measures to keep their colonized subjects apart physically and ideologically, the Malays of Malaysia and their pro-bumiputra policies, or the Chinese-dominated PAP and their ill-conceived attempt to entrench moral (read “Confucianism”) values through the
school system. In spite the resistance that racial minority groups pose to these ethnonormalizing measures, the same history also shows that individuals do become complicit in these schemes. In the colonial period, Malay aristocrats and Peranakans sent their children to English-medium schools to learn both the language and English habits to better act as cultural go-betweens. Racial minority women also served white men as concubines, despite the instability inherent in the position, because of the material comfort they accrued from it.

In the next chapter, I shift the focus towards nation-building efforts in post-independence Singapore. As mercantilistic colonial masters, the British made no attempts to create a unified identity among their subjects. With Singapore become first domestically autonomous and then independent, however, the need to initiate a vigorous nation-building project became increasingly urgent. State officials quickly adopted economic developmentalism as their governing philosophy and mobilized the population, using the military, the police and other coercive state apparatuses when necessary, into a productive labor force that made Singapore into an economic powerhouse. However, these officials met with lesser success in their attempts to capture the hearts of the citizens by imbuing Singaporeans with a concrete sense of national belonging. So far, these attempts include the promotion of mother tongues and religious courses in schools, and numerous public campaigns that first urged Singaporeans to lower their birth rates before reversing to become pro-natal ones. I will appraise these various nation-building policies in greater detail for the reasons of their success or failure in the next chapter.
Chapter 3: State Ideals of Citizenship and the Globalization Challenge

Being an ideal Singaporean is hard. Singaporeans are implicated, on one side, by the state’s aggressive goals for national development, which demand from them ever-increasing productivity in full-time and formal employment and which require these in return for access to social goods. From the opposite direction, they are compelled through policies – which again involve social goods – to aspire to particular forms of families that are supposedly traditional but that in fact require all sorts of modern orientations and habits. Singaporeans are compelled through a series of state mechanisms to work hard, full time, for many years of their lives, and to do so while also marrying, having children, ensuring that their offspring are upwardly mobile in an increasingly competitive middle-class society, and eventually making sure that their elderly parents are cared for (preferably within their households) and that they themselves have enough money to live comfortably in old age (Teo 2009: 533).

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine how state officials maintain Singapore's material modernity. I shall specifically discuss how PAP leaders create citizens. I begin with basic theories of state-formation and nationalism. Herderian notions of the unity of nation, language, state, and territory inform most contemporary forms of nationalism. Yet, in a world of rapid cross-border flows of people, capital, and information, globalization now poses increasingly stronger theoretical and empirical challenges to these telluric nationalisms (Cheah and Robbins 1998). In Singapore, PAP leaders labor to transform outward-oriented citizens into inward-facing patriots. For historical and geo-political reasons, they cannot ground their nation-building campaign on ethno-linguistic unity and its basis in history. Rather, not unlike other leaders of new nations, they invoke a vision that posits Singapore as a global cosmopolis endowed with peace and prosperity. Indeed, Singapore instantiates the challenges that globalization poses to Herderian ideas of nationalism.

To realize their futuristic vision, PAP leaders deploy a myriad of policies that aim to socially engineer Singaporeans into state-idealized citizen types. Dividing these policies into three groups, I argue that the leaders seek to maximize and actualize an individual's potential as 1) an embodiment of her designated race-culture; 2) a proliferate economic producer; and 3) a fecund biological reproducer. These policies enable the leaders to attract much economic prosperity to Singapore and,
consequently, higher standards of living for the people and political credibility for themselves. Yet, the policies also demand the formation of neo-liberal citizen-subjects with highly flexible work ethics. The rapidity of policy implementation generates “exceptions to neo-liberalism” (Ong 2006), because the citizens fail to adapt quickly enough and/or because they resist the changes. Examining state ideals of citizenship will illuminate their ideological bases and the challenges they pose to both PAP governance and the meanings of Singaporean citizenship.

The Nation, the State, Nationalism, and Their Globalization Challenges

I start by defining what I mean by “nation” and “state.” According to Anderson's (1991) classic formulation, a nation exists fundamentally as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (ibid.: 6). No matter its population size or its territorial reach, a nation has limits. It always has boundaries beyond which lie other nations. A nation also possesses sovereignty, because no dynastic monarchy makes claims to it. In the wake of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, the self-ruling state replaced the older divinely ordained, hierarchical, and dynastic realm. The sovereign state both emblematizes and gauges this freedom. Lastly, a nation exists as a community, because its members always conceive of it as “a deep, horizontal comradeship” (ibid. 7), no matter how unequal their social relationships may be in reality. Anderson further asserts that the emergence of print capitalism enabled the rise of the nation. By choosing not to publish in the more exclusive liturgical languages, print capitalists empowered readers of vernacular languages and dialects to partake in a common national discourse.

The last two points echo Gellner (1983), who also argues for a nation's roots in the bonds of solidarity between its members. As a condition for the nation' continued survival, this foundation pre-supposes the universalization of a shared ethnic tradition in the minds of equal and autonomous individuals. In particular, mass education disseminates shared social values to realize national cultures. In contrast, Anderson sees colloquial languages only as tools to ingrain the allegorical
imagery and empty homogeneous notions of the national community into the social imaginary. He resonates with Balibar who views the national form as a repository of previously undetermined ideas, images and ideologies (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991). Hence, both Gellner and Anderson regard any cultural notions associated with newly emerging nationalism as reconstructed and future-oriented, because they transcend what Geertz (1963) aptly terms the “primordial sentiments” of tradition culture. This does not mean that new nations do not invoke old values or cannot seek recourse in the past. Rather, the basic imperatives of national culture reflect the nation's peculiarities more than the contents of the culture itself. “One is not dealing here simply with new ideologies of boundedness; one is dealing more precisely with a new kind of boundedness” (Chun 1994: 50, emphasis in original). The new kind of boundedness that a nation's birth and its associated citizenship concepts engender often do not commensurate with the elite culture of traditional societies. Instead, new nations discard older totalities of a broader cosmological vision (e.g. the Christian kingdom of God), and demand their citizens to conceive themselves in terms of common identities and shared values. These demands form the basis of the bonds of horizontal solidarity in Gellner and Anderson's conceptions of nationalism (Chun 1994).

By “state,” I invoke Abrams (1988 [1977]) who identifies it as both an idea and a system. As an idea, the state projects a “message of domination – an ideological artefact attributing unity, morality and independence to the disunited, amoral and dependent workings of the practice of government” (ibid. 81). As a system, it exists as “a palpable nexus of practice and institutional structure centred in government and more or less extensive, unified and dominant in any given society” (ibid. 82). In both cases, the state has no real materiality despite its apparent concreteness. As Abrams notes in the epigraph that opens this chapter, the state's existence as a collective illusion makes it difficult to study, as its reification masquerades real power relationships as public interest. Foregrounding Aretxaga's (2000) call to attention to the state's “fictional reality,” Abrams (1988 [1977]: 58) writes:
the state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is ... It starts its life as an implicit construct; it is then reified – as the *res publica* ... and acquires an overt symbolic identity progressively divorced from practice as an illusory account of practice. The ideological function is extended to a point where conservative and radicals alike believe that their practice is not directed at each other but at the state. The world of illusion prevails.

Scholars and lay people alike endow the state with a misplaced concreteness by objectifying and personifying it, as they mistakenly posit a division between the political and the social. They do this through discourses and practices of power produced in everyday encounters at the local level through public rituals (Kong and Yeoh 1997), and encounters with the bureaucracy, monuments, spatial organization, etc. Effectively, the state functions as a new kind of governmentality with multiple boundaries and no institutional or geographical center (Mitchell 1991; Trouillot 2001). To pierce the illusion of the concrete state, we ought to first treat the state as a historically constructed and contested process in moral regulation and political legitimation.

In their thesis on English state-formation, Corrigan and Sayer (1985) show that quotidian practices simultaneously construct and are constructed by modern citizen-state relationships and forms of discipline. As material cultural forms, everyday state routines, rituals, and policies constitute and regulate the social making of meaning and of subjects. Framing state-formation as a kind of cultural revolution, Corrigan and Sayer deny such revolutions as merely ideological, as ideology cannot be considered separately from the materiality of the process. In doing so, they highlight the totalizing dimension of state-formation, from the construction of national character and identity to the creation of individual state subjects along the axes of class, occupation, gender, ethnicity, and locality. Herein lies the state's power to create, define, and deny new subjects and identities (Roseberry 1994). These totalizing and individualizing processes form a common discursive framework, a model articulated in both linguistic and non-linguistic forms that shape and are shaped by the lived experiences of state subjects (Joseph and Nugent 1994). However, other means of seeing and expressing these lived experiences also exist, so anthropologists of the state must consider what states are formed against: “Neither the shape of the state, nor oppositional...
cultures, can be properly understood outwith the context of the mutually formative (and continuing) struggle between them” (Corrigan and Sayer 1985: 7).

In contrast, Gramsci (1971) understood state-formation as hegemony. Defining “hegemony” as the means by which the ruling elites achieve and maintain domination and rule, he argued that it operates when elites persuade the majority to internalize elitist values as their own. Elites accomplish this by portraying their values as “natural” or “commonsensical,” resulting in the widely held notion of the state as a neutral manifestation of public will that arbitrates conflicting social interests. This normalization of elite dominion forms the core of “ideological hegemony.” Not surprisingly, those who attain power through ideological hegemonic means rather than outright coercion also tend to achieve better results. Dominant groups attain, express, and enhance their authority by mobilizing instruments of governmentality, or what Althusser (1971) calls “state apparatuses,” that regulates law, health, education, crime, national security, and other areas of social life (Scott 1998). These groups infuse the landscape with structural oppositions where they conceive of themselves and their landscapes as “normal” and ordinary, while casting subaltern groups as not. In effect, these landscapes become “landscapes of power,” or “landscapes that reflect and reveal the power of those who construct, define and maintain them” (Kong and Law 2002: 1505). Elites use these constructed landscapes to reify their ideologies to legitimate themselves. These landscapes can do so because they make elite ideologies appear pre-political and unquestionable, thus contributing to the social constructedness of reality (Duncan and Duncan 1988).

The effectiveness of political power achieved and maintained through hegemony exceeds that of power achieved and maintained through force, but Gramsci (1971) asserted that nobody ever achieves complete hegemony. Like Corrigan and Sayer (1985), he also called attention to the anti-state: other social groups that challenge those seeking power. “No matter how great the scope and intensity of control superordinates possess, since their power presumes the active compliance of others, those others can bring to bear strategies of their own, and apply specific types of sanctions”
Specific forms of resistance may be as overt and material as political action, or they can be latent and symbolic when dissenters convey them in such cultural terms as the appropriation and transformation of the dominant group's material culture (Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hall et al. 1978). Since dominant groups cast themselves and their landscapes as “normal,” they interpret the behaviors and landscapes of the resisting “others” as disruptions that they must contain and manage, if not purge entirely, through the use of Foucauldian techniques of domination and of the self (Danaher et al. 2000).

Modern forms of state surveillance and population control depend on spatial homogenizing, rationalizing, and partitioning. Furthermore, the transformation of space into territory that makes nationalism possible also relies on the conceptualization of people living in a single shared spatial frame (Harvey 1989). In the midst of growing homogeneity and fragmentation of space brought about by economic globalization, states use tropes to secure their misplaced concreteness. The map, for instance, identifies people with territory by visually representing nations as discrete territorial partitions. States also make use of botanical metaphors that suggest a nation as a grand genealogical tree nourished by the soil of its territory. Both the map and the tree reify a nation's sovereignty, its limited membership, and its continuity in time (Malkki 1992). Without these tropes, we cannot conceptualize the state as “a compulsory organization with a territorial basis” (Weber 1978: 56).

Other states invoke powerful kinship idioms. These idioms possess a particularly strong potency as the basis of community, because they draw upon the past to both posit a common ethnic origin and to claim substantial identity in the present (Brow 1990). The solidarity that allegedly exists among nationals rests upon tropes of kinship, reproduction, shared biogenetic and psychic substance, and a common code of conduct (Segal 1994). The authority of the state as a morally regulating super-subject also rests on similar grounds. Indeed, elites the world over prefer this paterfamilia model, as it gives them a choice role (Trouillot 1990). Kinship-based representations of nation and state can also be polysemous. State officials in revolutionary Mexico, for instance, play
concurrent roles as sons and fathers of the nation by casting themselves as both children of Mother Mexico and members of a collective patrimonial state (Nugent and Alonso 1994). In fact, the father-son-mother trinity in Mexican nationalist discourses sacralize the state and its imagined relations with the nation by recalling the relationships between God, Jesus, and Mary, or between the Catholic priests, the Church, and the religious community (Alonso 1994).

The substantialization of socio-cultural forms of nationhood enables their embodiment and rests upon the naturalization and objectification of gender and sexuality. Not surprisingly, feminist and queer studies scholars produce some of the best analyses of the relationships of gender and sexuality with the nation and the state (e.g. Chaterjee 1993; Enloe 1989; Mayer 2000; Parker, et al. 1992). For instance, Parker et al. (1992) correctly highlight the implicit fraternity in Anderson's (1991) idea of the nation as a “deep horizontal comradeship,” and his failure to address gender and sexual politics entailed in the love of one's country. As kinship tropes naturalize age and gender hierarchies in many nationalisms, they also construct vertical relationships between ethnicity and class, people and state, and heterosexuals and homosexuals. As such, nations may possess both horizontal and vertical dimensions (Brow 1990).

For example, while men have been cast in the gender and sexuality literature largely as the nation's martial protectors (Cohn 1987; Mosse 1996), women serve more varied roles vis-à-vis the processes and practices of state-formation: 1) as biological reproducers of ethnic collectives; 2) as reproducers of ethnic/national boundaries; 3) as reproducers and transmitters of the collective's ideologies and its culture; 4) as signifiers of ethnic/national differences; and 5) as actors in national, economic, political, and military struggles (Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989). These constructions of gender and sexuality play such key roles in the formation of ethnic and national subjectivities and collectivities that the state's technologies of bio-power yield different consequences for subjects who do not perform them. These outsiders or outsider-insiders include immigrants, ethnic minorites, and homosexuals (Lohr 2003; Gaudio 2009), but also socially disenfrancised citizens, ethnic
majorities, and heterosexuals on occasion. In times of conflict, the rape, torture, and murder of “enemy” women become key signifiers of victory and defeat, while aggressive states use the rescue of their own women as pretexts for military deployment (Enloe 1989). In contrast, having failed to live up to the standards of heteronormative masculinity, feminized pacifists, deserters, prisoners of war, and other non-combatant men risk rape, castration, murder, and other acts of “gendercide,” or “the deliberate extermination of persons of a particular sex (or gender)” (Warren 1985: 22).

Besides kinship, gender, and sexuality, anthropologists of the state also study state-formation and nationalism in terms of affect (Daniel 1993; Elliston 2004), autochtony (Caestecker 2000; Ceuppens and Geschiere 2003), language ideology (Gal 2006; Paulston 1997), memory (Boyarin 1992; Walkowitz and Knauer 2009), post-colonialism (Hale 2006; Gustafsson 2009), ethnicity and race (Alonso 1994; Brubaker 2009), religion (Geertz 1980; Willford 2006), rituals and spectacles (Kong and Yeoh 1997; Taylor 1997), space (Harvey 1989; Reynolds 1994) and state violence (Moodie 2010; Nagengast 1994). For the rest of this section, however, I shall focus on the challenges that economic globalization poses to the idea of the Herderian nation-state.

During the 1980s and mid-1990s, globalization scholars from anthropology and elsewhere point to the modern state's seemingly imminent demise (Appadurai 1996; Kearney 1995; Tsing 2000a). On the level of theory, Foucault (1978, 1979, 1991) dismissed the myth of the state as a unitary center of power and the most important target of political struggle with his notions of bio-power and governmentality. Empirically, warlords, guerrillas, and other wartime actors in Africa and Asia openly disputed with the state over its monopoly of violence (Steinmetz 1999). Transnational migrants, be they barefooted refugees or well-heeled jetsetters, regularly crossed state borders to unsettle both territorial sovereignty and ethnically homogenous definitions of the nation-state (Malkki 1995; Ong 1999). Such migration resulted in dispersporic identities that co-exist and compete with national ones (Siu 2005). State-citizen relationships changed as well. The rise of neo-liberal economics caused the privatization of the penal system and other state apparatuses (Hallinan 2001),
resulting in citizens feeling abandoned and ambivalent towards an apparently remote state that no longer wanted to fulfill its obligations (Berdahl 1999). In fact, neo-liberalism proved so luring that over-zealous globalization pundits such as Ohmae Ken'ichi (1995) even predicted the end of nation-states as regional economic blocs emerge to replace them. Under these many dislocations between nation and state, no wonder Aretxaga (2003) calls the hyphen in “nation-state” untenable!

The dire omens turned out to be greatly exaggerated. Despite the erosion of the functions that once defined the Weberian state by the neo-liberal logic of what Comaroff and Comaroff (2000) call “millennial capitalism,” the state did not wither away. In fact, the number of states quadrupled since 1945. In the five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, 22 new states were created (Nagengast 1994). Scholars explain the state's amazing resilience by pointing to that quality that Bourdieu (1999) calls “meta-capital.” Despite its elusiveness, the state commands an awesome aura of power, an aura bolstered by the real capital that flows behind its veil in the form of international aid, developmental projects, and various kinds of capitalist ventures. The ethically doubtful practices of local bureaucrats substantialize the state even further through the discourse of corruption and the public scandals that they generate (Gupta 1995; Nararo-Yashin 2002). Indeed, globalization commensurates with statehood by fueling the desire for it, whether to gain access to resources and power, or to defend an ethnic group from the predations of other states (Aretxaga 2003).

Rather than rendering the state redundant, economic globalization only transformed its functions from those distributing available resources to those of promoting enterprise (Marcuse and van Kempen 2000; Trouillot 2001). Just as neo-liberalism re-constituted the individual into an active, risk-reducing, and choice-driven subject who relies on her own entrepreneurship rather than paternal forms of welfare for her subsistence (Stevenson 2003), states (especially the local ones) are increasingly expected to attract their own capital investments instead of depending on the central government for economic aid. Indeed, writing on the rise of the “brand state,” van Ham (2001)
argues that local states must now act entrepreneurially and actively market themselves to attract foreign capital investments.

Similarly, Florida (2002) argues that cities must attract the creative class to secure economic prosperity. He arrives at this conclusion by correlating the wealth of certain US cities to the concentration of the creative class residing there. Not unlike what Isin and Wood (1999) call the professional-citizens, this class consists of professionals such as bankers, lawyers, architects, and managers. They emerged in the late twentieth century to identify with a cosmopolitan imaginary centered on consumption practices. More importantly, they show fewer concerns for their national interests and may be more loyal to their jobs than the city or state they reside in. They challenge the boundedness of the nature-state with their mobility, especially when they are unlikely to gravitate towards those places deemed lacking in diversity. Florida advises cities to make themselves more desirable to these professionals by fostering spaces of cultural diversity. In particular, he uses his “gay index” to measure how much a city embraces difference.

The flexible loyalty of the creative class forces cities to compete against each other in “the economy of appearances” (Tsing 2000b). Here, success demands that competing cities set up gay villages, ethnic enclaves, cultural festivals, hi-tech corridors, economic growth areas, and other sites of cultural diversity. In the growth areas, state officials attract foreign investments and professional labor by ceding them semi-autonomous rights. This graduates state sovereignty and variegate the workers’ basic citizenship rights to labor protection (Ong 2006). However, the cosmopolitanism of these zones can be asymmetrical (Shih 2001). The foreign investors and professional labor that state officials seek to attract typically hail from metropoles. These officials learn metropolitan habits to access foreign capital and technical expertise, but the metropolites may only be really interested in extracting profit from the zones.

Certainly, the practice of commodifying differences is by no means new. By the late 1800s, New York’s entrepreneurs were already offering guided tours of Chinatown, the Lower East Side,
and other spaces of exotic and dangerous queerness to the white bourgeoisie (Rushbrook 2002). These encounters with the racial Other enabled tourists to affirm their own middle-class identities and values (Stallybrass and White 1986). Rather, the novelty of the economy of appearances lies in the paradox that cities must first build their sites of cultural spectacles to appear successful before they can actually attract the creative class that will make that success a reality. This inevitably gives rise to a trend of “me-too-ism” where every city that considers itself a player must have the requisite sites of cultural difference (Bell and Binnie 2004: 1814). The spectacular economy brooks no alternatives; not having these features means not being in the competition at all.

**Citizen as Embodiment of Race-Culture**

Having assessed basic theories of nationalism and the nation-state, I shall now proceed with state-formation and citizen-making processes in Singapore. As I already discussed in Chapter 2, Singapore seceded from Malaysia in 1965 plagued by ethnic strife between the Chinese and the Malays, economic poverty, and a citizenry more oriented toward its respective cultural homelands in China, Malaysia, and India than Singapore itself. In particular, one incident of ethnic unrest carved deeply into the nation's collective psyche. On 11 December 1950, outraged Malay-Muslims took to the streets to protest the judicial mishandling of the custody case for Dutch girl called Maria Hertogh. The judge awarded custody to the girl's biological Christian parents, even though she had wanted to stay with her adoptive Malay-Muslim mother. The three days of the Maria Hertogh Riots resulted in 18 people killed, 173 injured and many properties damaged (Turnbull 1989).

Naturally, preventing the future recurrence of ethnic strife became one of the first tasks that officials of the new Singaporean state undertook. Adopting a multi-racial approach, PAP leaders started by greatly simplifying the ethnoscape. In colonial Singapore, state officials used “race” and “ethnicity” interchangeably. They recognized four main ethnic categories – the Chinese, the Malays, the Indians, and the Others that consisted of minor ethnic groups – and a plethora of sub-ethnic
groups. The 1957 census, for example, had 30 sub-ethnic headings that included Hokkiens, Tiechiu, and Khek (Hakka) among the Chinese; Indonesian, Negrit, and Semai among the Malays; Indian Tamil, Telegu, and Malayali among the Indians; and Eurasian, Ceylon Tamil, and Pakistani among the Others (Hirschman 1987). As official recognition of the sub-ethnic divisions reified intra-ethnic differences, PAP leaders streamlined the census by removing the sub-headings, and retaining only the four main ethnic categories. These four groups became the so-called “CMIO model” of racial categorization still in use today. This model follows the fluid colonial use of “race” and “ethnicity,” and its legitimacy as a state apparatus results in similar terminological slipperiness in both state and everyday discourses. For the remainder of this dissertation, however, I shall retain a conceptual distinction between “race” and “ethnicity” in my analysis.

After simplifying the ethnic categories in the census, PAP leaders elevated the non-English vernacular languages already being taught in schools to the level of “mother tongue” of their respective ethnic groups. Thus, Chinese children learn Mandarin, Malays Bahasa Melayu, and Indians Tamil, along with English as part of their pre-tertiary bilingual education. The PAP leaders saw languages as carriers of cultural identity and values, whose differences can become real social divisions through the linguistic ideological processes of iconity, recursiveness, and erasure (Gal and Irvine 1995). As such, the leaders' linguistic imposition helped to unify each ethnic group by cutting down on intra-ethnic divisions. Furthermore, even though modernization does not necessarily result in westernization (Appadurai 1996), the leaders still feared that Singapore's rapid industrialization would replace the citizenry's cultural heritages with excessive individualism that threatens both social cohesion and their vision of a strong paternal state. The teaching of “mother tongues” would act, in the words of Lee Kuan Yew (1991: 29), as a kind of “cultural ballast.” English, for this reason, does not count as a “mother tongue.” To the leaders, children learn English to access the scientific expertise the West offers, but the language does not carry the kind of “correct” cultural values to inculcate the children in. They even decreed in 1979 that high school students seeking
entry into local universities must first secure passes in both the English and mother tongue examinations, a decision that they reversed only in 2004 to accommodate Chinese students who could not cope with their Mandarin lessons.

The fact that English does not count as a “mother tongue” also means that children racially classified as “Others,” having no state-assigned “mother tongue” of their own, get to choose the language that they will learn. Many select Bahasa Melayu, thinking its perceived simplicity and its use of the Roman alphabet will translate into higher chances of scoring better grades (PuruShotam 1998). Children from the other three major ethnic groups have no such choice. Parents who seek to educate their children in a non-prescribed “mother tongue” must obtain permission from the Ministry of Education, and Ministry officials rarely approve.

The choice of Bahasa Melayu as the Malays' “mother tongue” generated little controversy. Although the Malays originate from different parts of island Southeast Asia and speak their own languages – the Minangkabau and the Bugis, for example, came respectively from Sumattra and Sulawesi in present-day Indonesia – their various sub-ethnic groups already speak versions of Bahasa Melayu as the region's trade language (Andaya 2001). Mandarin, on the other hand, poses more problems for the Chinese. The forebears of most Chinese-Singaporeans migrated originally from the southern Chinese provinces of Guangdong and Fujian. Instead of the northern Chinese language Mandarin, they spoke mainly Cantonese and Hokkien. Indeed, the 1957 census reported that a mere 0.1 percent of all resident Chinese spoke Mandarin as their “mother tongue” (Bokhorsst-Heng 1999). Nevertheless, PAP leaders still chose Mandarin, because it enjoyed official status in China. More importantly, its lack of native speakers made it a highly suitable neutral language that could unify the Chinese.

To promote the use of Mandarin, PAP leaders relegated the non-Mandarin Chinese varieties to the less legitimate status of “dialect” that precludes state support. They also launched the yearly Speak Mandarin Campaign in 1979. Free-to-air television and radio stations followed by removing
all “dialect” programming (Bokhorst-Heng 1999). In the late 1980s, PAP leaders even attempted to
change the way the Chinese romanize their names. On top of her name in Mandarin romanized in
*pinyin*, a Chinese person also has a statutory name whose orthography approximates how she would
pronounce that name in her “dialect.” This statutory name appears in all official documents. The
*pinyin* one does not, but an individual can opt to include it in her identity card and her passport.
Thus, a Hokkien man called Chen Yafa in Mandarin will most probably be better known as Tan Ah
Huat. The strong ties of the statutory name to one's “dialect” group means that other Singaporeans
can often identify an individual's sub-ethnic background by her statutory name alone. This hinders
the PAP leaders' goal to homogenize all the Chinese, so in lieu of the old way of romanization, they
urged Chinese parents to romanize their children's statutory names using *pinyin* only. Overall, the
Mandarinization project met with success. From 1990 to 2000, the proportion of Chinese who
spoke Mandarin as their principle household language rose from 30.1 percent to 45.1 percent. In the
same time period, “dialect” use dropped from 50.3 percent to 30.7 percent (Singapore Department
of Statistics 2001). As for the statutory names, some parents did romanize their children's given
names in *pinyin*. Yet, they retained the old way of romanizing their family names. The resulting
names, such as Tan Yafa (to continue with the example above), can sound strange to the
Singaporean ear, but they demonstrate the resilience of “dialect” use despite overt state
Mandarinization.

Like the Chinese, not all Indians speak their state-assigned “mother tongue” either. In 1990,
the census reported that Tamils only formed 63.9 percent of the Indian population. Malayalis (8.6
percent), Sikhs (6.7 percent), Hindustani (2.0 percent), and other smaller “dialect” groups make up
the rest (Singapore Department of Statistics 1990). The most current census from 2000 no longer
provides such a “dialectal” breakdown of the main racial groups, but the sub-ethnic proportions
should not have changed significantly. Before 1990, non-Tamil Indian children could learn Tamil in
school, or they could choose another “mother tongue” the way their “Other” counterparts did. Either
way, the incongruity between school and home languages could mean a lack of adequate home reinforcement for what they learnt in school, and subsequently, poor grades and low morale. In 1990, Ministry of Education officials finally heeded the years of complaints from non-Tamil Indian parents and began offering Malayalam, Punjabi, Hindi, and other minority Indian “mother tongues” in secondary schools (primary schools followed in 1994). Regardless of what “mother tongue” an Indian child ends up learning, the overall small number of Indian-Singaporeans means that any one school typically does not have enough Indian students to form their own class. Consequently, even Tamil-language students must often go to centralized language centers outside of curriculum time to pursue their studies. The traveling to and fro the language centers places an additional strain on these students that their Chinese and Malay counterparts need not endure (PuruShotam 1998).

Here, I question why MOE officials do not diversify Chinese “mother tongues” the same way they did Indian ones. I argue that it has to do partly with the legitimacy of the languages involved. The non-Tamil Indian “mother tongues” enjoy official status as scheduled languages in India. This status gives weight to the requests from non-Tamil parents for more “mother tongue” options. The same cannot be said of the Chinese “dialects,” even had Chinese parents complained just as much. China recognizes only Mandarin as its official language. The number of Indian-Singaporeans (7 percent of the total population) vis-à-vis the Chinese (75 percent) mattered as well. Assuming that the diversification of “mother tongues” does indeed lead to intra-ethnic divisions, state officials can better contain these tensions among the Indians better than they can the Chinese.

Outside of language policies, state officials also discursively produce the three ethnic groups of “Chinese,” “Malay,” and “Indians” by making them publicly observable through their cultural activities. Each year, for example, the officials set aside a number of holidays dedicated to these groups that include Lunar New Year for the Chinese, Hari Raya Haji and Hari Raya Puasa for the predominately Muslim Malays, and Deepavali for the Hindu Indians. These ethnic/cultural groups in turn generate their own activities, sometimes with state assistance, such as the annual light-ups.
and night bazaars in their respective ethnic enclaves as their holidays approach. In turn, these events
give rise to the impression that Singaporean culture has three vibrant, albeit, frozen traditions.
These events also reinforce the discursive fluidity of “race” and “ethnicity” by blurring the
distinctions between “race” (with its notions of biological fixity) and the more culturally mutable
“ethnicity.” This blurring makes the impression of frozen traditions highly dubious from an
anthropological viewpoint (Clammer 1985). Nevertheless, state officials promote it because of its
political and ideological pay-offs.

Firstly, the seemingly unchanging cultural traditions make ethnic relation management easier
for state officials. Since 1969, there has been no more overt ethnic unrest. This does not mean that
inter-ethnic tensions disappeared entirely, but it does add to Singapore's international reputation as a
stable financial center in a politically unstable region. This reputation attracts foreign capital
investments, which, in turn, translates into rapid economic growth for the country and political
legitimacy for the PAP. The CMIO model at the foundation of this stability, however, generates its
own issues. For example, the model's ossified racial categories fail to reflect the ethnic situation on
the ground. The model determines an individual's ethnicity not as an aggregate of her parents' nor
by the cultural traditions she identifies with. Rather, it assigns her official racial identity based on
her father's race, resulting at times in inconsistencies. During fieldwork, for instance, I befriended a
man who has a Cambodian father and a Chinese mother. Even though he has been thoroughly
sinicized and cannot even speak a single Khmer word, he is still registered officially as an “Other.”
Even though the man married a Chinese woman, his son is also an “Other” because children inherit
their official racial identity through the patriline. The man's “Otherness” became highlighted when
his son started taking Mandarin classes during kindergarten. The man received a phone call from
the Ministry of Education, asking him why his son was learning Mandarin. In a move that exposed
the artificiality of “mother tongue” education in Singapore, the man had to go to the kindergarten
with supporting documents to justify his decision.
Even had the half-Cambodian man been fully Chinese, his official “mother tongue” may not accurately reflect the actual linguistic situation either. Despite what the “mother” in “mother tongue” suggests, the language that an individual learns at school really has nothing to do with her mother’s ethno-linguistic identities. Rather, the patrilineal logic of the CMIO model means that her father’s racial identity determines what she learns as her “mother tongue.” (Might “father tongues” not have been a more appropriate label in this case?) Furthermore, an individual’s “mother tongue” may differ from her home language, as shown by the non-Tamil-speaking Indians I discussed earlier. This inconsistency would have presented less of an issue were it not for the PAP leaders wanting to transmit cultural values via the “mother tongues.” Since the majority of one’s early socialization and acculturation occurs within the home, a mismatch between one’s “mother tongue” and home language may contradict the leaders’ intentions. Consider the example of a Sikh student who took Bahasa Melayu in the 1980s because schools then had yet to include Punjabi as part of their curriculum. The cultural values he absorbed through his “mother tongue” lessons would not align with his ethno-linguistic identities at all. Consider also the case of a monolingual Cantonese grandmother who cannot speak to her grandson because her daughter never taught him how to. Nowadays, many Chinese parents deliberately commit linguistic suicide this way so as not to distract their children from the mastery of Mandarin. However, without Cantonese, how can the grandson access the cultural knowledge and values that his grandmother offers?

The rigidity of the CMIO model has many nation-building implications beyond language and cultural policies. For the sake of brevity, however, I shall only discuss two other domains here. The first lies in compulsory military conscription. As I shall discuss further in Chapter 5, every able-bodied male citizen must serve at least two years of National Service upon turning 16½ years of age. In theory, the military unit a conscript is assigned to depends wholly on his physical fitness and the results of an aptitude test he takes before his enlistment. In reality, it is as an open secret that Malays will never be deployed in the commandos, armor, and other strategically sensitive units.
Even after conscription started in 1967, the Malays were deliberately and completely excluded from military service until at least the mid-1970s. They are enlisted now, but they are generally not given high levels of security clearance. As such, they are posted more than proportionately to non-combat roles such as truck drivers and store clerks, or outside of the military in the police or civil defence force. The air force too did not have its first qualified Malay pilot until 1992, 24 years after its establishment in 1968. Undoubtedly, this bias alienates the Malays and reflects leftover bad blood from the turbulent ethnic politics immediately before and after Singapore's independence. Yet, the Chinese-majority PAP leadership openly justifies this discrimination on the grounds that the Malays share racial and cultural affinities with their co-ethnics in Malaysia and Indonesia. Who will they side with should Singapore go to war with its neighbors? In fact, the current Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has historically been a vocal defender of this policy. In 1987, he said:

... we live in Southeast Asia. If there's a conflict, if the [Singapore Armed Forces] is called to defend the homeland, we don't want to put any of our soldier in a difficult position where his emotions for his nation may be in conflict with his emotions for his religion because these are two very strong fundamentals and if they are not compatible, then they will be two very strong destructive forces (pulling) in opposite directions ... And we don't want to put anybody in that position where he feels he is not fighting a just cause or perhaps, worse, maybe, his side is not the right side. That would be an intolerable position for the person and an unworkable position for the armed forces (The Straits Times 23 Feb 1987).

Using culture to predict future Malay disloyalty smacks of the de-historicizing “culture talk” that Abu-Lughod (2002) discusses. She argues that US discourses that link the 9/11 terrorist attacks to Islamic cultural traditions mistakenly locate the cause of the attacks in the idea of the jihad, instead of interrogating the CIA's historical complicity in resurrecting that idea in the agency's Cold War tussle with communist Russia. Constructing Islamic cultural traditions everywhere as monolithic and unfailingly warmongering, such discourses also ignore the more pressing economic developmental agendas that most Muslims have. Similarly, “culture talk” allows PAP leaders to justify their discrimination while avoiding a critical examination of Lee Kuan Yew's own role in the events that led to Singapore's secession from Malaysia in 1965. “Culture talk” also enables them to
dismiss the possibility that after four decades of their economically enriching governance, the Malays may have developed emotional ties to Singapore that transcend their regional affinities. Finally, while undermining their own nation-building goal to unify all citizens with their bias, the leaders may end up with a self-fulfilling prophecy. They marginalize the Malays now to contain possible betrayals during future wars, but otherwise-patriotic Malays may just turn their backs on Singapore precisely because of their poor treatment. Likening her life experiences to “being the least favorite child in the family,” a Malay journalist admitted that she would have emigrated were it not for her family ties. She continued:

Someone then remarked that this is why Malays like myself are not trusted. But I explained that this lack of patriotism ... comes from not being trusted, and for being treated like a potential traitor” (The Straits Times 2008b).

Public housing forms the second domain where we can see the rigidity of the CMIO model. Established in 1960, the Housing Development Board (HDB) implements all phases of housing development, including clearing the land, resettling the former tenants, planning the housing estates, designing the multi-storey public flats and, until the late 1980s, managing the housing estates (Wong and Yeh 1985). Until 2006 when private developers began designing some high-end flats, only the actual construction of the flats is contracted out to private companies. I shall discuss the public housing program in further detail in the next section. Here, I highlight that the program houses 85 – 90 percent of all Singaporeans, the majority of whom own the flats they live in. In theory, public housing is allocated fairly via balloting. In reality, however, a citizen's ethnicity can influence where she lives. Through the HDB, state leaders aim to reproduce the nation's ethnic mix, as closely as possible, within each block of flats, housing estate, and new town. Supposedly, this prevents ethnic segregation and the re-occurences of communal riots. Although the balloting system of flat allocation effectively disperses ethnic groups all over the island, PAP leaders alleged that housing transfers taking place via the secondary housing market enabled ethnic regrouping since the
late 1980s (see Figure 4 below). In the ensuing panic, HDB officials imposed a system of ethnic quota with effect from 1 March 1989.

![Map of New and Old Ethnic Enclaves](image)

**Figure 4: Map of New and Old Ethnic Enclaves**

Applied to the sale of new and resale flats, the quota policy sets a maximum limit on the percentages each of the four official ethnic groups living in each public housing block, estate, and new town. In cases where a particular group reaches or exceeds its limit, any further housing transactions must not worsen the “ethnic imbalance.” For example, Malays in a Malay “enclave” can sell their flats to anybody, but a seller from another group in the same affected block or estate cannot sell to a Malay buyer. The policy aims to contain the perceived problem, not artificially force the proportions of affected groups down (Lai 1995). HDB planners compute the actual quota by taking into account the national population's ethnic mix and the projected demand for housing by
each ethnic group. These planners derive this demand from the rate at which new households are being formed. To allow for some flexibility in the configuration of ethnic composition at the micro-level, they then fix the proportions for each block at three percentage points higher than that fixed at the neighborhood level (Sin 2003).

PAP leaders tout the quota policy as “necessary for the long-term stability of the nation” and “a small price to pay in order to ensure we do build a cohesive, better integrated society in Singapore (The Straits Times 31 Jan 1989). However, this official explanation focuses more on the end-results of mobility trends among public housing residents rather than the reasons and motivations behind ethnic regrouping (Ooi 1993). Likewise, the consequences of the policy remain unclear. Sin (2002) reports that although he made several requests to HDB for data, HDB officials kept turning him down because of the data’s “politically sensitive” nature. Even so, Sin argues in his subsequent analysis that regrouping may occur because established religious infrastructure and social networks attracting new members of an ethnic group while deterring existing members from moving away. For instance, the presence of mosques and halal food stalls in a neighborhood may pull in more Malays into a new neighborhood while dissuading already resident Malays from relocating. The analysis also reveals the difficulties the quota system impose on the sale of flats by minority sellers. For example, non-Chinese sellers cannot sell to the Chinese in a Chinese “enclave,” even though the Chinese form the largest group of potential buyers. This either delays the sale of the property, or forces sellers to lower their selling price to hasten the sale. Minority sellers can also sell back to the HDB at a government-fixed rate, but they make a loss in the process as the government rate can be 30 percent lower than the prevailing market price (Balakrishnan 1989).

More importantly, Sin (2003) asserts that PAP leaders use the quota policy to dilute existing pockets of electoral resistance. The leaders invoke the spectre of ethnic riots to justify the policy, but it is extremely simplistic to blame such unrest on the existence of ethnic enclaves. Enclaves may
worsen ethnic tensions, they do not cause riots (Lai 1995). Furthermore, I observe, the blame of causing ethnic unrest fall on ethnic minorities, as if the Chinese do not form enclaves or they were not involved in the riots of the past. Lastly, present-day enclaves bear little resemblance to their counterparts of old. Ethnic minorities are now minorities everywhere, even in those areas that Singaporeans think of as minority enclaves. Even in Geylang Serai where tourists can find the state-sanctioned “Malay Village,” the Malays witnessed a slip from their majority position in the 1950s to 22.4 percent by 1980. If riots were to break out again between the Malays and the Chinese, the Malays would be greatly disadvantaged by their numerical inferiority. Most likely, PAP leaders use the quota policy to limit the Malays' electoral resistance. Malay disenchantment with the PAP is well-known (Balakrishnan 1989), and the leaders certainly blamed the Malay vote for their narrow victories in certain Malay-dominated constituencies (Clammer 1998). In 1988, for instance, they secured only 50.9 percent of the popular vote in Eunos and 54.9 percent in Bedok. This contrasted with the 63.2 percent that they garnered nation-wide (Rodan 1992). In this light, the quota system appears to both undermine the perceived growth and consideration of anti-PAP votes in existing Malay “enclaves,” and to prevent the emergence of new centers of resistance. Certainly, this move aligns with other unsavory PAP electoral tactics such as the redrawing of constituency boundaries to break up pockets of resistance among the surrounding PAP-supporting wards (Sin 2003).

Barr and Skrbiš (2008), Chua (2003b) and Rahim (1998) convincingly argue that the PAP's governance affected the Malays most adversely. They adjust the least well to the highly competitive economy of post-independence Singapore, being at odds especially with Singapore's promotional stance in the “Asian values” debate of the 1990s (Chong 2002). Throughout the 1980s, the primary education curriculum also persistently portrayed a pro-Chinese bias and deprived minorities of role models (Barr 2006). In particular, the loss of land that underpins Malay identity to the Chinese-majority PAP denies the Malays the discursive space for socialization, identification, culturalization and politicization in their nationhood discourses (Chong 2002). This, however, does not mean that
the PAP politically disenfranchised the Malays. Upon independence, PAP leaders incorporated them into the emerging nation and exhorted them to participate in the nation-building project. The leaders also recognize the Malay's historical presence in the region and accorded these autochthons certain privileges to address their economic disadvantages. These rights include free education in all levels of schooling, the enshrining of Bahasa Melayu as the national language, state assistance in mosque-construction, and a cabinet minister specifically dedicated to Muslim affairs. No other ethnic or religious groups receive such privileges.

The various multi-cultural policies I discussed above reveal the PAP leaders' use of multiculturalism as a disciplinary tool. Chua (2003b) argues that the logic of harmony underwrites the complexity of the policies. While few can deny that harmony is a public good, the substance and means of attaining this lofty goal can be problematic. Unlike the more liberal Euro-America, Singapore does not have a fully democratic government where ethnic groups can negotiate their differences in free, undistorted public debates. Having reduced the opposition into an impotent political force, PAP leaders can impose unilateral decisions with relative impunity and justify their illiberality as their “knowing” what is best for Singaporeans. This forces the citizens to petition the leaders directly or through the media to address their grievances, which, in turn, tends to preemptively foreclose public discussions in the PAP’s mode of paternalistic/authoritarian governance.

In terms of inter-ethnic relations, the leaders constantly warn citizens of the precariousness of the current state of racial harmony to justify their constant policing of ethnic boundaries. These policing measures range from the Internal Security Department, which can detain without trial those deemed to work against “public interest,” to the criminalization of promoting religious and ethnic strife under Section 298A of the Penal Code, to the Presidential Council on Racial Harmony. Since discussions of ethnic relations always present a certain risk of disrupting ethnic harmony and no one can guarantee that unrest will not occur, the entire discursive domain of “ethnicity” becomes taboo. Those who raise the issue publicly risk being branded and disciplined as “racial chauvinists” (Chua
During the 1997 elections, for example, Tang Liang Hong from the Workers' Party expressed sentiments from monolingual Mandarin speakers about their socio-economic immobilization from Singapore's increasing use of English. When the PAP leaders called him a “Chinese chauvinist,” Tang challenged their “lie.” The leaders retaliated by filing defamation suits against him and forced him to flee. Tang remains, till this day, a fugitive from the law.

In this light, whatever ethnic stability that the PAP leaders discursively claim they achieved cannot be anything but shallow. Chua (2003: 75) writes:

The result is a “racial harmony” that is minimalist, never going beyond visual familiarity and overtly recognisable differences, one maintained by tolerance of difference without any substantive cultural exchange, deep understanding and even less cultural crossing of boundaries.

For instance, Singaporeans cannot be sure whether the social stability they have been enjoying since the last episode of ethnic violence in 1969 resulted from the state suppression of “ethnic talk,” and not from the progressive enlightenment of an increasingly educated nation. If it were the former, it makes suppression not only necessary, but also that the PAP leaders should continue it. Since the leaders never lifted their ban to test if discussions about ethnicity will indeed resurrect ethnic strife, they must continue to enforce it as the only sure way to maintain the present social stability. On the ground, however, Singaporeans still encounter ethnicity-related issues such as unfriendly inter-ethnic sentiments, workplace discrimination, and structural inequalities inherited from the colonial past. A significant part of these problems undoubtedly stem from the gradual sinicization and Confucianization of public spaces since 1965 that I already discussed in Chapter 2. The inability to negotiate these difficulties means that not only does multi-culturalism remain weakly realized (Chua 2003b), but also, as I shall discuss further in Chapter 4, deters Singaporeans from developing a real sense of cultural belonging to the country.
Citizen as Economic Producer

The second group of citizen-making policies aim to maximize and realize the economic capabilities of individual citizens. As Tremewan (1994) argues, the forced relocation of farmers and urban squatters into state-built public housing in the 1960s produced a working class dependent on the state for shelter and on wage labor to pay for it. Although the public housing program initially encountered resistance, it has since become a major source of political legitimacy for the PAP by expanding home ownership to 85 – 90 percent of all citizens (the remaining 10 – 15 percent either live in private housing, or can only afford to rent their HDB flats). Undoubtedly, it also contributes towards Singapore's post-independence economic miracle. As Lim (1987: 185) summarizes:

public housing, by lowering the price of a major wage-good, has lowered the wage. It may be credited with stimulating faster economic growth and employment creation. It may also have released private-sector resources of other forms of productive investment, thereby increasing productivity and growth. By ensuring a higher standard of living for the working population at a given wage, it may have contributed to better worker productivity and certainly to political and social stability and labour peace, which are necessary underpinning for private investment and economic growth.

For the residents, the program also brought radical improvements in living standards. Fully integrated into the road and mass rapid train systems, public housing estates are also planned to provide self-sufficiency in terms of the residents' needs. Residents can walk to neighbourhood centers to access low-level goods and services, or take in-town bus services to nearby town centers to obtain higher-order goods. The island-wide mass rapid train system can also take residents further away if need be. In the past two decades, some town centers have been upgraded into regional ones to expand their functions and catchment areas, and to make their range of offered goods and services more upscale. Furthermore, each housing estate has primary and secondary schools, religious institutions and public recreational facilities within easy reach. The presence of commercial activities and clean industries in the estates also provide residents with employment.

The program's massive material successes pay immense political dividends to the PAP by
making the party synonymous with economic development. In turn, party leaders mobilize this success to their own advantage by claiming that only they can deliver the goods. Citizens who vote for the opposition can only blame themselves if the current social stability and economic prosperity deteriorate. Although it is not possible to accurately gauge just how much citizens accept the PAP's carrot-and-stick discourse, the successful public housing program undoubtedly accounts for the party's political success. Since 1959, the PAP invariably garners the overwhelming majority of the votes. Critics may trace these victories to the gerrymandering discussed above and other unsavory electoral practices, or to the fear of PAP reprisals for supporting opposition parties, or even to the citizens' desire to protect the investment of a large part of their savings in their public housing properties. Whatever the reasons, no one can deny the basis of the party's political legitimacy in the public housing program (Chua 1997, 2000). Certainly, state legitimacy requires constant ideological affirmation and justification too (Chua 1995). Nevertheless, the housing success begins to explain how the PAP can achieve both economic success and political legitimacy despite its authoritarian governance: Singaporeans tolerate a certain level of illiberality as long as it translates into improved living standards. Here, material pragmatism trumps the idealism of human rights.

Of course, the public housing program cannot create and sustain Singapore's prosperity by itself. Lacking natural resources to develop, PAP leaders must also expand both the available labor pool as well as improve its quality. To this end, they granted suffrage to women through the 1961 Women's Charter. Among other rights, the Charter guaranteed women the right to act in their own legal capacity and allowed them to engage independently in any trade or profession. Consequently, female labor participation rates shot up from 17.5 percent in 1957 to 25.8 percent in 1970, 45.6 percent in 1986, and 51 percent in 1992 (Goldberg 1987; The Straits Times 6 Mar 1993). Together with the concurrent universalization of education, women's literacy rate also increased from 34 percent in 1957 to 65 percent in 1965, and 80 percent in 1980 (Hill and Lian 1995).

Lazar (2001), however, argues that the PAP leaders granted women suffrage as a "strategic
egalitarian” act. By “strategic egalitarianism,” she means that the fulfilment of specific political and economic goals predicates the granting of equality to women. Although the PAP leaders instituted changes to encourage gender equality, these changes are highly selective, motivated solely by pragmatism, and stop short of enabling full emancipation for women in all spheres of life. Lazar also implies in her concept that only the political elite can decide whether, and to what extent, institutional equality may be granted. Indeed, PuruShotam (1992) wryly describes the granting of rights and opportunities to Singaporean women as “gifts” from the government. These gifts oblige women to suffer the will of the male gift-givers, and ultimately benefit the PAP leaders more.

Using the Women's Charter as an example, Lazar points out that the PAP leaders used it to incorporate feminist concerns into their broader political agenda, and to enhance their own political image in progressive, humanitarian, and revolutionary terms (cf. Molyneaux 1998). This move won the support from women's groups, especially the Singapore Council of Women, as well as the PAP's own Women's League. However, the Charter pertains mostly to women's rights within marriage and the family. The Charter does not cover laws pertaining to family maintenance, inheritance, taxation, immigration, and citizenship. These other laws fall outside the Charter's purview and they continue to discriminate against women by enshrining men as the rightful heads of households, and men's responsibility to maintain their wives and children (AWARE 1988).

Worse, PAP leaders can withhold or even retract their gifts in the light of other national considerations. For instance, in the aftermath of the Great Marriage Debate of 1983 that I discussed in Chapter 2, the National University of Singapore (the country's only university at that time) took in more male students than female ones to “address” the gender “imbalance” in its student population. Girls in the Gifted Children's Program that started in 1984 also consistently comprised only one third of the total enrollment. Koh and Wee (1987) read this as the result of an undeclared quota to over-represent boys in the program. Also in 1984, PAP leaders forbade girls in the lower secondary classes from taking technical studies, while making home economics a mandatory
subject for them but not for the boys. These decisions blatantly reified traditional gender roles by suggesting that while girls needed schooling for their future roles as “wives” and “mothers,” boys required training only as “workers,” but not “husbands” and “fathers” (Koh 1987). Not surprisingly, the PAP politicians paid dearly for their arrogance. Although the party still won 77 out of the 79 available parliamentary seats in the 1984 elections, its share of the popular vote slipped an alarming 13 percent to 62.9 percent. This loss revealed limits to the citizens' tolerance for illiberality.

In the end, however, the Women's Charter benefits PAP leaders more than the women it was named after. By providing the legal justification for women to leave their homes and enter the paid workforce, it expanded the available workforce. This fueled the national industrialization program and enabled the leaders to deliver their election promise to enrich the country. In this light, the leaders granted women suffrage more out of pragmatic reasons than a genuine concern for their welfare. Chan Heng Chee writes:

> The mobilisation of women into the economy is a conscious government policy ... to relieve the labour shortage to reduce the dependence on immigrant labor. It is by no means clear that the participation of women in labour is a commitment (to the) principle of belief in emancipation, that women are entitled to the equal right as men to work. As a woman journalist in the Republic wryly commented, “Women get the chance to play a role in the economy only when economic necessity forces the male to call upon her services.” Thus, when recession made its impact on Singapore, women were the first to be retrenched (quoted in PuruShotam 1992: 326).

The concept of “strategic egalitarianism” can also be applied outside of the Women's Charter to other socially egalitarian decisions that the PAP leaders make. Take, for example, the statement that former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong made in 2003 about employing openly gay citizens as civil servants. As I discussed elsewhere (Tan 2009), many gay men and lesbians hailed this move as a watershed event as no government officials, much less the Prime Minister himself, ever talked of them in anything but a negative light. Yet, the state's recognition of its homosexual citizens can be easily withheld or withdrawn. Four years later in 2007, politicians voted to retain the criminality of non-virginal sex between men, while legalizing the same acts for straight couples. This decision
effectively made all gay men and, by extension, all lesbians into second-class citizens. Like the Women's Charter too, Goh's statement serves the PAP's interests more than it does gay and lesbian Singaporeans'. The PAP leaders aspire to transform Singapore into a global city like Tokyo, London, and New York, so Goh recruited gay people to advertise the country's cultural diversity to global capital and professional labor. Yet, the gay people themselves benefited little from the publicity campaign. Goh did not liberalize the civil service, because the service already does not screen applicants on the basis of their sexuality to begin with. Furthermore, state agencies cannot recruit gay civil servants solely because of their sexuality, as this means they must knowingly employ criminals to do so. Indeed, my civil servant informants reported no significant changes in attitudes towards gay men and lesbians in their respective agencies after Goh's announcement.

Other Singaporeans do not always benefit from the state's cosmopolitanization project either. State officials implement their economizing decisions in such a rapid succession that coming out ahead in this constantly changing environment requires a highly flexible and, since the 1980s, neo-liberal work ethic. Whether for personal or structural reasons, some cannot and/or will not make the necessary lifestyle changes that this ethic demands. Soon after independence, these class tensions became apparent when English-medium instruction was made compulsory in schools. While many parents realized that English afforded much potential for upward social mobility, others saw the language and the “foreign” values of individualism and conspicuous consumption it transmits as threats to their own cultural traditions. This latter group tended to be over 40, having either received no formal education, or studied in their respective local languages in community schools before the 1970s when mass education became nationally available. The state's closure of Nanyang University (the only Mandarin-medium institution of higher learning in Southeast Asia at the time) in 1980 ostensibly to improve its graduates' employability, struck a particularly heavy emotional blow to the Mandarin-educated Chinese (Wong 2002). This siege mentality made for a false consciousness, as Chinese history lacks no examples of individualism and conspicuous consumption (Clunas 1991; de
Bary 1981; see Fong 2004 for a more contemporary ethnography). However, under the state multicultural policies, the resulting heightened ethnic awareness only further intensified the mentality.

Always bubbling just below the surface, the linguistic/class tensions between those who mastered English and those who did not boiled over in 1999. That year, former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong noted in his National Day Rally speech that two broad categories of people would emerge as the country became even more internationalized. One group, the “heartlanders,” consists of taxi drivers, hawker stall-holders, production workers, and other members of the working classes. Being less socially mobile and more bounded to Singapore, they have very local orientations and interests. In contrast, the other group (the “cosmopolitans”) consists of highly educated, skilled, and mobile Singaporeans with an international outlook. The challenge, Goh argued, lies in “[getting] the heartlanders to understand what the cosmopolitans contribute to Singapore's and their well-being, and to get the cosmopolitans to feel an obligation and sense of duty to the heartlanders.” Without the heartlanders to form the stable core of Singaporean society, educated elites cannot engage the global with a crucial sense of locality. “If cosmopolitans and heartlanders cease to identify with each other, our society will fall apart” (The Straits Times 1999b).

Goh did not mention exactly where the heartlander and the cosmopolitan live and work. In the decade since his speech, Singaporeans came to identify the heartlander as someone who resides in Ang Mo Kio, Toa Payoh, Queenstown, and other older HDB housing estates where one can find “real” Singaporean culture in the nation's heart. In fact, many businesses in these estates incorporate the term in their names to attract said clientele (e.g. Heartland Mall in Kovan). In contrast, the cosmopolitan disappeared from popular discourses. Presumably, she resides in a private condominium and works in a comfortable, air-conditioned office somewhere, but the details were never further elaborated upon. Indeed, why would the average Singaporean have much to say about her? When Goh placed the heartlander and the cosmopolitan in a symbiotic relationship, he also implicitly made the former the morally superior partner. To the average citizen, the heartlander
embodies “authentic” Singaporean culture, while her globally oriented counterpart falls under moral suspicions. The cosmopolitan's outlook and ability to leave the country in the event of disasters and war make her national allegiance questionable.

Contextualizing Goh's speech makes the political shrewdness of his discourse apparent. In 1999, Singapore was still reeling from the massive retrenchment of the Asian financial crisis two years earlier. Worried that the jobless would translate their discontent into reduced support in the next national election, Goh did what politicians elsewhere in Bulgaria and the United States did to the poorer segments of the electorate (Creed 1998; Hill 2000) – he centered the working classes in the nation's moral universe to assure them that they had not been forgotten in the dizzying, almost incomprehensible race for capitalistic development. In reality, however, does the heartlander really differ that much from the cosmopolitan? Here, I argue that Goh presented a false dichotomy. The word “cosmopolitan” comes from the Greek words for “world” (kosmos) and “city” (polis), so cosmopolitans are philosophically imagined as transcendent of the particularistic. Rather than leading an existence of nomadic non-belonging, these “citizens of the universe” embrace all of humanity in their circle of belonging (Cheah 2006). Discursively, it also appears as if the heartlander has little to do with the global. If that were true, how did the Asian financial crisis that started in Thailand result in massive retrenchment in Singapore? HDB flats also do not just house the working classes. With the combined household monthly income limit for public housing residence set at S$8,000 (about US$5,700) (HDB InfoWeb), the middle classes, many of whom hold jobs in air-conditioned offices in the central business district, live in HDB flats too. Lastly, given the small size of Singapore Island – a journey by car from the eastern end to the western one via a connecting highway takes about two hours – and an Internet penetration rate of 58.6 percent (International Telecommunication Union 2008), any heartlander can access the global simply by taking a subway train bound for the central business district, or going online at home or in an Internet cafe. As Werbner (1999: 18) argues, “even the working class labour migrants may become cosmopolitans, willing to 'engage
with the Other.”” Goh valorized the poor in his speech, but he also further widened the fundamental class divide between English-speakers and Mandarin-speakers with his dichotomy.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population ('000)</th>
<th>Resident ('000)</th>
<th>Non-Resident ('000)</th>
<th>Total Population Growth (%)</th>
<th>Resident Growth (%)</th>
<th>Non-Resident Growth (%)</th>
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<td>1196.7</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
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Table 1: Population Growth Rates
(Derived from Singapore Department of Statistics 2009: Section 3.1)

Singaporeans perhaps express their discomfort with the global and the modern most acutely through their public discourses about unskilled guest workers. After reaching replacement level in 1976, the average number of children a woman that gives birth to in her lifetime (i.e. the total fertility rate) continued to drop until it reached 1.28 in 2008. As such, immigration must account entirely for the rapid population growth from 2 million in 1970 to 4.8 million in 2008 (Singapore Department of Statistics 2009). With reference to Table 1 above, a small number of these migrants become permanent residents and citizens who make up the resident population. In the past decade, they caused this population to grow at about 1.6 percent every year. The vast majority of the overall migrant population lacks the necessary education and/or technical skills to qualify for permanent residence or citizenship. With the exception of the Thais, the nationalities and ethnicities of these unskilled guest workers match those of Singaporean citizens: ethnic Chinese from the PRC, Malays and Indonesians (generalized as “Malays”), and South Asians (generalized as “Indians”). As such, they can be absorbed with relative ease, whether ethnically or culturally, into the local ethnic
communities without aggravating the existing inter-ethnic tensions (Chua 2003b). Yet, they remain temporary and marginal. Not only do they face more restrictions than their skilled counterparts (see Chapter 2), they are also more liable for dismissal during bad economic times. For example, their numbers dropped during 2002 and 2003 when Singapore struggled to recover from the 1997 Asian financial crisis, and the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the dot-com bubble burst of 2001.

The accelerated growth of the guest worker population after 2005 strained the existing housing facilities and transport infrastructure, resulting in a more pronounced outpouring in the local media of frustrations by the citizens. Even before 2005, some Singaporeans already found the close presence of so many guest workers irksome. For example, some 5,000 – 10,000 South Asian migrant construction workers would gather in the South Asian enclave at Little India every Sunday afternoon to socialize with friends and visit the temples there. Many of the neighborhood's Chinese residents openly disliked the workers' presence. In a local geographical study (Chang 2000), these residents blamed the workers for blocking public access paths, and making carparks and buses congested. They also feared for their personality safety, despite the lack of documented evidence of burglary. One even complained that she “can't stand the smell of too many Indians,” and that the workers were making themselves “too much at home” (ibid. 357).

The racist grouses against guest workers apexed in 2007 and 2008, not surprisingly, when demographers also recorded the biggest jumps in guest worker numbers. The bulk of the complaints seemed to focus on workers from mainland China. Both the English- and Mandarin-language media carried news of PRC women getting involved in illicit affairs with local men, or secretly taking on sex work behind their legitimate jobs as bar hostesses, waitresses in restaurants and coffee shops, masseurs, and pei du ma ma 陪读妈妈. The Mandarin term pei du ma ma refers to those mothers (ma ma) who accompany their children studying in Singapore (pei du). They are legally forbidden to work. Non-Mandarin-speakers also complained about PRC wait staff who could not converse in English. I could not find any official numerical breakdown of the overall guest worker population
according to its national origins. However, I suspect that PRC migrants make up the majority, as PAP leaders decided that ethnic Chinese should constitute approximately three quarters of the total population (Chua 2003b). I also conjecture that they do so to bolster an otherwise shrinking local-born Chinese population out of a fear that Singaporeans will ultimately vote along ethnic lines, and that ailing Chinese support would mean a stronger Malay opposition.

The growing intolerance also made a local journalist ponder why Singaporeans forgot their humble origins as migrants and became so atas, or “arrogant” in Bahasa Melayu (literally, it means “above”) (The Straits Times 2007). Guest workers take up essential manual labor jobs that sustain and grow the economy, jobs that citizens no longer want to do themselves. Yet, Singaporeans treat these workers with distaste. Chua (2003b) sees in this class-based racism a nascent sense of national belonging. Here, both state officials and ordinary citizens privilege their citizenship and economic status over any ethnic connections, affinities and identities with the workers, because of the latter's cultural “inferiority” that presumably stems from their economic backwardness.

**Citizen as Biological Reproducer**

The final group of state citizen-making policies focus on biological reproductivity. Noticing the downward trend in total fertility rate, former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew accused the nation's womenfolk in 1983 of jeopardizing Singapore's future with their recalcitrant infertility. Few can argue against the need for babies to support economic growth and reproduce the nation, but the Great Marriage Debate Lee triggered invoked remains extra-ordinary to this day for two other reasons. Firstly, Lee blamed women entirely for the national infertility, as if men had no role to play producing babies. Two non-feminist women's organizations consequently proposed, in a disturbing collusion with state patriarchy, that childbirth be made mandatory for women. Just as men bear arms during their years of military conscription, so patriotic women should also bear children (The Straits Times 1983b). A newspaper columnist responded tartly that “if childbirth is [sic] indeed
national service, the women in the Singapore Council of Women's Organizations should be the first to volunteer – before they seek to draft other women” (The Sunday Times 1983a). Secondly, the debate was the first time that Lee openly conflated the uneducated with the brown-skinned ethnic minorities, and expressed his discriminatory views against them. While the Chinese (who consisted 76 percent of the population at that time) shrank at seven percent per generation, the Malays (15 percent) wildly proliferated by four percent per generation and the Indians (6 percent) by one percent (Heng and Devan 1992). These changes made Lee lament:

If we continue to reproduce ourselves in this lopsided way, we will be unable to maintain our present standards. Levels of competence will decline. Our economy will falter, the administration will suffer, and the society will decline. For how can we avoid lowering performance when for every two graduates ... in 25 years' time there will be one graduate, and for every two uneducated workers, there will be three (The Straits Times 1983a)?

Consequently, state officials introduced a bevy of measures to contain and reverse the failing fertility trend. In 1984, they set up the Social Development Unit under the aegis of what is now the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports to encourage graduates to marry and have children early. In reaction to complaints about the SDU’s implicit elitism, the Social Development Service was set up a year later by the People's Association, a separate statutory board, to provide similar services for non-graduates. In January 2009, the two units merged to enlarge their catchment areas and provide more opportunities for members to socialize. As I shall discuss further in Chapter 5, both the SDU and the SDS organize events that generally aim to enable busy Singaporeans to socialize with members of the opposite sex in the hope that they will start dating or, better yet, get married.

More overtly, state officials also have an arsenal of monetary tools that rewards childbirth, and eases the structural and financial burdens of raising children. With reference to Appendix A, state officials sought to regulate childbirth immediately after independence in 1965. In the period of the old population policies (1966 – 1983), they strove to rein in population growth because of the
endemic problems of massive unemployment and under-employment. Urging Singaporeans to “stop at two,” state officials legalized abortion in 1970 and allowed income tax child relief only for a couple's first three children from August 1973 onward. Immediately after the Great Marriage Debate (1984 – 1986), lower-educated and lower-income couples were encouraged to sterilize with cash grants of S$10,000, while graduate mothers could claim up to the same amount in income tax child relief for each of their children. The electoral backlash the PAP suffered from their blatantly eugenic and elitist policies made the politicians retract some of their more objectionable policies, but their pro-natalism remained. Urging Singaporeans to “have three or more [children], if you can afford it” from 1987 – 1999, state officials reversed previous third-child penalties in primary school registration, such that children from families with three or more children now received priorities in getting into their desired schools. Realizing that working couples might not have children because of the time demanding by child-rearing, state officials also began offering working mothers S$100 monthly subsidies to send their young children to approved child-care centers.

In 2000, after two decades of pro-natalist efforts that saw little results, state officials took more drastic measures. In response to criticism that Singapore's fast-paced society does not make an environment conducive to reproduction – Singaporeans complain that they often return home from work so tired that all they wanted was to shower and sleep – the pro-natal rhetoric shifted to stress the importance of maintaining a proper work-life balance. For instance, companies were asked to implement more family-friendly practices, such as dismissing workers on time instead of making them stay as long as their bosses do to “prove” their productivity. More significantly, state officials started rewarding mothers for their labors with so-called “Baby Bonuses” of S$1,500 for the second child and S$3,000 for the third. Parents who set up Child Development Accounts in banks would have their deposits matched dollar-for-dollar up to a certain limit. Working mothers could also claim eight weeks of paid maternity leave. Over the following decade, state officials extended the Baby Bonus program, rewarding the first two children with S$3000 each in 2004, and S$4000 each in
2008. For the third and fourth child, the award went up to S$6,000 each in 2004. Paid maternity leave was also extended to 12 weeks in 2004, and 16 in 2008. Simultaneously, infant-care subsidies also went up to S$400 in 2004, and S$600 in 2008. Lastly, for households with young children, the state levy they must pay for each foreign domestic helper they hire also went down from S$345 per month to S$250.

State officials do not limit their obsession with babies simply to monetary assistance and rewards. Harnessing the discursive and material might of such state agencies as the Ministry of Manpower; Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports; Housing and Development Board; Social Development Unit; Social Development Service; Internal Revenue Authority of Singapore; Registry of Marriages; and Registry of Muslim Marriages, officials expose the average citizen to fecundity-related issues at some point of her life. She may become part of an unwitting audience for the “Romancing Singapore” campaign – a state-initiated but privately run campaign that aims to cultivate a mood for love among dating or married couples – when she switches the television or radio, or go to the movies, or just simply browsing through a magazine. She may even take up the campaign's offers by, for instance, going to a “Singles Nite” at a sushi bar or spending a weekend at the Ritz Carlton with her date. Even marriage does not offer respite from the state's baby messages. Upon the official registration of her marriage, the new bride may receive receive pamphlets with such titles as *Truly, Madly, Deeply: A Booklist on Marriage*. This handbook lists books that cover topics such as planning a wedding; the secrets of a successful marriage; sexual intimacy; the differences between men and women and how to reconcile them; home décor; and financial planning (Teo 2007).

Strangely, these tremendous efforts fail to reverse the downward fertility trend. In 2008, the total fertility rate still hit a dismal 1.28 (*The Straits Times* 2009b). How can this persistent infertility be accounted for? I want to stress here that while state officials could have easily blamed gay men and lesbians, they have never done so. Rather, Singapore follows the global trend among developed
nation-states. In the period from 2000 to 2005, the total fertility rate for Germany, Japan, Australia, and the United States were 1.32, 1.33, 1.75, and 2.04 respectively (UN Population Division 2005). The classic demographic transition theorist Kingsley Davis (1937, 1997) explains the poor rates as a result of economic development. Arguing that industrialization undermines childbearing incentives, he posits that the newfound social mobility in developing economies essentially contradicts the social organization of the kin-based, familistic society. The new fertility regime, in contrast, focuses on small families. Grand in its scope, this theory predicts low fertility as a looming crisis for all economically advanced countries as global fertility declines with continued economic globalization.

Studies that focus on the value of children affirm Davis's theory by suggesting that the first two children satisfy such key childbearing rationales as becoming a parent, having a child to love, and carrying on the family name. Indeed, industrialization quickly undermines the rationale for higher parity births, such as helping with household chores and looking after younger children, by raising the cost of education and other childcare expenses (Bulatao 1981; Caldwell 1982). The cost of sending one child to school from the primary through to the pre-university levels in Singapore ranges from S$2,000 (US$1,400) to S$73,500 (US$52,000), while four years of college education cost S$25,500 (US$18,000). In comparison, pre-university education in Japan can set parents back S$100,000 (US$71,000) to S$166,500 (US$118,500), while university tuition costs S$62,500 (US$44,500) to S$377,000 (US$248,500) (The Straits Times 2008c). The same industrialization that raises these direct costs of childcare also increases the indirect ones, such as investments in time and energy. Having more children means higher opportunity costs to the parents in terms of job advancement, a better material lifestyle, and a head start for each child. The same newspaper article cites a Japanese man who thinks having a second child as a rash decision even though he adores his son: “I need to put aside money for my own retirement.” In this light, Mason and Kuhlthau (1992) rightfully insist that these various cost increases be treated as an important anti-natalist factor.

Other demographic theorists locate the infertility trend in terms of ideological change. As
Mason (1997: 450) argues, “theories of fertility change must recognize that changing perceptions ultimately drive fertility change, and that perceptions may change more slowly or more quickly than the reality with which they are concerned.” Lesthaeghe and Van de Kaa provide illustrative insights here. Arguing that low fertility hinges on a cultural shift in the dominant mental/cultural schema (Lesthaeghe and Van de Kaa 1986; Van de Kaa 1987), they further assert the existence of two successive motivations for declining fertility. The first, associated with the (first) demographic transition and especially with declining family size, assumes that all who could have children would bear them, and that parents aim to provide substantial resources to their children as their dominant orienting goal. In contrast, the low fertility of the second demographic transition is motivated by new ideas that place the individual and individual choice at the core of the unfolding life course, as can be seen in the increased rates for divorce and co-habitation. In the absence of a clear normative life course, individuals face the challenge of constructing a meaningful life that does not necessarily include parenthood. This schema agrees strongly with Gidden's (1991) observation that in the de-institutionalized modern life course, having and caring for children still remain important, but only in situations where couples feel that parenthood will enable them to self-actualize better.

Another group of demographers use gender equity to explain failing fertility. McDonalds (2000) explains how gender equity can paradoxically become anti-natalist in high fertility contexts but pro-natalist in low fertility settings. As societies become more economically developed, gender equity also increases as more women enter the work force. Increasing female employment causes fertility to drop by opening up new avenues to feminine satisfaction, status, and prestige outside of childbirth and child-rearing. At lower levels of fertility, gender equity may rise further in politics, education, and other individual-oriented institutions, but remains relatively low in family-oriented ones. Consequently, fertility can fall to very low levels in Italy, Japan and other more patriarchal societies, while remaining closer to replacement levels in the United States, Scandinavia and other more egalitarian contexts. With pervasive gender equity, fertility closer to replacement level occurs
as women bear fewer of the financial, time and energy costs of rearing children. Greater equity spreads these costs more broadly among men and the state than in settings with stronger familial patriarchy. Indeed, Brewster and Rindfuss (2000) point out that as the state de-familializes society by shouldering more of the responsibilities traditionally relegated to the family, the more working women find it conducive to have children.

This last point on the relationship between gender equity, de-familialization, and fecundity resonates strongly with Singapore's case of recalcitrant infertility. A year after the implementation of the latest changes to the pro-natalist policies in 2008 (the most significant being a greater coverage and a higher monetary payment for childbirth), The Straits Times (2009) declares the failure of the “baby bonus payments.” The article reports that although the government gave out a record S$230 million in payments in 2008, the total fertility rate still fell from 1.29 in 2007 to 1.28 in 2008. It attributes the higher payout to the restrospective nature of the policy changes, as parents who gave birth prior to 2008 could still claim the rewards. The report also traces the payment scheme's failure to its appealing only to those who already want to have children to begin with, not the more important group of couples who desire to remain child-less.

Furthermore, by publicly framing the incentives to ease the financial burden of childbirth and childcare as “payments” and “rewards,” state officials undermine their own goals by treating children as if they were common commodities in the market place to be sold by parents to the state. This mercenary attitude cheapens parenthood as a life course ideal, resulting in policy failure. When sociologist Youyenn Teo (2005: 123) questioned her informants about their attitudes towards the pro-natalist policies, the resulting comments centered on the common belief about the incompatibility between money and good values:

... first, material incentives are ineffective because the behavior that is encouraged requires genuine beliefs that transcend money. Second, in fact, money is seen in opposition to good values so that equating money with them cheapens the values. More generally, insofar as it is using money to encourage certain behaviors, the state contributes to a materialistic culture that undermines the cultivation of genuinely good values (emphasis in original).
Teo's consultants did not deny the usefulness of the tax rebates and cash bonuses. However, they also insisted that these incentives are merely “extras” that do not actually sway their decisions one way or another. Responding to Teo's queries about the whether tax credits affect people's child-bearing plans, one married Chinese woman laughed and exclaimed: “I hope not! That shouldn't be the reason why you have kids. Then next time you tell the kid, 'Oh, I had you because of the twenty thousand dollars!'” (Teo 2005:126) Another informant, a single woman, points out that the use of monetary incentives encourages abuse of the system. Those who take the money may behave in ways that violate policy's spirit by, for example, having a baby just for the money. Lastly, a married Malay man describes the state as too “money minded” (Teo 2005: ibid.), because it maintains a materialist approach for social and cultural matters that characterizes its economic strategies in general. Overly focused on economics, state officials lack sensitivity towards the psychological and social needs of society. Consequently, the state promotes bad rather than good behavior, and opens the way for abuse and devaluing the values they allegedly support.

The national attention given to the fertility of married Singaporeans unintendedly alienates their unmarried counterparts. Being part of a couple has become such an unquestioned badge of normality (as part of the larger social entrenchment of heteronormativity) that those participating in other forms of intimate sociality, including being single, must justify their abnormality (Budgeon 2008). Reflecting this observation, newspaper editor Sumiko Tan alleges that state pro-natalism reeks of “singlism,” i.e. the negative stereotypes and discrimination direct against the unmarried. In a poll of 1,000 US undergraduates she cites, singles are seen negatively as immature, insecure, ugly and prone to jealousy, while married people are seen as honest, caring and kind. Singlism in Singapore can also manifest at the level of the individual as micro-aggressive acts in the work place. These acts include making singles cover, with no extra pay, the work of colleagues who go on maternity leave; giving parents priorities to take leave during the school holidays in June and December; and assigning night and weekend duties to singles. After all, they have no families to
care for, so they must have flexible schedules, right? Singlism ignores how singles contribute to the national economy just as much as married people do, or that singles have parents and siblings to go home to. This unequal attention, Tan admits, makes her feel less wanted (The Sunday Times 2008).

During my own fieldwork, some of my consultants made comments that resonated strongly with Tan's sentiments. Over dinner one night in a café, I chatted with Thomas about his feelings towards Singapore as a gay man. Relating how he would soon be eligible to purchase his own HDB flat the following year when he became 35 years old, he emphatically revealed that shocked he was at the many privileges and grants the state denies him because he is not married:

There are so many privileges and grants that are given to married couples that I'm not allowed to have. Wow! I didn't know that. I was really an idiot when it comes to money and stuff like that. So only when I started doing [research on HDB flats], I started to find out. I was so surprised. And there're so many limitations and stuff like that. I almost wished that, you know, it made me feel that... you're just a troublesome family member. That they have no choice but to give you a room. Given a choice, they wouldn't. So they would like, you know, don't give you the best and stuff like that. It hit me personally for this lah, as a single. And I think that being gay is one or two levels even below single.

Not surprisingly, given his feelings of alienation, Thomas admitted later in the interview that given the opportunity, he would migrate out of Singapore to greener pastures where his worth as a human being and as a citizen is not measured in terms of how many babies he can produce for the state.

Echoing the earlier assertion by Yanagisako and Collier (1987) that scholars ought to study gender roles and kinship categories as part of a larger integrated system, Teo (2009) contends that state officials impose such impossible demands on citizens' (especially women's) (re)productivity that women cope by focusing on their careers and holding back on their fertility. She points out how state pro-natalist policies characteristically locate the question of childbearing and child-rearing firmly in the realm of women’s “choices” through the shaping of structural possibilities and constraints. For instance, nursing mothers can claim tax relief for the female (and only female) foreign domestic helpers they hire, and up to 16 weeks of paid maternity leave (the cost of which is shared between the state and the employer). State officials appear to de-familialize childbearing and
childcare through these policies, but this shifting of responsibilities is entirely financial in nature. Women are still expected to prioritize their roles as mothers over those as employees, and invest the bulk of their time and energy in childcare. For example, only working mothers can claim the tax relief for hiring foreign domestic helpers. This restriction suggests that not only are working mothers still expected to work while parenting their children, but the task of mothering children ultimately still falls on women (albeit in surrogacy in the form of the domestic helper).

Maternity leave further reifies women's roles as mothers. In sharp contrast to the 16 weeks of maternity leave that a working mother can claim, her husband can only claim up to four. Even then, the discretion of granting paternity leave (or not) falls entirely on the employer. Indeed, state leaders justify this difference by framing men's primary role not as fathers, but as workers. Longer periods of paternity leave, they claim, will endanger the economy (The Straits Times 2008d). In this respect, Singapore's gendered state policies resonate with the ideology of “gender equality” Shapiro (1991: 276 – 7 n40) observes in the Israeli kibbutz movement:

The attempt to achieve [sexual] equality is generally a matter of trying to turn women into the social equivalents of men ... Women had to be given the opportunity to work in agricultural production, in developing industries, and in the army. There was, however, no comparable effort to get men into the kitchens and the laundries.

Indeed, Singapore's gender ideologies not only ossify traditional gender roles that locate men in the public sphere and women in the private one, but also ironically discourage working mothers from taking the full 16 weeks of maternity leave. The norms that emphasize the primacy of work and the undesirability of long periods of time-off still persist. As a result, working mothers feel guilty and insecure. They must weigh the time they devote on their newborns against the debts of obligations they “owe” their colleagues who cover their duties, as well as the chances of becoming obsolete through their extended absences (Teo 2009). One of my straight male consultants even speculated that maternity leave may hurt the employability of potential mothers:
You know, the whole maternity leave scheme may backfire. If this woman comes along looking for a job, and the employer knows she's getting married soon, why should he choose her and pay for the 16 weeks when she goes on maternity leave?

Under these conflicting demands, it is no wonder that working women fail to attain the “work-life balance” that state officials continuously emphasize, and end up choosing their careers over family formation.

Conclusion

As I reach the conclusion of this chapter, I find it apt to go back to the beginning and remind ourselves, as Teo (2009: 533) does, that “being an ideal Singaporean is hard.” State officials envision their perfect Singaporean as the culmination of three ideals, i.e. the embodiment of race-culture, the productive economic worker, and the fecund biological reproducer. After a survey of basic theories of the state and the nation, I proceeded to a discussion of the myriad state policies that officials have in place to socially engineer citizens into the perfect Singaporean of their vision. These discourses and practices include those that reflect the state's restrictive language ideologies, racist military recruitment policies, the ethnic quota system that governs one's residence depending on one's ethnic background, the liberal policies towards both skilled and unskilled migrant workers, and the arsenal of pro-natalist incentives I just discussed. These incentives aim to lower obstacles to women having more children, but they ultimately reflect state gender ideologies that burden women with conflicting and near-impossible demands on their economic and biological (re)productivity.

Given their circumstances, Singaporeans may be expected to revolt against the state's gender injustice and generally heavy interferences in their private lives. Yet, women do not treat the state as the source of their work-life struggles, but rather blame themselves for their failure to harmonize the demands between career and motherhood (Teo 2009). Even more paradoxically, they see the state as a benign agent whose only fault lies in its inability to fully realize its good intentions:
Counterintuitively, even though people saw the state as heavily involved in precisely the main source of their conflicts – an increasingly competitive and stressful work environment – they capped their criticisms with the claim that the economic has a certain logic that the state is merely responding to. They described the state as dealing with an inexorable force that is “the economy” and depicted it as doing the best it can for the larger good of the nation. They used phrases like “understand the government’s point of view,” “see the bigger picture,” and “the government wants to do the right thing” to account for why, despite their disagreement with specifics, the state still had an important role to play in shaping families (Teo 2009: 550).

While it provided the driving force for the radical politics of second-wave feminism earlier in the 1970s, gender in this case has somehow been disarmed.

Women's compliance with the state's gender order should not be taken as an indicator of real satisfaction with the socio-political status quo. After all, citizens cannot possibly enjoy the frequent incursions that the state makes into their lives. Such discontent, in fact, has consequences in the cultivation of national belonging that I shall discuss in greater depth in Chapter 4. There, I begin with an introductory discussion of the differences between (neo)liberal conceptions of citizenship and the communitarian ones that state officials employ. Next, I shall examine the ideological efforts that these officials make to convince Singaporeans of their political legitimacy. Ironically, these efforts result in the citizens' alienation from the government and, through the government's intimate associations with the nation-state, from Singapore the country itself. In the last section of the chapter, I shall discuss ethnographic examples of how local LGBT rights activists attempt to bridge this affective gap through their activist efforts.
An Interlude

Every year on August 9, Singapore celebrates its National Day. It marks the first day of island's existence as an independent nation-state in 1965, a day after it was (as popular discourses go) unceremoniously “expelled” from Malaysia. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1992) would have called this piece of traumatic historical “truth” an “invented tradition.” The historically inclined know that Singaporean politicians wanted to leave the union as well, albeit with far more reluctance than their Malaysian counterparts did. Nevertheless, no one seemed to mind the exaggeration of what actually happened. After all, almost everybody loves a good story of the underdog surviving against all odds to triumph over his oppressors (except, of course, the oppressors). And Singapore did just that, at least in economic terms.

Figure 5: 2007 National Day billboard showing some Members of Parliament at the junction of Kampong Bahru Road and Outram Road (Source: Author)
Preparations to celebrate this national victory occur every year months ahead of National Day itself. Starting in May, town councils install billboards by major road junctions (Figure 5) and hang pennants from the ubiquitous public housing blocks (Figure 6). Television and radio stations will also start playing the National Day theme song of the year. These tunes used to be of the chest-thumping variety, such as *Stand Up for Singapore* (1984) and *Count on Me, Singapore* (1986) that I learned as a young child. Realizing that these early efforts likely repelled their audience because they sounded too inorganic and propagandistic, state officials took to a softer approach that tugged at one's heartstrings in the late 1990s. This policy change resulted in the penning of *Home* (1998), *Where I Belong* (2001), and *Song for Singapore* (2010), songs that all focus on one's emotional ties.
to Singapore as the place where one grew up and, ultimately, the place to return to no matter where one goes in life.

The celebrations climax during the National Day Parade (NDP) on National Day itself. The parade used to be held alternatively between the National Stadium and the open field in front of City Hall aptly named the Padang (Malay for “field”). The Stadium closed for good in 2007 for redevelopment, so the venue shifted to the Floating Platform at Marina Bay. Tickets to the NDP are free, but demand always far outstrips supply (despite three chances to catch it live in a full-dressed rehearsal, a preview parade, and the actual parade on August 9 itself), so tickets are allotted via balloting. Each balloter can apply for up to four tickets every time, but balloters do not always have seeing the parade in mind. As National Day draws nearer, advertisements offering NDP tickets for sale Singaporeans will start appearing on local auction websites. Depending on how desperate a buyer becomes, these tickets can sell for as much as S$200 apiece. Detractors decry such capitalization of nationalistic sentiments as morally reprehensible behavior, and call (unsuccessful so far) for the state to intervene in this gray market.

In 2008, I finally went to see my first NDP. To be honest, I took this long to go not because I had been unsuccessfully balloting for tickets all this time. Rather, I treated the parade as I did the Merlion (that hideous water-spouting statue with the head of a lion and the body of a fish that stands in Merlion Park), or the zoo, or the Singapore Flyer (the country's answer to the London Eye giant Ferris wheel), or the many other attractions the state built to unburden tourists of their euros, yen, and dollars. Like the tourist spots, the parade will always be there. There is one every year. I can catch it on TV during either its live or encore telecast. If I miss the parade this year and I really want to watch it, I just simply wait for next year. Besides, the Pink Picnic also occurs on the afternoon of National Day at the Botanic Gardens. I would much rather attend the picnic and help my gay friends assert their place in Singapore than to go to the NDP and support a state that has not always been gay-friendly. Still, what kind of an anthropologist of the state who studies Singaporean
cultural citizenship would I be if I missed the NDP during fieldwork? So, I went online to apply for tickets. As my beginner's luck would have it (or maybe I had priority because I never applied before), I got a pair of them.

On National Day itself, I donned my favorite red shirt (so as to better match the red on the national flag) and headed out to the Floating Platform. The parade began at 5 pm, but members of the audience could enter the platform two hours earlier. Those who wanted to go even earlier would have to first wait in line at checkpoints set up some distance away from the venue. The tickets were color-coded and I had to sit in my designated color zone. It was otherwise free-seating within the zone itself. Since I was already assured a seat, I would normally arrive only at about 4.30 pm. Yet, in cases like the NDP where the timing of one's arrival could determine one's view of the stage, Singaporeans are known to act in a *kiasu* manner. *Kiasu*, a term that comes from the Hokkien *kia* (“fear”) and *su* (“lose”), literally means “the fear of losing out.” Together with its close cousin *kiasee*, literally “the fear of death” but more properly translated as “the fear of punishment” (*see* = death in Hokkien), *kiasu* has been ascribed by Singaporeans upon themselves as part of their way of thinking. Nobody likes to lose or to get punished, so it is natural to take measures to avoid such outcomes. One, however, becomes *kiasu* or *kiasee* when the preventive measures turn extreme.

Take, for example, the so-called “Hello Kitty Craze” that swept through Singapore in early 2000. That year, McDonald's sold pairs of Hello Kitty and her boyfriend Dear Daniel dressed in different ethnic costumes as toys that accompanied its set meals. There were six pairs in total. The quality of the dolls was inferior to those of other Sanrio products. Nevertheless, the dolls became so popular that at the height of the McKitty Craze, some 300,000 Singaporeans of all ages (or eight percent of the total population) crammed into all 114 McDonald's outlets on the island to get their hands on the toys. The long lines of impatient customers sweating under the hot, tropical sun led to ugly disorderly behavior, such as catfights, line-jumping, and wasteful dumping of uneaten burgers that became the focus of mass media scrutiny. Under tremendous public pressure to control the
Kitty-crazed crowd, McDonald's decided to release the last pair of dolls not in February as originally planned. Rather, those who ordered the set meal would receive a coupon that they could then use to redeem the dolls much later in July that year. The craze finally died (Ng 2001).

As yet, no one could fully explain why Singaporeans went crazy over Hello Kitty. Ng (2001) attributed it to the general popularity of Hello Kitty among the Chinese-Singaporeans who formed most of the long lines outside McDonald's, the marketing savviness of McDonald's itself, and simple unmitigated greed. Each doll in the pair cost only S$4.50, about four times cheaper than a regular Hello Kitty doll of the same size. The dolls' costumes were also unique. Since McDonald's launched the McKitties in Singapore first, many thought that the toys had a high collection and resale value. News of a Singaporean man who sold a pair of McKitties to a Hong Kong collector for US$50 (or about ten times the original price) further fueled the fever. Indeed, most bought extra pairs with resale in mind. Popular discourses also blamed Singaporean kiasuism for the craze. In what North Americans would identify as “keeping up with the Joneses,” one must have the dolls because the neighbors also bought them. Not having them would mean a tremendous loss of face. The final joke, however, was on the McDonald's costumers. Unbeknownst to them at the time, the restaurant chain would later release similar dolls in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Japan. This move rendered the ones in Singapore worthless as investments.

Certainly, Singaporeans do not monopolize kiasuism. Anyone who has seen the long lines outside of retail outlets for the post-Thanksgiving or Christmas sales, or days before the official release of a particular product (Apple's iPhone and iPad come to mind here) know that kiasuism afflicts people worldwide. Since resources are ultimately finite, kiasu behavior seems inevitable in some situations. The only difference, perhaps, lies in how Singaporeans treat it as a national trait that some deride and attempt to excise. A field informant, for instance, regards kiasuism as vestigial behavioral from the recent colonial past when most residents had been poor and life was hard. It will, however, remain socially entrenched even after the generation that came of age in that era of
poverty passes on. Singapore has become materially wealthy, but there will always be some things that are in short supply – well-paying jobs, affordable housing, government scholarships, places in reputable schools – so Singaporeans will always be kiasu at some level. For others, kiasuism is something they embrace, sometimes in self-deprecatory humor as a reminder to not take themselves too seriously. It was in this humorous spirit that a local cartoonist created the comic character Mr Kiasu as the protagonist of a series that makes fun of the stereotypically kiasu Singaporean. The series lasted from 1990 to 2000, and it enjoyed such popularity that a local Mandarin-medium television station even turned it into a sitcom.

In the comic series, Mr Kiasu often ends up embarrassing or frustrating himself through his actions. Unknown to me at the time, I would also realize that my own kiasu behavior at the NDP would amount to nothing. Fearing that long lines would form at the gantry points outside of the floating platform and stop me from getting a good seat, I made my way to one just outside of the entrance of a metro station at 1.30 pm. There was no one there at the gates. It was too early. I wanted to get out of the hot sun, but I did not want to lose my first-place position. It took about another 40 minutes before others came to join my line. Shortly before the gates opened, a woman walked up to me and introduced herself as a reporter with one of the local newspapers. She wanted to interview me, and she gave me her number for me to call later. On the way to the platform, I bumped into two friends from The Bear Project. Their seats were in the same color zone as mine, so we decided to sit together. When we reached the platform, we collected goodie bags and went to our allocated zone. That was when I realized that my kiasuism was for nothing. The platform was huge, with a seating capacity for 27,000! Yes, the seats could have been bigger with more leg room, but I really needed not have gone so early and sweated that much at all. Giant television panels had been installed on the stage, so that even those sitting at the back could see the performances appearing on stage later.

Sitting near the middle of the zone and enjoying the cooling sea breezes blowing in from
Marina Bay, we opened our goodie bags to see its contents (Figure 7). Some of it was expected: tissue paper, packet drinks and snacks, a cap, a sling bag, a raincoat, and a mini national flag. There were also two balloons and an odd contraption consisting of several see-through rectangular plastic blades linked together at one end. The color red dominated the entire ensemble (except the blue goodie bag), and everything had the NDP logo of five children in a star formation shooting forth stars from their upward-reaching hands. One of my friends blew up his balloons. They turned out to be a rod and a hand. We could beat the rod against the plastic hand instead of clapping with our own hands. The odd contraption unfolded to become a propeller of some sort. We reckoned that it must be for a mass display later.
The parade began shortly after a brief shower at about 5.30 pm. The NDP's theme varies year by year – the one for 2008 was “Celebrating the Singaporean Spirit” – as do the parade floats and items that match that theme. Yet, as a national ritual (Kong and Yeoh 1997), the parade has certain fixed structural elements that get re-enacted every year. The appearance of hosts, usually local TV celebrities, signals the imminent commencement of the parade. They give instructions in the use of any unfamiliar apparatuses in the goodie bag – the propeller was indeed meant for a mass display – and rev up the audience's spirit. Several pre-parade entertainment segments follow. These items include the perennial crowd favorite of parachuting commandos precision-jumping into the parade grounds (and, in this case, not into Marina Bay!), and precision drills by the military police. Parade contingent of military, police, and civilian representatives march in. The parade commander salutes the Prime Minister and other senior parliamentarians as they arrive, but the parade does not formally begin until the President arrives in his armored sedan and his entourage of traffic police escorts. The singing of the National Anthem follows, as helicopters bearing a giant national flag fly past overhead. The President then inspects the parade contingents, and is honored by a feu de joie by the Guards of Honor. After he gives permission to march the parade off, the parade commences as the contingents march past the dais on which he sits, and the audience behind him. With timed precision, fighter jets from the air force now fly in to perform awe-inspiring aerial acrobatics as they roared past the gathered audience below. After the formal parade finishes, the audience takes the national pledge during the lighter-hearted celebrations that follow.

As a ritual, the NDP has several distinct characteristics and functions. Firstly, the parade occurs in a time and space specifically set aside for it. The specially decorated streets and designed costumes, together with the anticipating audience, transform the parade into a particularly emotive event (Goheen 1993). Secondly, it enables its participants to reflect upon the values that make up Singaporean society (Turner 1974), because the ritual foregrounds these shared values to celebrate them (Goheen 1993). Thirdly, it comments on existing social relationships. It concurrently shapes
and is shaped by the field of social networks it is enmeshed in. By emphasizing the shared attribute of citizenship (Goheen 1993), highlighting common values (Bocock 1974), displaying communal power and solidarity (Marston 1989), and generates what Turner (1974: 156) calls “liminality” to suspend the rules that govern everyday social interactions (Turner 1974), the NDP creates a sense of community by reinforcing national cohesion. Fourthly, the parade suspends a sense of place by building up collective memory that supports the formation of a sense of home, and, when written large, a sense of nationhood (Connerton 1989). Lastly, as a spectacle, the NDP inscribes its nation-building message onto the population through pageantry and fanfare. It does so either punitively through excessive violence (e.g. public torture and executions), or celebratorily through wonder and awe that deliberately constructed pomp creates (Ley and Olds 1988; Yeoh and Lau 1995). Foucault (1979) argues that spectacles amplify the threat of punishment to enable it to penetrate the realm of consciousness that lies beyond the immediate experience of witnessing the ritual. The same effect applies to rituals-as-celebrations as well. As such, public spectacles become a means for elites to exert hegemonic control (Ley and Olds 1988).

Hegemony, as Gramsci (1973) points out, can never be fully achieved. Elites seeking to gain and/or maintain power will always encounter resistance from groups that disagree with the version of reality that the elites propose. This dissent can be as overt and material as demonstrations and riots, or it can be implicit and symbolic. Kong and Yeoh (1997), for instance, register resistance among participants in the NDP contingents and entertainment segments. For the NDP to succeed, they must spend many tiring weekends rehearsing. They are fed (at a level of quantity and/or quality that may not commensurate with the labor put in), but they are otherwise not compensated. After all, they are supposed to participate out of a sense of nationalistic pride. Naturally, many consider the NDP a chore and resent having to “burn” their weekends this way. Resistance also occurs in other forms, such as the re-selling of NDP tickets and my own non-chalance towards the nation's birthday. In particular, the former draws public ire because it subverts the nobler project of
nation-building into selfish, personal gain.

The low level of widespread resistance begs the question: why are Singaporeans not any more patriotic? After more than 40 years of strong nation-building efforts by the state, should not national fervor be higher? In the following chapter, I explore one possible reason why Singaporeans remain reluctant to express their belonging to the country.
Chapter 4: The “Great Affective Divide” and Gay Activist Constructions of Citizenship

While the PAP Government has inspired in the people much respect for its efficiency and much gratitude for the good life as a result of this efficiency, there is very little in the way of affectionate regard (Catherine Lim 1994a).

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed three citizenship archetypes, and the discursive and real-life reactions Singaporeans have against the impossible demands that these models place on their cultural, economic, and reproductive lives. Continuing with the ethnography, I make two assertions in this chapter. Firstly, I maintain that gay men suffer from both a nation-wide apathy towards the country called the “Great Affective Divide,” and from the criminalization and subsequent social stigmatization of their sexuality. Secondly, by examining local gay activist efforts that center gay men and lesbians nationally to overcome this double alienation, I argue that community-based projects fare better in heavily Confucianized Singapore than gay pride parades and other assertions of individualism. To make both assertions, I begin by first comparing the liberal idea of citizenship with its Confucian counterpart and the “Asian Values” offshoot. In particular, PAP leaders use the communitarian “Asian Values” discourse to justify their authoritarian style of supply-side socialism. Next, I discuss the origins of the Great Affective Divide both as a term and as a social phenomenon rooted in this form of socialism. Lastly, I compare two instances of gay rights activism that occurred in 2010: a gay pride parade of two marchers that failed miserably, and a carnivalesque event called “Pink Dot” that attracted 4,000 straight, gay, and lesbian participants to an afternoon of cultural performances. Gay pride parades work well in the United States because individualism predicate the society there, but they fare less well in communitarian Singapore.

Liberal and Confucian Citizenship as Ideas

The history of the idea of liberal citizenship in the West can be traced from the practices of governance in the Greek polis in Aristotle's *Politics* through the French Revolution that marked the
transition of the individual from the subject of a sovereign to the citizen of a state. Subsequently, the American Revolution further delineated the state's limits as a legal entity empowered with political authority (vis-à-vis the more cultural concept of the nation). The merger of these two identities into the notion of the nation-state not only produced the identity of the citizen upon whom the nation-state wields authority, but also the responsibilities that this citizen owes the nation-state (Nuyen 2002). However, thinkers vary tremendously in their conceptions of this citizenship. While Miller (1995) locate it on the cultural-historical end of the spectrum, Oommen (1997) stresses on the legal-political end through such non-cultural criteria as residency.

Rather than going into further details of this history, I focus instead on the core ideas in this chapter. Hobbes regarded the citizen as the primary political unit, subjected only to the state's authority but otherwise equal in status to other citizens. Despite the state's potential abuses, Hobbes' citizen rationally chooses to live under its rule because this is still preferable to life in a natural state with no government. Locke further enhanced the Hobbesian idea of exchanging individual security for political association by constructing the citizen as an individual with inalienable rights to life, liberty, and property. Given the metaphysical view of a person as her own thinking, rational, and autonomous animal distinct from the state, this citizen only takes on obligations and responsibilities insofar as they further her personal interests. Furthermore, citizenship can only express the public dimensions of her identity and not her private ones, so it does not define her entire being. Mill went even further to insist that the nation-state, particularly as state, should not impinge on the private domain. As a set of rights that free an individual from the interference from the state and others to enable her to develop fully her individuality, liberal citizenship becomes the means to guarantee individual autonomy despite one's membership in a political community.

Confucian philosophers theorize about citizenship in a radically different fashion. Critics point out that classical Confucian writings do not contain any words for “citizen,” “citizenship,” or “citizenry.” In modern Mandarin, “citizenship” can be translated as *shimin* 市民, *guomin* 国民, or
As “people of the city,” *shimin* is too literal and not a common translation. *Guomin* (i.e. “people of the state”) emphasizes membership in a state and other legal and political dimension of citizenship, while *gongmin* (i.e. “public people”) stresses on the cultural and communal aspects. These terms all refer to the modern, Western notion of citizenship, so critics may that Confucianists do not discuss, let alone value, these terms (Nuyen 2002). Indeed, the term “Confucian democracy” sounds oxymoronic to Huntington (1991). The Confucian emphasis on the individual's duties to her group over her own personal rights makes the philosophy appear incompatible with the notion of liberal citizenship and, by extension, democracy.

Following Ames (n.d.), I concede here that Confucian ontology only attributes meaning to the self when the individual exists as part of a larger web of social relationships (see Chapter 5 for a further discussion on the ontological justifications). Yet, can Confucianism really not commensurate with liberal citizenship? The lack of signifying terms for citizenship in classical Confucian texts does not mean that the signified concepts do not exist in or are alien to the philosophy. For instance, during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE), the judicial upholding of Confucian family values led to such individual rights as the one to “conceal the crimes of close relatives” and the one to not “testify in court against family members” (Bell 1999). Later, Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1912 CE) laws also protected parents' rights to respect from their children (Li 1999). The Confucian ideal of *li* ("ritual" or "propriety"), i.e. acting and speaking in a manner that befits the given situation, also arguably implies the observation of rights. As such, it is more correct to say that Confucianism does not recognize free-floating, socially dislodged rights rather than it denying all individual rights.

With regards to the notion of equality, critics often accuse Confucianism with promoting elitism through meritocracy at the expense of equality. They charge Confucianism of allocating far too many rights and privileges to the superior gentlemen *junzi* who occupy the higher rungs of the strictly hierarchical Confucian society, instead of focusing on the masses *min* 民. Young (1998),
for instance, argues that Confucian *li* diminishes human worth, as it suppresses the idiosyncrasies of individual expression while creating hierarchy by defining social roles and their appropriate stylized behavior. Contrary to its detractors, Confucianism does in fact emphatically endorse the equality of human worth. The concept of “sameness” can be found in classical Confucian texts. In *Mencius* 4B: 32, Mencius asks while referring to two mythical kings often depicted as morally perfect, “How should I be different from others? Yao and Shun were the same as other men.” Later, in *Mencius* 6A:7, he comments: “The sage and I are the same in kind.” Elsewhere, Confucius notes that human beings are “by nature close together [or alike],” but “through practice set apart” (*Analects* 17:2). In fact, Tan (2004) argues that Confucius conceived of *li* as inherently flexible, as he did not reject all changes in ritual. While linen caps were prescribed for rituals, he followed the more common practice of wearing silk ones (*Analects* 9:3). He also acknowledged that the rituals of the Zhou Dynasty (1045 – 256 BCE) kings that he practised were themselves adopted and improved upon from those of the previous dynasties. Tan (2004) agrees that rituals, like any other semiotic structures, can oppress when their forms and contents are frozen. At their worst, rituals can even be abused to persuade people into accepting their oppression. Yet, she also reminds us that Confucius advocated against such ritualistic uses. He considered a good teacher as one creates as well as transmits knowledge (*Analects* 2:11). Transmission without innovation ossifies the past and renders it irrelevant to the problems of the present.

Other critics contend that equality should also be extended to the higher level of rights and social rewards. Kwok (1998: 90), for example, claims that the Chinese recognized only the “right of the prince, right of the patriarch, right of the ruler (*jun quan, fu quan, zhu quan*) – and such rights as those of the people, son and self-rule (*min quan, zi quan, zizhi quan*) are not encountered in past historical pages.” Insofar as equality means the same treatment of all citizens, Confucianism and liberal citizenship appear incompatible with each other. Responding to Kwok, Nuyen (2002) asserts that while *quan* 权 can be translated as “right,” it literally means power. Power inequality exists as
long as society recognizes different social functions. This observation holds true even in a country like the United States where liberal citizenship is nominally advocated. Its president wields a lot of political power, but even he will not be able to function properly as his country's leader if the power differential does not exist. Instead of focusing on power inequality, it makes more sense to ask if Confucianism provides equality in the processes of acquiring power. Here, I pointed out that both Mencius and Confucius believed that all human beings are the same in their potential to become gentlemen and, ultimately, sages *shengren* 圣人 through self-cultivation and learning. Confucius himself said that “there should be no class distinction” in education (*Analects* 7:7). Indeed, he never refused to teach anyone, no matter how poor.

Elsewhere, Nuyen (2001) further argues that while the hierarchical Confucian society does assign unequal powers and rewards, equality in this case should be read along Aristotelian lines. In other words, he contends that equality ought to be understood as having two axes, i.e. a horizontal one where those of equal status should be treated equally, and a vertical one where those with status should treat those with less unequally. Since the equal treatment of “unequals” violates the vertical aspect of equality and hinders the proper functioning of one's social role, the unequal treatment of different people in the Confucian hierarchy merely reflects the fact that they are unequals. Elitism and meritocracy can then arguably be interpreted as a commitment to equality.

**Confucianism and the “Asian Values” Discourse in Singapore**

In Singapore, Confucian values permeate the whole of society. These values do not spread *via* such “Great Traditions” as schools and other formal institutions (Redfield 1956). In Chapter 2 earlier, I discussed how state attempts to formally imbue citizens with Confucian values produced ambiguous results at best. The Religious Knowledge program in secondary schools was abandoned in the early 1990s because it heightened inter-religious tensions. The 1991 *White Paper on Shared Values* was also deliberately worded in race-neutral language to get Singaporeans to at least tolerate
it. Instead, an ethnic Chinese person typically gets exposed to Confucianism through the “Little Traditions” (ibid.), as families and other informal social structures transmit their values generation after generation. She may not enact Confucian rites – a devout Christian will not offer incense to her ancestors typically enshrined on the family altar – but she will know of loyalty (zhong 忠), filial piety (xiao 孝), humaneness (ren 仁), righteousness (yi • ), and other Confucian values. Indeed, she practices filial piety, to some degree, by taking care of the physical, financial, and emotional needs of her aged parents.

In the early 1990s, Confucianism and its ideological opposition to the liberal individualism of the West again became the center of public attention as part of the “Asian Values” debate. At the global level at that time, intellectuals from Asia, Europe, and the United States tried to explain the rapid rise of East and Southeast Asian capitalism in the 1980s. The Asian proponents attributed their successes to hard work, emphasis on education, familial orientation, collectivism, and other values supposedly unique to Asia (albeit in different strands of arguments modified to suit local cultural conditions). Their Western counterparts (e.g. Berger 1987) read these values (except collectivism) as copies of Western virtues that are either already present, or lost but recoverable. They interpreted, for instance, thrift and self-reliance as Victorian values. Rather than acknowledging the possibility of alternate modernities (Ong 1999), they insisted that any non-Western economy still required components of Western bourgeois culture to succeed. As such, the Asian successes became mere reproductions of the Western original (Chua 1999). Others accuse the Asian proponents – especially the premiers of Indonesia (Suharto), Malaysia (Mahathir Mohamad), and Singapore (Lee Kuan Yew) – of justifying their own authoritarian governance in the name of collective interests. Each premier nurtured and attempted to further project onto his country's body politic the idea of communitarianism already present in that country's national ideology (i.e. Panca Sila in Indonesia, Ruku Negara in Malaysia [Ramage 1995], and Shared Values in Singapore). Ostensibly, they used the de-ethnicized macro-identity that communitarianism provides to unify the diversity of ethnic
groups living in their countries (Chong 2002). The masquerading of self-interests as national concerns, however, just as easily enables political and economic abuses that benefit the individual at the expense of the masses. As proof, detractors need only to point to Indonesia where a massive outpouring of public anger ended Suharto's 32 years of one-man rule in 1998.

At its core, the Asian Values debate re-staged the ideological struggle between liberalism and communitarianism. The escalation of the debate, Chua (1999) opines insightfully, did not occur immediately after the demise of Soviet-style socialism by coincidence. The death of communism crippled left-leaning intellectuals in Europe and the United States by depriving them of an effective counter-discourse against the moral rapaciousness of rampaging globalizing capitalism. The Asian Values discourse filled the socialism-shaped hole by resurrecting the social and re-energizing the interrogation of Western-style capitalism. Not surprisingly, some regarded it as a substitute for communism and attacked it, often vehemently, in the defense of liberal democratic capitalism (Chua 1999). Fukuyama (1992: 238) writes:

> The most significant challenge being posed to the liberal univeralism of the American and French revolutions today is not coming from the communist world, whose failures are for everyone to see, but from those societies in Asia which combine liberal economies with a kind of paternalistic authoritarianism ... Asia's tremendous economic success has led to a growing recognition that the process was due not simply to the successful borrowing of Western practices, but to the fact that Asian societies retain certain features of their own traditional cultures – like a strong work ethic – and integrated them into a modern business environment.

In Singapore, state officials identified Asian Values with those that Confucianism espouses. As the Other of this Asian Values-as-Confucianism discourse, they chose that version of American-style liberal individualism where one's self and, at best, one's immediate family form her primary concerns. This extreme strain of individualism prioritizes individual rights, and reduces the state to a regulatory framework for orderly inter-personal transactions. Individuals in conflict settle their differences in court, making litigation the primary basis for social order. In this system, the concept of the social can only be thought of negatively as the injunction against the trangression of another's
rights and interests (Chua 1999). Rejecting this unsocial Other, Singaporean state officials put in place a system of “supply-side socialism” where they divert state resources to maximize citizens' productive potential (*The Straits Times* 1994a). As I outlined in Chapter 3, such efforts include the construction of an island-wide system of roads and metro stations (to facilitate the transportation of people and goods), and the provision of heavily subsidized education (to improve upon human capital) and public housing (to stabilize the household). Admittedly, the provision of such public goods would not have been at all possible, much less successful, were it not for draconic legislation that, for instance, enables the officials to acquire private land at prices below market rates for their construction projects (Chua 1997). These laws transgress private property rights, but are justified in the name of providing welfare benefits for the entire nation.

Yet, the equation of Asian Values with Confucianism commits two critical mistakes. Firstly, on the conceptual level, such an equation treats “Asia” as if it were a meaningful category even when PAP elites know that it is not. The vast Asian continent has such a diversity of ethnic groups and cultural practices that not only does “Asia” mean nothing beyond the geographic or cartographic sense, any attempt to definitively specify a set of common values automatically becomes a self-Orientalizing exercise (Hill 2000). Indeed, Sinnathamby Rajaratnam (1977: xx), a pioneer in the PAP leadership, proclaimed as the Minister of Culture:

> I have very serious doubts as to whether such a thing as “Asian values” really exists – or for that matter Asian anything – Asian unity, Asian socialism, Asian way of life and so on. It may exist as an image but it has no reality. If it has any meaning at all it is merely a convenient way of describing the heterogeneous, conflicting network of beliefs, prejudices and values developed in the countries which for geographical purposes have been grouped as being in Asia. Only as a geographical expression does the term “Asia” have any reality.

Yet, like any other invented tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), the Asian Values discourse can only be effective insofar that it resonates with the people upon whom it is inscribed. Despite its essentialism, it works precisely because the citizens themselves fail to approach it with a critical eye (Chua 1999). The excuses “We are Asians” and “We are an Asian society,” often used to justify the
rejection of anything socially progressive, attest to their unthinking readiness to accept the implementation of rigid identities and behaviors. Even Lee Kuan Yew could not resist this kind of convenient just-so reasoning. During a live interview on CNN in 1998, a gay man called in and asked him about the place of gay men and lesbians in Singapore in the future. Caught unprepared, Lee answered:

Well, it's not a matter which I can decide or any government can decide. It's a question of what the society considers acceptable. And as you know, Singaporeans are by and large a very conservative, orthodox society, a very, I would say completely different from, say the United States and I don't think an aggressive gay rights movement would help. But what we are doing as a government is to leave people to live their own lives as long as they don't impinge on other people. I mean, we don't harass anybody (Birch 2003: 7, my emphasis).

His successor, Goh Chok Tong, resorted to the same reasoning during a National Day Rally Speech (Goh 2003) when he attempted to placate Singaporeans angry at his hiring of openly gay civil servants: “Let me stress that I do not encourage or endorse a gay lifestyle. Singapore is still a traditional and conservative Asian society (my emphasis).”

Secondly, on the level of the social, Asian Values-as-Confucianism blatantly disregards the presence of non-Chinese ethnic minorities that make up almost a quarter of the total population. In particular, the discourse places Malays in a cultural quandary that threatens to depreciate their sense of self-worth. British colonial policies recognized the Malays' indigeneity by granting them special land rights, while restricting land ownership among non-Malay migrants. Access to land and its spaces of socialization, identification, culturalization, and politicization now predicates a Malay person's ethnic identity (Horowitz 1985). In Singapore where they cannot make historic claims to territory, Malays are denied this crucial component of their identity. Asian Values threaten to further disorient them culturally by marking Confucianism as the only path to economic success. Accepting this model means culturally identifying with the Chinese, a move that will surely cast a Malay person's ethnic identity into doubt. The Chinese predicate individual self-worth upon material success (Redding 1990), but religious piety and social relationships matter more to the Malays
(Chong 2002). Not adhering to the model, however, leaves the Malays with little other recourse. Members of the middle-class Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) attempted in 2000 to provide such an alternative. Calling for collective action by Malay leaders and more political clout to influence national policies, they undermined the de-ethnicized “Asian” macro-identity that Asian Values promote. State officials denied their request on the grounds that it would have made race a political issue. Ironically, this denial exposed the inadequacies of Asian Values by not addressing the possibility of a heterogenous collectivity where differences and bargaining strengthen instead of challenging institutional structures (Chong 2002).

“The Great Affective Divide”

Asian Values-as-Confucianism also support, through the paternalism inherent in both discourses, a conceptual binary that posits the state as the father and the citizens as his children. While masculinizing the state and endowing it with such “male” qualities as logic, discipline, authority, and universal vision, this dichotomy simultaneously cast the citizens as selfish, infantile, demanding, ignorant, dangerous, and feminine (Yen and Goh 2007). Such a parent-child relationship echoes the theory by radical feminist theorist Luce Irigaray (1985a, 1985b, 1993) that defines phallagocentrism as a “monosexual imaginary” (Whitford 1991: 92) centred on masculinity as the singular model that determines all other subjectivities. This model constructs the feminine as masculinity's negative Other to better highlight masculinity's positive values (Butler 1990; Hansen 2000). Given the limits of this chapter, I will not attempt a full investigation of how Singaporeans come to accept their subordinated position in their relationships with the father-state. The process likely involves an informal compact where, according to some of my more politically astute field informants, the citizens exchange their political acquiescence for material comfort. This compact came about in the aftermath of the PAP's crackdown on the massive leftist political protests in the 1960s. Those who survived the suppression came to see politics as dangerous territory to be treaded
upon only either by PAP cadres or the terminally foolish, and they taught this life lesson to their children. Certainly, the ample demonstrations that the PAP gave of its ability to create national wealth and to deal with detractors in the subsequent years convinced many Singaporeans to not question the arrangement.

Yet, in 1994, challenge emerged from a most unlikely quarter. That year, a local novelist called Catherine Lim (1994a) highlighted the existence of “a great affective divide” that estranged citizens from the PAP. She claimed that “while the PAP Government has inspired in the people much respect for its efficiency and much gratitude for the good life as a result of this efficiency, there is very little in the way of affectionate regard.” She further attributed the lack of national affect to the impersonal and bureaucratic style of PAP governance, as well as the heavy-handed manner in which the party handles alternative political discourses. Insofar as PAP dominance results in citizens equating the party with the country itself (even though they ought to distinguish the party from Singapore the country and Singapore the nation), the great affective divide effectively inhibits any real expression of patriotism. The near-impossible demands that the state makes on citizens that I described earlier in Chapter 3 only exacerbate Singaporeans' lack of affect towards the PAP and, indirectly, Singapore itself.

As evidence, Lim pointed to the hanging of national flags outside one's flat in the months before National Day on August 9. The state encourages the practice as a sign of one's nationalistic pride, but few Singaporeans do it on their own accord. As Lim explained, the lack of identification with the PAP/Singapore means that most Singaporeans feel embarrassed to appear patriotic. When flats appear fully decked with national flags (see Figure 8), it is usually because the neighborhood residential committee installed the flags. The committees only have limited manpower, so only those flats that face a main road are decorated. The inauthenticity of the “patriotic” flag display becomes immediately apparent when one moves away from the main road (Figure 9), or to the private apartments where the residential committee members cannot access (Figure 10).
Figure 8: Block of Public Flats Fully Decorated with National Flags in July 2007 (Source: Author)

Figure 9: Flagless Block of Public Flats in July 2007 (Source: Author)
PAP leaders did not react to Lim's critique initially. Kenneth Tan (2009) credits this tolerance to Lim's deft positioning of herself as a meek and obedient daughter vis-à-vis the overbearingly strict father-state. Lim (1994b) penned a second political commentary later that year. This time, she argued that former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong could not leave the domineering shadow of Lee Kuan Yew, his predecessor. As such, Goh failed to execute the gentler, more consultative style of governance that he promised earlier. This second article attracted Goh's ire. In a reply by his press secretary (*The Straits Times* 1994b), Goh stated that “he [could not] allow journalists, novelists, short-story writers or theatre groups to set the political agenda from outside the political arena.” He claimed that he “welcome[d] alternative viewpoints, but he [would] refute mistaken views, sharply if necessary.” He also challenged Lim to “enter the political arena so that she could take responsibility for her views.” Castigated, Lim not only apologized to Goh privately (*The Straits Times* 1994c), but also stated publicly that she merely wanted to share her views on what she perceived as a grave problem. She neither wanted to enter politics nor “belittle or upset anyone”
In 1999, a state proposal to phase out the madrasah system of Islamic schools set off another round of questioning. During the National Day Rally that year, Goh announced that the madrasahs, attended mainly by Muslim-Malays, failed to prepare their students adequately for the new knowledge-based economy. Not only did 65% of madrasah students drop out of school, those who stayed on to take the Cambridge “O” level examinations also fared far worse than their counterparts in mainstream schools. An average of 9% of madrasah students achieved a minimum of 5 “O” level passes from 1996 – 1998, compared to 28% of Malay students in mainstream schools in the same time period (The Straits Times 1999c). Arguing that madrasahs produced religious scholars who make no direct economic contributions, and at a number greater than what the Muslim community required, Goh proposed to close down all primary-level madrasahs and divert their students to mainstream schools instead (The Straits Times 1999d). Given the centrality of Islam in their ethnic identity, the Malays read Goh's proposal as the latest of many state attempts at ethnic suppression.

Frustrations over the madrasahs led activist Zulfikar Shariff to establish the now-defunct website Fateha.com to address perceived injustice the state committed against Malays. Fateha shot into national prominence when its commentators openly criticized the arrest and detention without trial of Jemaah Islamiah terrorists in Singapore in December 2001. A month later, when the Ministry of Education banned the use of Islamic headscarves in mainstream schools, Fateha also openly sided with the affected schoolgirls. These two incidents, Zulfikar Shariff (2004) claims, prompted a state campaign of intimidation that graduated from telephone and email taps to police raiding his apartment to threats of possible arrest and detention. Fearing for his life, he fled to Australia to escape political persecution.

In the two instances above, Lim and Zulfikar Shariff attracted the state's displeasure because they crossed discursive boundaries known locally as “OB markers.” First used by a parliamentary minister as an adoption from the golf term “out-of-bounds markers,” OB markers demarcate state
limits of topics deemed safe for public discussions. Unlike actual golf markers, the discursive ones are purposely left undefined. Social climates change constantly, the minister said, so state officials cannot determine the permissibility of a given topic in advance (*The Straits Times* 1999a). The two instances above, however, demonstrate that critical discussions of politics and race remain taboo. While Lim transgressed by critiquing the Prime Minister himself, Zulkifar Shariff violated the state's longstanding approach of de-politicizing inter-ethnic relations by *not* talking about them. OB markers clearly stifle the growth of a Singaporean national identity, and Gomez (2000) decries their use as state censorship. Not knowing where exactly the markers lie, citizens would rather err on the side of caution and self-censor than to risk getting into trouble with the state.

Despite their taboo nature, race and politics provide important inspirations for nationalistic discourses. By policing alternative (but not necessarily dissenting) political talk with heavy-handed methods, the state limits the basis for national identity-formation to only economic progress. The adoption of economic developmentalism in the early years of independence provided much-needed economic stability. It even gave the new state its *raison d'être* (Chua 1996). Anthropologists of the state recognize that the “universalization of a shared civilization or ethnic tradition in the minds of equal and autonomous individuals as a condition for its continual survival” form the basis of the bonds of solidarity among citizens of modern nation-states (Chun 1994: 50; Gellner 1983). In this respect, however, Singapore faced an endemic problem. Of its three major ethnic groups, the Chinese dominate numerically. With their many clan and trade associations that culminate in such umbrella organizations as the Hokkien Association and the Chinese Chambers of Commerce, they also formed the best organized group. Yet, their origins as migrants deny them propriety rights. Contemporary geopolitical tensions arising from the rise of communist China further meant strong discomfort in Singapore's neighbors in Malaysia and Indonesia over the possible rise of a third China in their midst. The Malays, while indigenous to the region, constituted only a numerical minority that could not politically dominate the new state. Lastly, the Indians suffered the twin
disadvantages of migrant origins and numerical inferiority. As such, the PAP could not base the new nation on a shared cultural heritage (Chua 1996). It could not create a “regime of authenticity” (Duara 2003: 33) by injecting timeless values into the idea of the nation to make it appear “real” and eternal.

Denied myths of shared traditions, the PAP sought other grounds for national existence in “universal” concepts that concurrently transcend and suppress ethnic differences (Chua 1996). These concepts include anti-colonialism, class politics and socialism/communism, and capitalistic economic modernization. Anti-colonialism can serve as a galvanizing force in the quest for independence (The Straits Times 1992). Indonesians read their anti-colonial struggles, for instance, as the presence and expression of the population's collective will, and elevated these endeavors to the level of a founding myth for their country (Yong 1992). Yet, PAP leaders could not utilize this option because Singapore achieved its independence without any revolutions. The British colonizers gave the island its political autonomy voluntarily. As for class politics, the PAP already decimated and tamed the contentious left by 1965 through a series of complicated strategies. These maneuvers included co-opting the trade unions into its own ranks and turned them into staunch anti-communists, and the closing of Nanyang University, the region's only Mandarin-medium institute of higher learning. In particular, this last move deprived left-leaning sympathizers of critical support from radical segments of Chinese university and secondary school students (Barr 2000).

By default, capitalist development became Singapore's sole candidate for its national raison d'être. Singapore's forced departure from Malaysia deprived the country of the anticipated larger Malaysian market, and threatened it with economic collapse. The PAP astutely capitalized on this fear of extinction, and turned it into a galvanizing issue of national survival. Framing the reason for Singapore's existence in economic rather than symbolic terms right from the beginning, Lee Kuan Yew (1962: 83) said, “Political problems ultimately mean the problem of how we make our living, how we can give everyone a fair and equal chance to study and work and have a full life.”
country's economic survival became embodied in the challenges that individual citizens face to earn their livelihood. In turn, progress in material well-being became the criterion by which citizens assessed, defined, and legitimated the PAP regime (Chua 1996).

Conceptually, Singapore turned Gellner (1983) on his head because its nationalism produced industrialization, not the other way round as it is normally conceived of. “In Singapore,” Willmott (1989: 591) observes, “the state preceded the development of nationalism rather than emerging as its political consequences, and the state itself became the first major symbol of national identity.” Curiously, this nationalism does not hark to the past as nationalism usually does, because Singapore has no primordial past to speak of. Rather, it looks towards the future, specifically one where the country secures its economic prosperity. Instability will always trouble this sort of vision. While Singapore achieved modernity, it still retains its geographical vulnerabilities. Years of economic development neither made it significantly bigger in land area nor granted it any more natural resources to develop. Unable to exorcise the specter of national extinction, it remains a nation in perpetual crisis. Consequently, Singaporeans consciously know, perhaps more than anyone else, that modernity is always work-in-progress (Osborne 1995), and that they must continuously strive to maintain their status. Otherwise, they risk slipping into non-modernity or, worse, that liminal, undead-like state between modernity and tradition that Brenner (1998: 14) calls the “unmodern.”

In turn, this fear of national decline justifies the continued use of the crisis discourse, and ultimately reinforces the PAP's political dominance. Heng and Devan (1992: 343) write:

> It is a post-Foucauldian truism that they who successfully define and superintend a crisis, furnish its lexicon and discursive parameters, successfully confirm themselves the owners of power, the administration of crisis operating to revitalize ownership of the instruments of power even as it vindicates the necessity of their use.

Ironically, this same discourse of survival can aid progressive politics, provided that citizens can be persuaded to accept the suggested new element as economically beneficial. When Goh Chok Tong suggested hiring openly gay civil servants, for instance, he reasoned that this move would attract
foreign investments and create more jobs for everyone else (*The Straits Times* 2003b). Using the same logic, other PAP leaders justified the opening of two casinos despite objections from all levels of society, including a number of Members of Parliament.

However, economic accomplishments cannot form a national identity by themselves for the simple and obvious reason that nationhood encompasses far more than mere national wealth. To be fair, economic progress can provide *some* basis for such an identity. Singapore overcame severe physical limitations to become a developed country, and this achievement imbues citizens with a sense of nationalistic pride that emerges during international disputes. When former Indonesian president B. J. Habibie dismissed Singapore disparagingly as a “little red dot” on the map in 1998, for example, Singaporeans rallied against this national insult. However, as Furnivall (1944 [1939]) pointed out, market interests can only provide fickle guarantees of civil peace in Singapore and other plural societies organized for economic production rather than social life. He predicted that because economics ignores the cultural embeddedness of market operations, such societies would eventually crumble under the pressure of inter-ethnic competition. In fact, as a symptom of Lim's great affective divide, citizens already see themselves more as members of their own respective ethnic group rather than as Singaporeans (Chua 1996).

**Doubly Alienated Gay Men**

The great affective divide afflicts all Singaporeans, but gay men suffer a double alienation from the state's criminalization of their sexuality. Before the major legal overhaul in 2007, homosex was an offense chargeable under Sections 377 and 377A of the Penal Code. The two Sections read:

*Section 377 (Unnatural Offences):* Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animals, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment for a term which may extend to 10 years, and shall also be liable to fine.

Explanation: Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence described in this section.
Section 377A (Outrages on Decency): Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or abets the commission of, or procures or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to 2 years (Singapore Statutes Online).

Prosecutors seldom invoked either Sections, but the acts that they could construe as unnatural offences ranged very broadly. Court decisions in the 1990s implied that only vaginal sex was considered natural. Every other sex act, from rape to mutual masturbation, was punishable under 377. Consensual fellatio is legal, but only if it leads to vaginal sex (Leong 1997).

While 377 targeted both straight and gay couples, 377A applied specifically to men. Court cases resulting from police sting operations in the late 1980s and early 1990s gave it precedent to include oral sex between men, mutual masturbation, and touching another man’s genitals. During the worst of these operations carried out in March 1992, the police made eight arrests at the popular cruising grounds at the Tanjong Rhu beach. Reporters from the local tabloid The New Paper, curiously present at the scene at that time, photographed the entire operation. The consequences of the raid went far beyond the S$1,000 fine that each of the eight arrested men received. Of the four men whose incriminating pictures The New Paper published, one committed suicide to expunge his shame (Leong 1995).

377A also enabled the state to harass gay men in other ways. In the moral panic that followed the first official case of HIV/AIDS-related death in 1989, the state attempted to suppress homosexuality on the misguided belief that this would somehow halt the spread of this so-called “gay cancer.” It was believed that state officials forced the closure of a number of gay nightclubs, including the very popular Niche, by refusing to renew their liquor licenses. The nightclub owners could not protest the state’s move, lest the real reason for the clubs’ closure be made publicly known (Heng 2001).

The legal discrimination of homosexuality extends to traditional media. To this day, positive gay and lesbian representations remain strictly suppressed in such media. The Media Development
Authority administers a series of guidelines for both traditional media such as television, and new media such as the Internet. One set of guidelines, the Free-to-Air and Cable TV Program Codes, stipulates that any television programming must be congruent with such national objectives as the observation of societal and moral standards, and the promotion of positive family values. The MDA misleads by using “guidelines” to describe its codes. By definition, “guidelines” are suggestive but not legally binding. Yet, depending on the severity of the violation, any breach of these codes can attract fines ranging from S$1,000 to S$50,000. In October 2006, for example, the MDA charged cable TV provider Starhub Cable Vision for airing an episode of the American reality TV program *Cheaters* that featured footage of women engaging in *ménage à trois* and bondage sex. Although SCV aired the heavily pixilated footage at midnight when most children would have gone to sleep, the MDA still found it guilty of promoting lesbianism and fined it S$10,000 (*The Straits Times* 2006). Consequently, gay men and lesbians only appear in traditional media if they end up dead (through murder, suicide, accidental death, or some other acts of violence), catching HIV, living the rest of their lives sad and alone, or meet some other dire and unpleasant fate.

The media suppresses lesbianism, but the courts never actually convicted lesbians. 377A applies only to men, and the courts only punished men for same-sex acts. This does not, however, legalize lesbianism. In principal, certain lesbian acts are prosecutable under Section 20 of the Miscellaneous Offences (Public Order and Nuisance) Act that punishes, with fines not exceeding S$1000 or imprisonment not exceeding one year, “riotous, disorderly or indecent behavior” in a public setting (Leong 1997). In reality, the impact of the legal omission of lesbianism goes beyond court cases. Leong (1995:14) writes:

> The legal omission of lesbianism amounts to the symbolic annihilation of lesbians: officially, lesbians do not exist in Singapore. Silence, or the absence of discourse on lesbianism, is no better than the legal oppression of male homosexuality: it is representative in itself by way of denying the existence of another form of human sexuality, thought and behavior.

Overall, the anti-sodomy laws render gay Singaporeans into what Richardson (1998) calls “partial
citizens.” State officials oblige all gay citizens to perform duties such as paying taxes, conscription into the military (for the men), and general observation of laws that they also impose on straight Singaporeans. However, gay citizens do not enjoy all the rights and benefits of citizenship that their heterosexual counterparts do.

In 2007, the Ministry of Law updated the legal codes. As part of a set of long-overdue housekeeping changes, it introduced several new laws that curtail marital rape, commercial sex with minors, and paedophiliac predation among other new crimes. Most significantly, it also announced that it would strike down 377 but not 377A (The Straits Times 2007b). This lopsided amendment legalized non-vaginal sex for straight couples but kept it criminalized for gay ones. Perhaps recognizing that the illiberality of this decision severely contradicted their previous promise to open up society to attract foreign professionals (Chris Tan 2009), several key ministers claimed that the government retained 377A only as a symbolic reminder that the PAP still supported the heterosexual orthodoxy, especially the hetero-patriarchal family unit. The ministers promised that they will not actually persecute anyone with the law.

Knowing that the lack of legal backing left the promise vulnerable to reneging in the future, gay rights activists tried to repeal it once and for all. This attempt included two signature-gathering campaigns (one online and one offline), and pro-repeal apologies from both a university law don and the Law Society of Singapore itself. Conservatives, consisting of clamorous Christians and less agitated Muslims, responded by launching their own anti-repeal campaign. Ultimately, politicians denied the repeal on the grounds that homosexuality remained too socially divisive an issue for them to legalize. The vociferous exchange between the pro-repeal and anti-repeal camps threatened to boil over and polarize society along religious lines. Fortunately, some good news did emerge from the debate. The Prime Minister himself reassured gay men that he would let them be, as they “are our kith and kin” and “we shouldn't make it any harder than it already is for them to grow up and live” in Singapore (The Straits Times 2007c).
Conceptually, the repeal campaign presents a case that contradicts previous observations made on the political passiveness of Singaporeans. Political participants are typically classified as either “active” or “passive.” As the former, they keep themselves politically informed (usually via the media), but their participation is usually limited to voting in elections. A small number also join civic and/or political groups and voice their grievances directly to the authorities (Painter 1992). Although only vocal citizens appear to participate actively, political participation involves both the vociferous and the muted. As Lee (2002) reminds us, even when one does not vocalize her thoughts, she still participates actively by acquiescing in a less confrontational manner. A citizen participates either in the role and method of decision-making, or complicitley abides by a decision already made (Pateman 1970). Real passive political participation does not exist.

Pateman (1970) further theorizes three levels of political participation: “pseudo,” “partial,” and “full.” She restricts pseudo participation to such processes as informing about and endorsing a pre-determined decision. No participation in the decision-making process actually occurs, but a feeling of participation is nevertheless created through such “technique[s] of persuasion” as public relations practices (Pateman 1970: 69). In partial participation, the individual exercises influence by voicing her opinions, but the political elites still reserve the final power and authority to make the decisions. In the last model of full participation, each member in a decision-making body is invested with equal power to determine the outcome of decisions.

The model of full participation does not work in Singapore, because it smacks too much of the idea of Western liberalism and the associated push for democratic and human rights. With their ambivalent attitude towards political participation and active citizenship, PAP leaders will not allow full participation to occur. Rather, the pseudo and partial participatory models appear to hold more meaning in the current discussion of civil society. The informal compact between citizen and state, where the citizen cedes her rights to question political decisions for material well-being, and the campaign to repeal 377A illustrate each of the two models respectively. In the case of the campaign,
advocates from both sides of the debate could only petition politicians and appeal to their sense of what is right. The privilege of making the final decision remained with the Prime Minister.

The apologias that the law don makes deserve some attention. The don, Michael Hor (2007, 2010), asserts that homosex ought to be legalized as it harms nobody. Furthermore, 377A's retention does not even benefit those seeking its preservation. As long as the law remains unenforced, gay men will persist in having homosex and offend these advocates. These advocates' arguments that the repeal imposes an unwelcomed pro-gay sentiment onto them and restricts their freedom of religion also do not hold. Rather, by insisting that Christianity and Islam must be anti-gay, they infringe upon the same freedom of their more numerous moderate brethren who think otherwise. In fact, 377A's retention likely violates the constitutional norm against unjustified discrimination. The two aspects of equality, conveniently called “fit” and “weight,” determines the constitutionality of any piece of legislature. To “fit,” a law must make sense (albeit not necessarily perfectly) in the way it classifies people or activities for attention. As for “weight,” the issue at hand must be serious enough to deserve that focus. 377A's retention fares badly on both measures. The law does not “fit,” as it targets only male homosex. If the law reflects an antipathy towards homosex in general, why does it not include women? After all, women make up fully half of the population and, presumably, half of all homosex as well. Neither does the retention carry sufficient “weight.” The appeasement of the sectarian sensibilities of any one social segment cannot justify the criminalization of private, consensual sex between two adults. If it did, it would throw into disrepute the constitutionally enshrined right to equal protection before the law.

The fact that the state preserved 377A in spite of its constitutional problems raises intriguing questions about the PAP's collective feelings towards homosexuality. As a party famous both locally and globally for running an efficient government, why does it willingly tolerate the legal untidiness of retaining a law it promised not to enforce? Why does it risk derailing its own plans to transform Singapore into a global city? Second-tier cities that aspire to become first-tier ones must at least put
up a gay-friendly and liberal façade to attract professional labor. By rejecting this “me-too-ism” of this global jostling for economic supremacy (Bell and Binnie 2004: 1814), Singapore risks falling behind in the race. Lastly, all three of the country's Prime Ministers indicated their willingness to legalize homosexuality at one point or another. Lee Kuan Yew (1959 – 1990) said in 2007 that the state has no interest acting as morality police even as it pays heed to society's concerns (The Straits Times 2007a). Goh Chok Tong (1990 – 2004) declared in 2003 that he welcomed openly gay men and lesbians in the civil service (The Straits Times 2003a). The current Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong (2004 – ), has yet to make a public statement similar to his two predecessors'. Yet, judging from his appeal to adopt a live-and-let-live attitude towards gay men and lesbians, he clearly also favors the decriminalization of homosexuality.

Assuming that the younger Lee does speak for the entire government, his reluctance begs the question: what stopped him from repealing 377A? According to my field informant Alex, a veteran gay rights activist and long-time political observer, internal divisions based on (il)liberal beliefs fracture the PAP despite its seemingly united public front. Lee must first purge the party of its conservative, and likely fundamentalist, Christian elements before he can truly exercise his will:

Lee Hsien Loong likely knows that homosexuality must be legalized sooner or later, but the short time between the repeal campaign and his appointment as Prime Minister did not give him enough time to consolidate his influence. He still did not have the power to remove the old dinosaurs from the PAP.

Unlike Alex, Sanders (2009) speculates Lee's denial as a stop-gap measure. Lee must know that if 377A were repealed, activists would exploit it immediately to campaign for equal employment opportunities for gay men and lesbians, gay marriage, gay adoption, and other even more socially contentious issues. By keeping 377A, he kept the floodgates closed and prevented these subsequent issues from surfacing.

Empirically, my fieldwork informants responded to the repeal attempt differently. When I asked them whether they thought the attempt justified the effort spent on it, the vast majority replied
positively despite its failure. Many of them knew right from the start that it had little real chance of actually succeeding. Rather, its efficacy laid elsewhere. Prior to 2007, most Singaporeans hardly even knew 377A existed as it afflicted only gay men. In Alex's words, it belonged to the "graveyard section of the Penal Code." By crystalizing its inequality and injustice for all to see, the attempt enabled all citizens to engage in the nation-building process. As one gay consultant put it, 377A's existence means "that your own people are against you, so it makes you question. After all my patriotism, what is it for? What I'm doing for these people, is it worth it?" Alex echoed this sentiment: "The campaign forced those gay men who had been sitting on the fence to declare their position." Another consultant, Yangfa, also ruminated:

[The attempt] was a course that we had to go through. It was a necessary evil. We had to go through that ... as a country, as a legislative process. We had to go through that process of questioning our laws. It would have been a miracle if it was repealed with minimal discussion ... What impressed me, what I really appreciated was the fact that it drew so much attention. There was a lot of media coverage. There was a lot of opportunities for people to air their views on both sides, and that itself was a milestone. A different way things might have turned out was that it was discussed all behind closed doors, and the media didn't report on it, and it happened within a matter of days. But it didn't happen within a matter of days. It was a matter of weeks, months if I was not wrong. The fact that it was talked about, I mean that in itself was wonderful!

Paradoxically, three of my consultants objected even though it would have legalized their sexuality had it succeeded. One of them saw no point in supporting it:

I don't think [the attempt] was necessary. To me, I just find it that ... I don't know why people are kicking such a big fuss. We know that [the repeal is] not going to happen ... I don't see the purpose of the [petitions]. Like I said, [the repeal] won't happen, so why sign it? I don't need to say I'm gay and I'm pro-whatever. Just let me run my own life. That's it.

Another one opposed because he saw the attempt as too socially disruptive:

I'm a very practical person. I think all these movements, it will come as society evolves. Don't push it too hard, because if you push it, you may get a negative effect ... you may get the reverse effect. So just let it be. I think the best movement is to do it subtly, through education, through the arts, through soft-sell. Ten years later, you can be sure that the attitude
will change. Rather than all these waving pink banners and marching down the street. It just irritates people and has a negative effect.

These three informants form only a minority in my consultant pool, but they appear to represent a larger population of silent but politically conservative or even apathetic gay men. As the debate over the possible legalization of homosexuality raged, *The Straits Times* (2007d) published the following letter from such a gay man:

I live my life *discreetly* and I am happy to have been able to do so without any legal interference pertaining to my homosexuality for the past 30 years. Singapore is a good place for a gay man to live in, as long as one understands the social contract involved and respects the mainstream's wish to have the traditional family unit as the social norm (my emphasis).

“Discreet” usually means “closeted” in the local lingo, and those who desire discreetness often justify their political conformity in terms of communitarian values. They object to such behavior, in the words of the above consultant who abhors social disruptions, as “waving pink banners and marching down the street” that draws attention to themselves and threatens social cohesion. Other, more astute consultants, see discreetness as homonormativity at work. They assert that gay men trade in their intangible human rights for material well-being. Yangfa told me:

When I went to the gay bars to get people to sign the off-line petition, I kept meeting these people who refused because they are civil servants, and that signing would identify them as gay and jeopardize their jobs. They made me so angry! I really wanted to give them a tight slap and tell them to wake the fuck up!

The fear of state retaliation was unfounded, because the pro-repeal campaigners were not punished. Writing as an academic, one informant (Heng 2004: 73 – 4) traces gay political conformity to a fear of state reprisals against unruly activism:

Criticism against Singapore's gay activists does not only come from conservative forces outside the gay community. There are gay Singaporeans who are also against political activism ... Those rejecting activism argue that being confrontational (read Western) rather
than consensual (read Asian) will only bring down the wrath of the state on the gay community and lead to the reimposition of restrictions on gay social and commercial activities. For these people, it is enough that the Singaporean gay community can enjoy a vibrant gay scene where many forms of recreation, which used to be available only in the West, are allowed, e.g. gay saunas, films and plays with gay themes, etc. They hold the view that these facilities are what count rather than abstract Western notions of gay rights. They are concerned that gay activists risk jeopardizing all these precious new gains by being political.

Another consultant observed that homonormativity commonly afflicts working adults in their 30s or older, but not younger gay men:

My own view with the whole decriminalization and the whole issue of gay rights in Singapore is this: that you cannot divorce what a gay Singaporean feels from his Singaporean identity or his Singaporean psyche. And his Singaporean psyche has always been, you know, I'm here and I put a lot of value to stability, economic success and blah, blah, blah, and less to the political and the more intangible things. Which is why you see Singaporeans, especially my generation. I'm not talking about the younger generation. The younger generation is very different, but up to now, we're talking about gay people who are in their 30s and above. I think they have always been very, very pragmatic. They've always said, “As long as I have a great job here, great standard of living. I can still have parties, I can still have sex, I can still travel overseas for sex. There's shopping, there are friends, there's family. I don't really care about gay rights, because I have all these material trappings.” And Singaporeans have always been like that. You don't have to talk about gay rights. You can talk to them about freedom of expression and they'll say the same thing: “I don't want to die for freedom of expression. I don't want to have a volatile society, and I don't want to have a disjointed parliament that can't pass its laws and run society efficiently, just for freedom of expression.” You'll find that a lot of people will gladly trade away intangibles like freedom of expression, human rights, gay rights, equality, for things like these. And that has been the psyche of Singaporeans all the way.

The majority of my informants are in their 30s and older, so I cannot verify whether political apathy really affects younger gay men less as this last consultant observes. However, one of my informants, Nick, was in his early 20s when I interviewed him. Nick expressed a positive hope for the future when I asked him to articulate his feelings towards Singapore. He advocated for gay men and lesbians to come out of the closet, despite the potential of a conservative backlash, because they would set off what he calls a “ripple effect.” “Out” gay men and lesbians change the views of the people around them. These surrounding people would, in turn, change how their own colleagues, friends, and relatives perceive homosexuality. This would eventually normalize homosexuality by
That's why I always say that change in Singapore is all about the grassroots ... It's all about the grassroots. Change in Singapore will only happen when we, as gay Singaporeans, are able to affect a critical mass of people. That's the only way we can hope for change ... The government in Singapore is hierarchical. There are people in power ... who have a fundamentalist Christian background, and it's people like these who are stopping change ... Instead of using this battering ram and try to ram things in, we ought to adopt a more outreach mode ... to wear down resistance like water does stone. I believe we shouldn't start at the top. We should start the bottom, you know, where the majority of Singaporeans are ... Singaporeans will say, “Ah, I'm just one person. What difference do I make?” But like I said, you as an individual, being openly out as a gay person, project a normalized image of what gay people should be and in that sense, break stereotypes because that shifts the image [of homosexuality] from that [portrayed in the] media.

In effect, Nick called for more socially engaged gay citizens to actively change societal perceptions of homosexuality rather than let state officials and the media dictate their behavior through murky OB markers and bad stereotyping. He knows that a direct confrontation with the state will only result in the state unleashing the police and other state apparatuses of coercion to enforce its order. Protesters will be hauled to the police station as criminals nobody should publicly associate with. By coming out and showing that gay men and lesbians behave just like everyone else does, Nick challenges common stereotypes of gay people as immoral perverts. Subsequently, when enough Singaporeans agree that gay people are just like everyone else, they can repeal 377A and bring about equality through popular consensus. Nick's social activism helps counteract the apathy of the great affective divide.

**Grassroots Citizenship Processes**

Nick's non-confrontational call for social activism echoes the goals of other gay rights activists. These activists realize that they can best affect political change by invoking the idea of the communal in their work. Before I conclude this chapter, I shall ethnographically examine two recent attempts to highlight the presence of gay citizens by these activists. One focused on the liberal idea of gay rights as individual rights, while the other enmeshed gay men and lesbians as part
of the larger social network of the extended family. Their success (or lack thereof) illustrates what works in Singapore and what does not.

The first attempt took place in 2010 during the annual Chingay parade in February. First organized in Singapore in 1973 to enliven a Chinese New Year festive mood dampened by the state ban on firecrackers the year before, Chingay has unclear historical origins. The official Chingay web site explains the etymology of its name:

There is no historical record of how the word “Chingay” originated. But records show that as early as the 19th century, Chingay appeared in South East Asia, beginning in Penang. The word was coined from its phonetic Hokkien equivalent, which means “the art of costume and masquerade”. It alluded to a Chinese styled decorated miniature stage or float borne on the shoulders of performers. This miniature stage depicts an important historical scene. It was probably the beginning of the manual float. During New Year processions in old China, such floats were carried through the streets on men's shoulders while dancers, jugglers and magicians entertained the crowds. Huge animals, both real and mythical took part in the processions, which were essentially religious in nature and aimed at honouring deities at the beginning of each new year.

In Singapore, what started out initially as a procession of decorated floats, acrobats, lion and dragon dancers, and other Chinese cultural performers became an extravagant multi-cultural event that included local Malay and Indian performance groups, as well as foreign ones hailing as far away as Brazil. Indeed, Chingay now attracts so many spectators that there are two parades each year, i.e. a preview that is not telecast live to viewers at home, and the actual parade that is. In 2010, organizers departed from the practices of previous parades and allowed impromptu participation in the samba contingent. Would-be participants needed only to register just a few hours before the parade. The organizers sold and rented out costumes to those who did not come suitably dressed, and they also provided basic instructions in samba. Taking advantage of this invitation, a local Chinese gay rights activist suggested organizing a gay and lesbian contingent to, in his own words, “put the 'gay' back into Chingay.” He tried to garner support by promoting his American-style pride parade as a fun but non-political event, despite my warning that other Singaporeans would never see it as such. As long as the state remains vested in policing sexuality, nothing sexual can ever be apolitical (cf. Hubbard
and Sanders 2003).

The activist opted to go to the preview parade, but only he and his Australian-Chinese friend showed up. They chose the preview, as the friend had to fly back home the next day when the actual parade occurred. Both the preview and the actual parade were held at the Pit Building of the Formula One Grand Prix race tracks at Marina Bay. In a video recording that he later uploaded onto the popular social media site Youtube (Tan 2010), the activist can be seen wearing a completely pink outfit and a brightly sequinned vest. In contrast, his friend donned a tight pair of shorts (but no shirts) to better show off his sculpted torso, wrapped a pink boa around his waist and another one around his head like a feathery tiara, and hung a pair of pink angel wings from his neck. As the clip starts, the friend comments he feels out of place, possibly because he knows that his loud, campy outfit does not quite match the costumes the other samba dancers are wearing. The sartorial mismatch does not deter him. Throughout the first half of the seven minute-long recording, he adds to the parade's already-carnivalesque atmosphere by vigorously waving a rainbow flag on a ten-foot pole. Near the middle, he grows tired of the flag-waving and the Singaporean took over. In the last minute, the Singaporean is still seen dancing joyously with the rest of the samba dancers. Here, however, the parade announcer spots the two men and can be heard declaring: “And now ladies and gentlemen, members of the public and tourists who had just registered on the spot this evening to join the parade. Looking at them dancing away! Chingay is indeed a parade for everyone! (emphasis in original)"

The two activists should be commended for their courage and tenacity in the face of no support. Nevertheless, their Chingay foray still failed completely, mainly because they ignored the Singaporean aversion to assertive politics. By insisting on an avenue that many associate with the vociferous demands for individual rights more commonly found in Euro-America, they undermined themselves right from the start. As for the pride parade itself, it could not subvert as it happened only with the state's sanction. Furthermore, the activists barely stood out from the riot of colors that
surrounded them. As Yasser, a field informant, reminded me after he watched the clip:

Their outfits looked drab in comparison and their rainbow flag means little to Singaporeans. Had I not known any better, I'd have thought of them as regular marchers who marked the end of the samba contingent.

To me, the parade itself also failed as a gesture of inclusiveness and solidarity, as the two activists could not possibly represent the size nor the ethnic, class, gender, sexual, and somatic diversity of the local LGBT population. The fact that they went to the non-televised preview parade further limited public knowledge of what their deed. The Australian activist discredited the parade even more. Born and raised in Singapore, he revealed earlier that he migrated to escape the country's lack of political freedoms. If he were truly interested in advancing gay equality in Singapore, should he not have stayed? It seems, after all, far easier to criticize authoritarian Singapore from Australia, where others already cleared the way for the socio-political inclusion of gay men and lesbians. The Chingay announcer made the last critique. How else could he explain the rainbow flag except by casting its bearers as tourists? Surely, no sane Singaporean would wave such a flag in such a public event when everybody knows of the illegality of homosexuality. As far as the announcer caught the audience's attention, he achieved more solidarity than the activists could by discursively stripping the Singaporean of his nationality and declaring that “Chingay is indeed a parade for everyone,” even bothersome trouble-making tourists.

Despite the parade's failure, I do not equate it with non-productivity. Altman (1996a, 1996b) controversially posits that non-Western gay and lesbian identities came into existence as copies of Euro-American originals through the globalization of Western consumer culture. The two activists unwittingly replicated this “global gay” thesis through their uncritical attempt to unmoor the pride parade from its cultural coordinates and transplant it in Singapore. Ironically, the parade's failure productively substantiates the critiques that Boellstof (2005), Sinnott (2004), and others launched against Altman and his Eurocentric telos. Western theories of sexuality inspire men and women with
same-sex desires in the non-West, but any accurate account of same-sex identities outside Euro-America must factor in local cultural conditions.

The second attempt, called Pink Dot, produced far better results. First organized in 2009 at Hong Lim Park, Pink Dot invites Singaporeans to gather and form (as its name suggests) a giant human pink dot to celebrate the idea that love transcends all limits. Accordingly, the theme in 2009 was “Freedom to Love.” To his credit, the activist who put together the failed Chingay pride parade also came up with the Pink Dot idea. Thankfully, the other activists involved in the event's organization quickly adapted the message to suit the local communitarian ideals. They cast gay men and lesbians not as loathsome, fearful sex predators but as living, breathing members of one's own family. They also deliberately framed Pink Dot not as a protest or a demonstration, but as a multi-cultural event open to Singaporeans of all races and sexual orientations. For instance, they held Pink Dot 2010 on the International Day of Families on 15 May to match the theme of “Focusing on Our Families.” This strategy of inclusivity worked. In 2009, Pink Dot attracted 2,500 participants. A year later, that number jumped to an estimated 4,000.

The second Pink Dot coincided with the end of the school year for me in 2010, so I signed up when the organizers called for volunteers. However, I nearly did not go, as I did not have a pleasant flight home. Technical difficulties delayed the flight from Chicago for six hours, and I had to rush through customs to get to my connecting flight in Hong Kong. When I finally arrived in Singapore at 3 am the day of Pink Dot itself, I was quickly reminded that I was no longer in more polite Illinois by an off-duty air stewardess who cut my queue at the ATM. Fortunately, I was not at all sleepy and grouchy despite my 24-hour flight home. I learned from previous trans-Pacific flights that I must sleep in the plane, with sleep-inducing medicine if necessary. I got a sore bum as a result from all that sitting, but I knew I would stay awake until 10 pm or so that night. Still, I would much rather hang out later with friends whom I had not seen for almost nine months, than go to Hong Lim Park in the afternoon. Later that day, I called up Gary to inform him of my decision, as I signed up
through The Bear Project's Facebook page that he administered.

Gary would not have it, so I found myself in a pink t-shirt at Hong Lim Park at the stipulated time of 3 pm. The weather that day was typical of May – overcast, but hot and humid. The cooling rainy season would only start a month later when monsoons began drenching the island. For now, whatever wind there was did not dissipate the heat so much as spread it around more evenly. As expected, Gary had not arrived. He was almost never punctual for any social event. He had to wait for his long-time boyfriend Kenneth to get ready, and Kenneth's sense of timing was rubber band-like at best. However, the Pink Dot organizers were already there, and preparatory work had begun. Tents were set up, while the volunteers busied themselves with either propping up static displays in the ground, or going to the nearby hawker center to buy ice and cold drinks. An hour later,
volunteers had arrived in sufficient numbers – including Gary and Kenneth at 3.45 pm – that one of the organizers gathered all of us for a briefing. He divided us into three groups. He tasked the first group to set up balloons and other decorations, and the second and third group to delineate the dot and to do crowd control respectively. Gary and Kenneth joined the second group, and I the second.

Some more ice and cold drinks later, another organizer came to brief the second and third group. A stage director by profession, he told us that we would form two shapes that day, a heart and the dot itself. He instructed those in the second group to hold up banners to mark out the required shape according to positions already designated on the ground, and those in the third group to usher event-attendees into the shape to fill it up. After each shape was formed, aerial pictures would be taken from a hotel room nearby. This room was on the top floor and it faced the park from across the road. We conducted a brief rehearsal before he dismissed us. We would not be needed again later when it was time to form the two shapes. Wanting to escape from the miserable afternoon heat, those of us from The Bear Project adjourned to a nearby air-conditioned cafetaria for yet more ice and cold drinks.

When we got back to the park at about 5 pm, I was tasked to distribute buttons and hand-held fans printed with pictures of Pink Dot's furry anti-mascots “Fear” and “Ignorance,” and the message “Love 4 All” (Figure 12). Moving among the crowd, I noticed that the park's normally green field was awash in a sea of pink – pink t-shirts, pink shorts, pink socks and shoes, pink balloons, pink groundsheets, pink paper plates, cupcakes with pink icing, pink radios, two dogs with pink-dyed fur, and even two famous local theatre directors who came as pinkly attired drag queens. The turn-out reflected, in part, Pink Dot's intended target audience. Critics later pointed out that the participants were overwhelming Chinese and English-speaking. Organizers would do well in the future, these critics remarked, to bridge the ethnic and class gaps by reaching out to the ethnic minorities, Chinese gay men and lesbians who speak mainly Mandarin, and the transgendered people who feel that Pink Dot was more about gay rights than sexual diversity. Of the gay men who did go
to Pink Dot, they represented the somatic spectrum very well. In the sea of pink, gym-trained jocks jostled for space with skinny twinks and fat chubs. Lesbians also showed up in large numbers, even though my untrained gay male gaze could only differentiate the butch ones from the femme and the androgynous.

A circular clearing opened up in the park's center. There, two men and a woman identified themselves as the event's ambassadors. These three, two straight theatre and television actors and a gay DJ, kicked off Pink Dot proper by introducing the invited performance groups. The impressive line-up included a Malay *dikir barat* singing group, classical Indian *bharatanatyam* dancers clad in eye-catching pink and purple saris, and a more contemporary dance group. A video clip featuring

Figure 12: The five types of buttons handed out at Pink Dot 2010 (Source: Author)

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Eileena Lee, a well-known lesbian activist, and her mother was also screened in between the performances. In the clip, Eileena talked about her coming out experience with her mother to encourage others to do the same. Not only did Mrs Lee embrace Eileena's sexuality, she did so despite her being Christian and Eileena being Buddhist. In a country where gay men and lesbians regard Christians warily as the shrillest homophobic voices tend to come from the conservative Christian quarters, Mrs Lee's acceptance showed that close family ties could overcome religiously induced prejudice.

At 6 pm, the MCs asked the crowd to get ready to form the pink heart and dot. The director whom we met earlier climbed up a ladder placed firmly on several tables in the performance area, and calling out instructions on a loudhailer to fill up each shape more evenly. Although the heart
and dot looked simple enough, it took more time than expected to get the banner-bearing volunteers to demarcate each shape properly and the crowd to fill in the space within. There was a real danger that the sun would set before the official photographers could take pictures of the pink heart and dot after they had been formed. Working quickly, the usher-volunteers molded the crowd as directly, and we managed to form both shapes in time (Fig. 12). Overjoyed that Pink Dot had accomplished its goals, the crowd clapped and cheered. After cleaning up the area of any litter we could find, the volunteers joined the dispersing crowd and went to a nearby mall for a much-deserved dinner.

Strong symbolic meaning saturates Pink Dot. Historically, Hitler's purging of German queers already associated the color pink with homosexuality. More importantly in this case, the color also results from the combination of the red and the white of Singapore's national flag. As such, pink symbolically re-inserts gay men back into the center of the Singaporean nation when Section 377A banishes them to society's margins. The name “Pink Dot” further strengthens this nationalizing sentiment, because it reminds Singaporeans of how they transmuted the “little red dot” insult former Indonesian President B. J. Habibie hurled against them into a badge of national pride. The site of the event, Hong Lim Park, also poses some significance. Located in Chinatown, the park is one of Singapore's earliest gay cruising grounds. According to my field consultants, gay men began cruising there as late as the 1980s. Even after younger cruising gay men gradually moved southwest to an area of derelict shophouses nicknamed Jurassic Park (now demolished and occupied by China Square), to Ann Siang Hill further west, and eventually online onto the Internet, older gay men in their fifties and above still use the park as such. Politically, not only did the park used to host speeches and rallies in the 1950s and 1960s, the state-sanctioned Speakers' Corner is also located there. Modeled after the more famous Speakers' Corner in London's Hyde Park, the Hong Lim Park version opened in 2000. It provides a rare public space for free speech and demonstrations in a country where the government usually treats such behavior with great scrutiny and distrust.

Indeed, as an indication of the PAP's distrust of active citizenship, the state originally made
the Speakers' Corner highly unsuitable for its intended purpose. For instance, speakers must first register their intention (although not their topics) with officers at a nearby police post. They could also only make speeches, without the aid of sound-amplifiers, between 7 am and 7 pm. Trees only shade the park along its edges, so the timing deterred would-be speakers from using the unshaded Corner, or going there to listen to others. Even at 7 pm, the park would still be uncomfortably warm from the day's residual heat. Over the years, however, the rules that govern the Speakers' Corner were relaxed such that would-be speakers can now register online with the Commissioner of Parks and Recreation. They can also hold events at any hour of the day, and use loudhailers and other sound-amplification devices from 9 am to 10.30 pm. The list of permitted activities had also been expanded to include exhibitions, performances, and even demonstrations (provided that the demonstrators are all citizens and permanent residents). Clearly, were these rules not loosened, Pink Dot would not have been possible at all. Hence, the genius of Pink Dot does not lie in the discovery of some exploitable legal loophole, but rather in how the organizers achieved so much by working within the restrictions that they face. To date, Pink Dot 2010 holds the record for having the largest attendance in any event ever held at the Speakers' Corner. As one organizer put it, “The government opened the door just a little, and we kicked it open all the way!”

Conclusion

In this chapter, I compared the idea of liberal citizenship with its Confucian counterpart. Although the two appear incompatible with each other at first glance, their difference lies largely in the social embeddedness of human rights. To liberal political thinkers, a person is automatically bestowed these rights by virtue of her being her own thinking, autonomous creature. Membership in a nation bestows more rights, but certain rights are guaranteed regardless of political association. In contrast, Confucianists only accord rights to citizens as members of larger communities. They do not recognize socially disengaged rights. Beyond this fundamental irreconcilable difference, other
philosophical contentions such as power, equality and creativity can be more or less resolved.

In the 1990s, the philosophical opposition between liberalism and Confucianism surfaced again as the so-called “Asian Values” debate. In a bid to explain the spectacular rise of certain East and Southeast Asian economies a decade earlier, intellectuals from Asia, Europe and the United States attributed these successes to social values either supposedly unique to Asia, or translated from Western bourgeois culture. As an extension of the post-WWII ideological conflict between democracy and communism, the resulting debate witnessed Asian proponents accusing their liberal Western counterparts of arrogantly refusing to acknowledge modernities alternative to the Western ones. In turn, these Western intellectuals accused them of supporting authoritarian rule in the name of collective interests.

In Singapore, the accusations of illiberal governance hold some truth. Unwilling to have its policies questioned by its citizens, the state discursively constructs itself as the father in relation to the infantilized citizenry. This unequal relationship benefits the citizens materially, but the lack of full political participation alienates them from the PAP. Insofar as Singaporeans cannot differentiate the political party from Singapore as a country and a nation, this “great affective divide” inhibits the real expression of patriotism. Gay men are doubly alienated, firstly as Singaporeans and, secondly, by the criminalization of their sexuality. However, dissatisfaction and anger over their marginal social positions led some gay rights activists to challenge the status quo and, in the process, engage gay men and lesbians in the bigger nation-building project.

To date, those activists who achieved at least a modicum of success did so because they realized they must work according to Singapore's communitarian ideals that, among other things, grant a healthy dose of respect to the authorities. Those who propound individualism-based rights claims or openly challenge the state's authority will likely face failure or, worse, time in the police station and possibly even behind bars. The three examples of the public campaign to repeal Section 377A, the gay pride parade during Chingay, and Pink Dot substantiates this argument very clearly.
More importantly, both the public campaign and Pink Dot demonstrate that gay rights can be advanced even in a country with an authoritarian government like Singapore. Confucianism and communitarianism do not always retard socially progressive politics as liberals think they do!

In the next and last main chapter of this dissertation, I shift my focus to examine how gay men cope with state demands on their sexuality in their everyday lives. Moving away from the level of the organization to that of the individual, I shall examine gay men's quotidian strategies in the two main spaces of nation-building in the home and in the military.
Chapter 5: Being Good at Being a Chinese-Singaporean Man

In Glendiot idiom, there is less focus on “being a good man” than on “being good at being a man” – a stance that stresses performative excellence, the ability to foreground manhood by means of deeds that strikingly “speak for themselves” (Herzfeld 1985: 16, emphasis in original).

The personal is political (Hanisch 1976 [1969]).

Introduction – Some Basic Definitions

In this chapter, I turn to individual gay men to see how they understand their homosexuality and their relationships with the seemingly monolithic state in their everyday lives. What do these men understand by the identity label “gay”? What culturally meaningful strategies do these men use to negotiate their sexuality and their relationships with the state, and to evade familial and state surveillance of their sexuality? I begin by defining the basic categories “male” and “man,” after which I discuss the meta-concepts of “hegemonic masculinities” and “subordinated masculinities” that frame cross-cultural studies of manhood. Next, I briefly explore the notion of gender performance, before I apply the above theories to analyze the everyday lives of gay men. I assert that while these men enact global gay discourses by referring to themselves as “gay,” reading Singaporean gay culture as an offshoot of the Euro-American original only produces a superficial interpretation. Many gay men do not “come out,” despite the central importance of this ritual in the modern gay identity, ultimately to avoid straining familial ties. While this does not mean that gay men cannot come out, those who do so successfully must perform other aspects of their masculinity to such high degrees as to deflect the social stigma arising from their sexuality.

I begin by first defining what I mean by “male” and “man.” I define “male” and its “female” counterpart according to one's reproductive anatomical differences. This biological definition seems commonsensical (Geertz 1983), especially we compare it with other socially constructed categories of difference such as “gender” and “sexuality” (Foucault 1990; Ortner 1974). Like all systems of common sense, however, this definition too stems from a social constructivist perspective.
transgendering people undergo sex re-assignment operations, they expose the artificiality that basic biological categories of “male” and “female” share with “gender” and “sexuality.” Nevertheless, I continue to use “male” in its commonsensical definition, because most people understand it this way. As a male, an individual learns to identify himself as not only a biological male, but also, depending on age, as either a “boy” or a “man” (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). In this light, the category “male” differs from that of “man.” Typically, biological males become men to claim the rights and privileges of membership in the dominant gender group. To do so successfully, a male individual must present a convincing masculinizing act that requires a set of conventional signifying practices that establishes and upholds the identity “man.” Butler (1990, 1993) calls this performance of the “man” identity the oft-unconscious repetition of acts that indexes one's manhood. Herzfeld (1985) also recognizes this performatve aspect, as one can see from his oft-quoted statement that I reproduced above.

Having a male body aids in the performance of masculinity, since the possession of such a body normally qualifies the owner for membership in the category “man.” Yet, membership does not always require such a body, as women demonstrate when they bind their breasts and mask their secondary sex characteristics. Neither will simply having such a body satisfy all the membership requirements. Biological males can still fail to become full-fledged men if they cannot muster the other masculinizing signifiers (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). The fact that males can fail highlights the inherent contested nature of the masculinization process. As Hanisch (1976 [1969]) famously observes in the epigraph I reproduced at the start of this chapter, “the personal is political.”

This contestation prompts the following questions: What counts as a masculinizing signifier, and what do males do after they became men? The anthropological record of masculinity offers a diverse range of answers. Anthropologists define and use the concept of masculinity and the related notions of male identity, manhood, manliness and men's roles in at least four ways (Gutmann 1997). The first approach locates masculinity in what men think and do. The second incorporates the
element of performance by reading masculinity as the thoughts and acts that signify one's manhood. The third considers how and why some men emerge from this performance as more “manly” than others. The last approach emphasizes the social centrality of male-female relationships and defines masculinity in terms of non-femininity. Using these various frameworks, anthropologists document meanings of masculinity that differ in social domains as diverse as kinship and marriage (Lomnitz and Pérez-Lizaur 1987; Peletz 1996), fatherhood (Gutmann 1996; Taggart 1992), the body (Alter 1992; Reddy 2005), male friendships (Brandes 1980; Tiger 1969), same-sex sexuality (Herdt 1981; Kulick 1998), heterosexual desire (Allison 1994; Frank 2002), male initiation rites (Godelier 1986), warfare (Chagnon 1968), diasporic life (Manalansan 2003), domestic violence (Bourgois 1995), and men’s relationships with women (Delaney 1991; Sacks 1979).

The above studies all provide insights into the construction of masculinity across different cultural systems, but their cultural specificities presents an issue of commensurability. For example, do anthropological inquiries into the masculinity of the Indian *sannyasi* wrestler (Alter 1992) inform similar work on the masculinities of the “warlike” Yanomamö (Chagnon 1968), the US strip club patron (Frank 2002), the “macho” Mexican (Gutmann 1996), or the Brazilian transgendered *travesti* prostitute (Kulick 1998)? How does my own study of Singaporean gay masculinities fit into this complex constellation of male images and behavioral codes? Gilmore (1990) acknowledges the issue of cross-cultural commensurability in his influential study where he produces a seemingly universal set of core masculine attributes that includes discipline and self-direction. In the end, even he fails to formulate a definitive theory of universal masculinity, as too many variations exist along the cross-cultural continuum of male images and codes. Herdt and Stoller (1990: 352 – 3) encounter the same difficulty in their comparison of male-female erotics: “[f]or the study of erotics and gender identity, cross-cultural data are still too impoverished and decontextualized to truly compare masculinity and femininity, sexual excitement, and fantasy constructs of people from different cultures.” What meta-concepts can I then deploy to better frame my studies of masculinity?
Males, Men and Masculinizing Acts

Among sociologists, Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985) made “hegemonic masculinity” the organizing framework for the study of men and masculinity in their landmark paper “Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity.” Positing masculinity as a hierarchy, they argue that in any given society, certain forms of masculinity that they call “hegemonic” command more social prestige than others. Multiple forms of hegemonic masculinity can exist concurrently. For instance, the masculinities of the soldier, the sports star, and the country's president enjoy hegemonic status in present-day US discourses. These masculinities all center on one's capacity to assert control while resisting control by others (Johnson 2005). Yet, what counts as hegemonic changes over time. For example, the ideal of Chinese masculine beauty changes synchronically and relatively to fluctuations in the importance of physical activities. Men of the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907 CE) “cultivated a virile, even martial appearance. They liked thick beards, whiskers and long mustaches and admired bodily strength. Both civilian and military officials practised archery, riding, sword fighting and boxing, and proficiency in these arts was highly praised” (van Gulik 1974: 188). By the Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1912 CE), the masculinity of the effeminate and physically frail scholar became idealized. Then, the non-Chinese Manchus' conquest of China led the Chinese to reject physical strength and military prowess for their associations with these foreign “barbaric” invaders (Wu 2004).

What counts as effective means to attain the hegemonic ideals also varies according to the individual's biological sex, age, ethnicity, class, and other social backgrounds. When women vie for positions of power in politics, commodity-trading, and other traditionally men-dominated domains, they must often compensate for their lack of male bodies. They must “out-macho the boys,” so to speak, by exerting more effort in their masculinizing performances (Zaloom 2006). Even among men, the same means can produce different results when inflected by one's social backgrounds. For example, aggression is considered a conventional masculine trait. Consider now two men, one white and one black, of the same age who work at the same job in the urban United States. Collins (2009)
maintains that the white man's aggression would be rewarded, as he is simply being himself. Yet, the same aggression in the black man would brand him as dangerous due to the racialized history of the United States.

Many may strive to attain hegemonic masculinities, but only a rare handful actually succeed. The conceptualization of masculinity as a performance implies an audience that actively interacts with the performance and validates its degree of success (Serano 2007). In other words, a male does not become a man simply by constructing his masculinity. He must also be perceived as having that identity. Goffman (1961: 144) calls this the “dance of identification.” The masculinities of those who fail, or those who do not try, become “subordinated” (in Carrigan et al.'s [1985] terms) in the hierarchy of masculinities. In present-day US discourses, such lesser valued masculinities include those of gay men (Eng and Hom 1998), men of color (Doyle 1989; Eng 2001), and masculine women (Halberstam 1998). The inability to attain the hegemonic ideals may drive some to enact masculinizing acts that valorize their subordinated masculinities. For example, Cooper (2000) avers that Silicon Valley computer programmers practice “nerd masculinity” that involves enduring long work hours to meet production goals, and to establish a reputation for expertise.

Informed by the feminist critique of gender, Carrigan et al. (1985) revolutionized the study of men and masculinity with their theoretical contributions. They debunked sex-role theory for its blindness to power, showed how masculinity was about power relations among men not between women and men, illuminated the link between masculinity and heterosexuality by taking gay sexuality seriously, treated masculinity not as a trait but as a form of male practice that has its effect the subordination of women, and formulated the concepts of hegemonic and subordinated masculinities (Shrock and Schwalbe 2009: 278).

Nevertheless, “hegemonic masculinity” remains problematic as a meta-concept. Carrigan et al., for instance, do not clarify what it actually looks like (Wetherell and Edley 1999). They also charge that men subjugate women in the pursuit of hegemonic ideals. Ample anthropological evidence supports this claim (e.g. Gutmann 1996; Ogasawara 1998), but Carrigan et al. also treat “man” in their
original formulation as a static category bereft of meaningful social processes. Seen this way, any pursuit of masculine ideals becomes masculinity's equivalent of the biblical Original Sin. Lest he further the oppression of women, anyone born as a biological male must forever foresew becoming a man!

To avoid this ethical dilemma, we should not see the pursuit of hegemonic masculinity as a moral critique. Schrock and Schwalbe (2009: 280) observe that

[all humans learn where they are supposed to fit in a set of preexisting cultural categories, some of which are hierarchically arranged. So just as North Americans of European descent learn to think of and present themselves as white, which is the dominant racial category in U.S. culture, males learn to think of and present themselves as men, which is the dominant gender category.

The root of the problem, they argue, lies not in individuals but in the system that privileges those who successfully attain the ideals. Envisioning hegemonic masculinity as a set of social processes and practices contra Carrigan et al. opens up new opportunities to refine the idea. It becomes possible to see hegemonic masculinity not as a configuration of purely white or heterosexual praxis, but rather as a hybrid masculinity that reproduces patriarchy by uniting diverse (even subordinated) masculinizing practices (Demetriou 2001). Re-conceptualizing hegemonic masculinity also enabled Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) to expand the meta-concept to include a more complex model of gender hierarchy; to further highlight of the interactions between the local, the regional and the global; to give a more specific treatment of embodiment in the contexts of power and privilege; to emphasis more strongly on the internal dynamics and contradictions of hegemonic masculinity; and to recognize the potential for a greater movement towards gender democracy. Biological males may one day attain their hegemonic masculine ideals without perpetuating gender oppression.

In the spirit of refining masculinity theory, Coles (2008) proposes what he calls “mosaic masculinity” to explain how men recalibrate their conceptions of hegemonic masculinity vis-à-vis their own identities. By “mosaic masculinity,” he (ibid.: 238) refers to “the process by which men
negotiate masculinity, drawing upon fragments or pieces of hegemonic masculinity which they have the capacity to perform and piecing them together to reformulate what masculinity means to them.” Cole recognizes, as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) do, that men strategically adopt or reject different aspects of ideal masculinity to gain social acceptance in their changing life circumstances. This agency means that men who embody subordinated masculinities do not simply reject all of the tenets of masculinity, but rather “focus upon those elements that privilege them and reject the rest” (Coles 2008: 238). Subsequently, this reformulation enables these men to see their masculinities as dominant, especially if they operate in domains with other men of similar dispositions and actions.

_**Wen and Wu Masculinities**_

Among Chinese-Singaporeans, they understand hegemonic masculinity in terms of ideas of manliness that date back at least to the time of Confucius during China's Zhou Dynasty (1045 – 256 BCE). During my dissertation research, I did not specifically address how the construction of my consultants’ masculine selves reflects these ideas. Yet, no discussions of Singaporean masculinities would be complete without an understanding of what these ideas entail. As such, I shall discuss them here as a theory and leave the research about their dynamics as lived experiences for the future.

Historically, the Chinese know masculinity as a heuristic dyad called *wen-wu*, a term that translates as “cultural accomplishments-military prowess.” Both the terms *wen* and *wu* have many meanings. For *wen*, the *Great Chinese Dictionary* (Luo 1990b: 1512 – 3) lists 26 definitions whose core meanings center on literary and other cultural attainment. Creel (1970: 67) captures the gist of its importance when he states that *wen*

appears to have originally had the sense of “striped” or “adorned”, and it may be by extension from this that *wen* came to mean “accomplished”, “accomplishment” or even “civilization”: all of those adornments of life that distinguish the civilized man from the untutored barbarian.
In comparison, *wu* has over twenty definitions in the same dictionary. These definitions center on martial and military force and power (Luo 1990a: 338 – 9). These various meanings of *wen* and *wu* have deep historical origins. *The Book of Rites*, one of the Five Classics of the Confucian canon, describes how two legendary Zhou Dynasty (1050 – 256 BCE) kings received their posthumous titles. One, King Wen, used culture to rule while the other, King Wu, used military power. In the *Jì Fa* chapter, one finds the verse, “King Wen, who by his peaceful rule, and King Wu who by his martial achievements, delivered the people from their afflictions” (Legge 1885, Volume 28: 209).

From the surface, *wen-wu* appears indistinctive from masculinities found elsewhere. Even Louie (2002) observes that common elements exist in *wen-wu* and contemporary Western visions of the “real man.” For instance, one can easily compare displays of Chinese *qigong* and other martial arts to the exhibitions of military hardware in most independence day celebrations nowadays. Even so, two key differences exist between Chinese and Western masculinities. The first rests in the forms of male sexuality that the Chinese consider appropriate. Unlike much of the recent sexual ideologies in Anglophone countries, the Chinese do not require militant homophobia as proof of one's manhood (Louie 2003). Keeping in mind that studies of sexuality and the concomitant homophobia first arose only in late nineteenth-century Europe (Foucault 1990), Wu (2004) finds that elites commonly accepted male same-sex relationships over China's long history. Non-elites of the Ming (1368 – 1644 CE) and Qing Dynasties (1644 – 1912 CE) even deliberately cultivated homo-erotic sensitivities to display their awareness of aristocratic cultural vogues.

The Chinese accept homosexuality, but they reject uncontrolled sexuality. The control and containment of one's sexual passions characterize Confucian sexuality (McMahon 1988). Imitating the forms of the masters in calligraphy, extensive rote learning, and even taking one's examinations in enclosed examination halls, and other *wen* practices all aim to hone one's self-control. *Wu* adherents should also promote peace instead of encouraging war; the martial arts often include training in patience and restraint. The Chinese recognize that while sheer brute strength has its uses,
they view those who use it exclusively as nothing more than mere oafs. They even describe sexual intercourse in general as a battle, where the ultimate goal lies in making one's partner achieve orgasm while withholding one's own (Louie 2003).

This historical acceptance has subversive, even blasphemous, modern implications. Louie (1999) goes further than Wu (2004) to aver the social normality of bisexuality in pre-modern China. He re-interprets Guan Yu, a major character in the classic historical novel Romance of the Three Kingdoms whom the Chinese deified later as their God of War. Novel editors de-sexed Guan Yu so that he now appears as an ultra-powerful, but ultimately sexless and not-quite-human, super-hero. Louie recovers Guan Yu's humanity by examining his service to his sworn elder brother/superior commander Liu Bei as a general. The novel records that Liu Bei often shares his bed with Guan Yu to indicate their close intimacy as sworn brothers. When Liu Bei leaves him to sleep with his other advisers, Guan Yu often becomes strangely foul-tempered the morning after. These fits of jealousy lead Louie to argue that while Guan Yu was married with children, he had sex with Liu Bei on top of his military duties. Louie attributes the lack of further commentary about Guan Yu's anger to the novel editors' sexually conservative censorship, but he does not state what sex role Guan Yu takes.

Yet, extra-sexual social conditions such as age, social class, and personal wealth structured sex roles in pre-modern China, unlike the present-day and more egalitarian West (Hinsch 1990). The older, more socially powerful partner usually took the active role. This means that Liu Bei inserts Guan Yu during sex. No wonder the novel editors censored such unbecoming details of Guan Yu's sex life!

The second key point of difference between Chinese and Western masculinities lies in wen's general historical dominance over wu. In contrast to the disparaged stereotype of the overly studious “geek” and “nerd” in the contemporary US, the Chinese considered wen superior to wu as early as the Spring and Autumn Period, even though each had its own place in the ordered Confucian state. This historical period spans roughly from the second half of the eighth century to the first half of the fifth century BCE. Confucius revealed his own preference for wen: “The master said of the shao
that it was both perfectly beautiful and perfectly good, and the *wu* that it was perfectly beautiful but not perfectly good” (*The Analects* III: 25, translated by Lau 1979: 71). *Shao* refers to the music of Shun, a member of the group of mythological kings called the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors. King Yao, another member of the group, found Shun so virtuous that he abdicated in Shun’s favor. In contrast, the King of Wu ascended to his throne through military might, and *wu* refers to his style of music. Confucius considered music essential to one’s character development (Li 2008). By stating his preference for *shao* over *wu*, he showed his belief that physical violence could not help an individual achieve true perfection. This bias continues even today. Political candidates in contemporary Taiwan often list their highest education achievements in the briefings for televised electoral coverage. The high number of doctoral degree-holders contrasts sharply with their Western counterparts who would rather emphasize their military service record or “sporting” mass appeal than their elite education (if any)(Louie 2002).

Despite their *wen* preferences, the Chinese still think that the ideal man should also embody *wu*. Even in the modern Chinese languages, *wen wu shuang quan* 文武双全 (Mandarin for “complete in every *wen*-*wu* aspect”), *wen wu bing yong* 文武并用 (“employ *wen* and *wu* in concert”), and other idioms describe these perfect men. In order to win their Han Chinese subjects over, the Manchu emperors of the Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1912 CE) sinicized themselves and exhibited competence in both *wen* and *wu*. Spence (1966: 157) observes that

> the Kang-hsi Emperor thus inaugurated the first of those literary projects for which the Ch’ing dynasty is justly famous; this was a measure of his feelings of confidence and stability: having been “*wu*”, the military conqueror of Wu San-kuei and Galdan, he would now also assure his reputation as “*wen*”, the literary Emperor, proving his appreciation of the Chinese poetic tradition despite his non-Chinese ancestry.

Just as few men ever achieve hegemonic masculinity, only a handful actually master both *wen* and *wu*. I present these two ideals here as distinct concepts only for heuristic purposes, and not to
essentialize men as either wen or wu beings. In real life, to the extent that all Chinese men attempt to harmonize wen-wu within themselves, most end up embodying both to some degree. The authors of The Analects recognized this long ago: “There is no man who does not have something of the way of Wen and Wu in him.” (The Analects XIX: 22, Lau 1979: 156). While either wen or wu can count as ideal masculinity, both must be present to a high degree if one were to achieve the heights of the hegemonic ideal.

Lastly, wen-wu historically applied only to Chinese men. Women accrued wen-wu prestige only when they masqueraded as men. Zhu Yingtai, the female Eastern Jin Dynasty (304 – 439 CE) scholar immortalized in the classic tragic love story The Butterfly Lovers, cross-dressed to take the imperial examinations to display her wen talents. Hua Mulan, a legendary warrior woman reputedly from the Northern Wei Dynasty (386 – 534 CE), also had to conceal her femininity to serve in the army in lieu of her aged and disabled father. Her life story formed the basis of the 1998 Disney animated feature, Mulan. Once these women took off their disguises, however, their wen-wu attributes evaporated immediately. Both cases demonstrate that no matter how well-trained women might be in wen-wu skills in private, their achievements would only be publicly acknowledged if they appeared as men. Louie (2002) traces this discrepancy to the imperial civil service or military service examinations in which one must typically excel to gain official recognition. Feudal customs explicitly forbade women from taking either test with varying degrees of rigidity over China's long history, so one simply could not discuss women in wen-wu terms. This non-applicability continues even today. Hence, unlike Westerners, the Chinese do not at all equate the lack of masculinity with femininity. Instead, a man becomes non-masculine when he loses his sexual potency – whether through impotence or castration – as the mastery of wen-wu requires sexual self-discipline. In this light, the Chinese traditionally never saw eunuchs as men. No matter how accomplished eunuchs might be in wen-wu talents, their lack of a complete male body meant they had even less chance of accumulating wen or wu prestige than women did (Louie 2003).
The feudal customs that denied women access to *wen-wu* also denied foreign men the same. Rather than seeing foreigners as non-masculine, the Chinese hyper-sexualized them to reveal their animal barbarism. Stripped of their civilization, foreigners became discursive beings of only basic instincts and sexual drives. In early Chinese descriptions of Western men, foreigners had four testicles and an excess of body hair. Both characteristics index a highly sexualized masculine form (Dikötter 1992). Consequently, the Chinese considered foreigners too animalistic to understand the finer philosophical points of the Confucian Classics, much less attempt the imperial examinations to acquire social prestige and civilization: “*Wen-wu* was not perceived as applicable to men outside the Chinese cultural realm because it contains within its matrix a masculine sexuality of self-affirming, civilising difference” (Louie 2002: 13).

Now that the Chinese have contact with Western discourses of masculinity and feminism through cultural globalization, I doubt that they still think of *wen* and *wu* as strictly Chinese male attributes. Given the roots of Chinese masculinity in the male anatomy, I surmise that the Chinese bestow *wen-wu* qualities on foreign men more easily than they do their own women. An exposition on the impact of globalization on Chinese masculinities will go beyond the scope of this thesis. While elements of *wen-wu* will become readily obvious in the ethnographic discussion below, I will leave the more detailed inquiries to a future date. For now, I will turn my attention to the cultural dynamics of masculinities among male Chinese-Singaporeans.

**Being Good at Being a Chinese-Singaporean Man**

Having discussed masculinity as theories, what do these ideas mean to Singaporean gay men as lived experiences? Among Chinese-Singaporeans in general, Williams (2006) asserts, hegemonic masculinity centers on financial, career, marital, and reproductive success. Clearly, gay men already can never achieve complete hegemonic masculinity. The Chinese ones may achieve recognition for their *wen*-ness if they do well in school, and use their academic credentials as the basis of their
careers. My consultants mostly claim a middle-class background, so they succeed somewhat in this respect. Even those who claim working-class backgrounds do not suffer from material deprivation. They live in at least three-roomed public housing apartments (i.e. two bedrooms and a living room), as their middle-class counterparts do, even though their parents may own the apartments. Nobody rents, to my knowledge. They have access to televisions, refrigerators, cell phones, computers with high-speed Internet access, and other urban amenities. Otherwise, however, their sexuality prevents them from getting legally married and having children biologically (unless through surrogacy). They cannot adopt children even if they want to. An informant told me:

No, laws do not specifically forbid gay men from adopting, but the adoption agencies will first check the men's families. Once they realize that [the men] lack a “proper” family environment, they will not allow the men to adopt.

Of course, my informants' perpetual bachelorhood may not really bother them. After all, many straight Singaporeans also do not marry and have children. State discourses also never once blamed homosexuality for Singapore's low birth rates (even though they could easily have). Gay-bashing is also unheard of, at least in the news, if not in reality. As such, personal capabilities mostly limit the extent of material comfort in gay men's lives. Even so, their bachelorhood leaves the men open to questions about their personal lives that they may feel too uncomfortable to answer. In the following sections, I examine how gay men negotiate their masculinity and sexuality in their everyday lives. Specifically, I ask how do gay men make sense of the identity label “gay,” and how these meanings affect their lived experiences in the two main domains of social life in their natal family homes as well as the military. I chose these two domains, because gay men spend a longer-than-usual period at home before moving out (at least when compared to their Euro-American counterparts), and because the compulsory nature of military service makes the conscription experience a character-defining period in most Singaporean men's lives.

I begin by questioning the meanings of the identity label “gay.” Altman (1996a, 1996b)
asserts that non-Western gay and lesbian identities came into existence as copies of Euro-American
originals through the globalization of Western consumer culture. My ethnographic data appears to
support this “global gay” thesis. All of my informants self-identify as “gay” in the Euro-American
sense of this identity label. They do not think of themselves as “queer” – it seems that this label is
limited only within academic circles. Neither, despite their predominantly Chinese ethnicity, do they
refer to themselves or to other gay men as tongzhi 同志 (“comrade” in Mandarin), an identity label
that rose in Hong Kong in the late 1980s before becoming popular in China and Taiwan as well
(Chou 2000; Wong and Zhang 2000). The Singaporean Mandarin media uses it as a euphemism for
“gay man” (nan tongzhi 男同志 “male comrade”) or lesbian (nü tongzhi 女同志 “female
comrade”), but the local ethnoscape does not otherwise avail itself to the spread of the label beyond
Chinese ethnic boundaries. As Alex, an activist friend, once told me, no Malay or Indian gay man
would ever refer to himself with such a blatantly Chinese label.

In lieu of tongzhi and “gay,” my informants sometimes refer to themselves with more local
terms such the Malay pondan and bapok; the Mandarin bo li 玻璃 (“glass”) and jie mei 姐妹 (“sisters”); the Hokkien ah qua 阿官 (also spelled ah kua); the Cantonese bo lei (“glass”), zi
mui (“sisters”), gei (a transliteration of the English “gay”) and gei lou (“gay man/fellow”); or the
local constructions sister, AJ, PLU, and 302. As local equivalents of the English “faggot,” these
terms carry derogatory connotations. My consultants' use of these terms mirrors African-Americans'
co-option of the racial epithet “nigger” to empower themselves (Kennedy 2002). However, in all
cases of alternate identity label use, my informants used these descriptors as synonymous
substitutes for the Euro-American “gay”. It seems that Altman's thesis holds true in Singapore.

In contrast, I insist that reading Singaporean gay culture as a mere copy of the Euro-
American original only produces a superficial interpretation. Many of the alternate identity labels I
mentioned above have their own rich cultural histories that the “global gay” thesis threatens to obfuscate. Take, for example, the Malay terms *pondan* and *bapok*. Peletz (2009) argues that many Malay terms that now index homosexuality originally referred to transgendered and bisexual ritual specialists in early modern Southeast Asia. Embodying both male and female elements – the (fe)male-bodied ritualists wore the attire of the opposite sex – these specialists served as sacred mediators between humans, spirits, and nature. The male-bodied *bissu* of the Bugis of Sulawesi, for instance, put on female attire and accoutrements of femininity, safeguarded royal regalia, engaged in relations and marriages with same-sexed (but male-gendered) partners, and enjoyed noble status. Yet, the immense respect that these specialists commanded does not suggest a free-for-all sexuality. Severe sanctions that were based on biological sex, kinship status, age, and class governed the ritualists' behavior. Transgressors might be burned alive or killed in other ways.

The Chinese terms *bo li* and *bo lei* (Mandarin and Cantonese cognates for “glass”) refer not only to one's anal opening through analogy of the mouth of a glass bottle, but also to its fragility. In contrast, the Hokkien *ah qua* (pronounced /aː ɡə/) was originally a disrespectful slur used against effeminate eunuchs of the imperial Chinese courts. *Qua* here is a cognate of the Mandarin *guan* ("officer"). Eunuchs (*tai jian 太监*) were also called *huan guan 官官*, so adding the diminutive *ah* prefix to *guan* turns an otherwise prestigious title into a belittling insult.

In the case of the local constructions *AJ*, *PLU*, and *302*, consultants told me that they believe that missionary schoolboys first invented *AJ* as a Pig Latin version of “gay.” *PLU* originally abbreviates the name of the local LGBT rights advocacy group *People Like Us*. *PLU*, however, neither indicates actual PLU membership nor even interests in rights activism. Rather, PLU's close associations with homosexuality expanded PLU's semantic domain, so that *PLU* now also means “gay.” In fact, Singaporeans incorporate *PLU* into the names of their gay-oriented businesses and organizations. These groups include the *PLU Café* in a sleepy part of the island called Yio Chu
Kang, a gay bathhouse called *PLU Spa Sanctuary* in Johor Bahru in neighboring Malaysia, and the Internet forum that specifically caters to gay and lesbian youth interests called *PLUME* (an acronym for *People Like You and Me*). Lastly, 302 originates as the number of a clause in the military's medical handbook that designates homosexuality as a psychological “abnormality”. Given the prominence of military service in male Singaporean lives, as I shall discuss below, Singaporeans incorporated 302 and other military terms into their everyday speech. Hence, reading Singaporean gay identities as offshoots of the Euro-American original obscures these socio-linguistic histories.

**Being Good at Being Gay at Home**

Explaining Singaporean gay culture as a “global gay” offshoot also assumes that gay men there treat “coming out” with the same ontological importance as Euro-American ones do. In Euro-America, a gay man comes out by openly declaring his homosexuality outward from the immediate family, to friends, and then to colleagues. A few of my consultants, including Eileena who brought me to the closeted lesbian bar in Chapter 1, came out completely. The vast majority came out only to their siblings, friends and/or colleagues, and many support gay activist events. Yet, they remain closeted to their parents, either refusing to come out, or claiming that they do not feel obliged to.

In this sense, Singaporean gay men share a “tacit subjectivity” with their counterparts from the Dominican Republic. Decena (2008) argues that the mainstreaming of the coming out process in the United States means that people come out now to become “normal” gay subjects (McRuer 1997, Vaid 1995). Still, many Dominican gay and bisexual men residing in New York City resist coming out fully to their families to protect their own privacy. More importantly, many also claim that their families already know implicitly anyway, so they do not see the need to openly state the obvious. In fact, disclosure may even backfire as public knowledge of the men's illicit sexuality exposes their families to public gossip and humiliation (cf. Murray's [1997] discussion of a similar Islamic “will not to know” about others' homosexuality). Drawing upon Spanish grammar that permits a speaker
to drop the subject from her utterances as long as she conjugates the verb correctly, Decena calls these implicitly gay and bisexual Dominican subjectivities “tacit.” By remaining tacit, these men maintain the integrity of their social networks against the corrosive effects of public shaming. As such, they allow scholars to transcend the explicit categorization of individuals in our critical examination of the complexities that structure social relationships.

The reasons why Singaporean gay men remain tacit about their sexuality, however, differ from those of the Dominican ones. Overwhelmingly, my informants claim that they do not want to hurt their parents. One said, “[Telling my parents] won't enrich their lives, so why risk all the negative outcomes?” Another one revealed:

No, they don't know. I have to keep it as secret. I believe that saying all these things may hurt them, because they're very nice to me, and they've been taking care of me for the past 23 years, so I do not wish to break this news to them and, you know, break their hope.

Many of my informants' parents received little formal education. Born in the 1950s and 1960s when Singaporeans had neither universal education nor compulsory instruction in the English language, these parents learn what little they know about homosexuality from the tabloid Lianhe Wanbao and other Mandarin-medium newspapers. Wanbao usually does so in sensationalist reports where gay men or lesbians inevitably die from suicides or drug overdoses, seduce the husbands or wives of “happy” (read “heterosexual”) families as what I jokingly call “homo-wreckers,” suffer mental breakdowns in public, or otherwise meet some disgraceful or unpleasant end. These negative images color the parents' perceptions of homosexuality, so my informants feel that coming out strains familial relations, and shames and saddens their parents. Conservative parents also generally do not discuss sexual matters with their children. Even if they suspect their children's sexuality, but they rarely ask directly to confirm. This verbal reluctance gives my informants even less impetus to come out to their parents.

Many informants also live in their natal homes even though they are now in their 30s and
40s. Unlike Euro-America, children in Singapore are typically not expected to move out until they marry or earn enough to buy their own apartments. This usually happens from the late 20s onwards. The practice of renting rooms does not seem prevalent. Sylvia, a lesbian friend, suspects that because the country's land shortage drives up real estate prices, gay men and lesbians would rather stay home and save on the rent money until they can buy their own properties. With rents for an apartment room just outside of the city center costing S$1,000 (US$770 in current exchange rates) or more, the savings can be substantial when a fresh graduate's gross monthly salary starts usually around S$2300 (US$1700). Staying at home, however, presents a risk to gay men who do come out to their parents. Instead of accepting the son, the parents may evict him. On top of his emotional trauma, the son now also faces the immediate need of finding some place to live. “That's why,” a consultant advised me, “you should buy your flat before you come out. This way, you'll still have some place to go to even if things head south.” More than rents, emotional risks ultimately inhibit gay men from coming out to their parents. Brian, another informant, explains his reluctance in more succinct terms: “I just don't want the drama.”

When my informants claim shielding their parents from emotional hurt as their rationale for their remaining in the closet, they prompt me to pose a dangerous question: is “coming out” that important or even necessary? Western gay ontologies posit that an individual's outer self should match his/her inner one. This mirroring predicates the commonly heard “coming out” rhetoric that positions those who come out as being truthful to themselves. When I asked Otto, an informant, why he came out to his mother, he said, “I don't want to lie to myself anymore.” Ontologically, this view frames the closeted gayness as an existential crisis that one can resolve by coming out. It also assumes substance dualism that constructs the human mind-self as a substance distinct from one's body and other phenomena of the material world. The development of this dualistic subjectivity can be traced from Platonic thought that saw humans as pre-existent and even disembodied, to the more recent Idealistic proponents who emphasize the subject's ability to guarantee her own unity through
time. As perhaps the most renowned of all the substance dualism philosophers, Descartes concluded that “I” as the subject of doubting assumes that the “I” exists and doubts. To him, the self exists by itself, before the body and the physical world outside come into existence. Descartes also linked the self to the mind and distinguished the resulting self-mind from the body. He further conceptualized the self-mind as something greater than the body, because it can exist independently from bodily movements (Yao 1996). In this view, whatever makes an individual homosexual must also reside in the pre-existent self-mind, since it obviously does not come from the body or the physical world outside. Consequently, not only do gay “coming out” rhetorics call for the matching of one's two selves, they also posit gayness as a pre-social human right.

Confucianism, in contrast, posits a different construction of the self. Confucian philosophers seldom conceive the self as something that essentially perceives and thinks as Descartes did. While many thinkers do hold the concept of mind/heart (xin 心) in great importance, xin refers to the moral heart/mind rather than the cognitive mind. Xin comes into being when an individual cultivates her self to maturity, and it presupposes a unity between one's inner faculties and external performances. The larger self subsumes the smaller xin as both an extension and its faculty of thinking. In contrast to the disembodied Cartesian self-mind, the Confucian self-xin always relates to one's embodied actions (Yao 1996). We should not equate this lesser emphasis on an individual's inner complex with lesser complexity in the Confucian self, or even a lack of distinction between the private and the public. Rather, Confucian thinkers regard a person holistically instead of treating one's inner and outer selves as distinct categories (Eno 1991). In a completely opposite view from Christianity and its idea of the Original Sin, this means that an individual can develop her xin and true self by excising her baser instincts, and preserving and nurturing her innate benevolence, righteousness, propriety, trustfulness and other moral qualities.

To cultivate her self, an individual should expose herself to education (jiao 教) and moral
training (li 礼). The key to this process of self-development lies in respecting one's self, which an individual achieves by harmonizing her dispositions and conforming to the proprieties in every situation and on every occasion. One should have the freedom to develop oneself, Yao (1996) points out, but one should not equate this freedom with freedom from self-control. An individual's immediate family becomes her first teachers of morality, so much so that Confucian thinkers conceive of the family as the roots of the self, and the self as a extending branch of the family. The family's importance frames the respect for one's self as essentially a responsibility, not only for manifesting one's own nature and the family's virtues, but also setting an example of integrity for others to follow (Yao 1996). This concern for familial relationships enmeshes the Confucian self within webs of social meanings, so Confucian thinkers do not posit the human right to be gay as pre-social as Descartes did. This concern clarifies the rationale behind my informants' reluctance to come out to their parents, and commit unfilial acts that hurt and shame their families.

In his study of tongzhi politics in Hong Kong, Chou Wah-Shan (2000) concurs by stating his reservations about the imposition of Anglo-American experiences onto other cultural traditions. He regards the discourses of “coming out” and “being out and proud” in gay pride parades as integral to a larger cultural project that affirms confrontational Western individualism. This model works in societies where individuality and self-affirmation predicate one's personal and cultural identities, but it jars discordantly in Chinese societies outside the West. Chou (ibid.) cites the example of an attempt to organize a gay pride parade in Hong Kong in 1992 that only managed to attract ten foreigners and two overseas Chinese. The organizers canceled the parade, fearing that the overwhelmingly foreign participation would reify the stereotype of homosexuality as a Western cultural import. This move drew harsh criticisms from gay Caucasians living in Hong Kong against the organizers' apparent lack of courage and sexual liberation.

If my informants neither want to come out to their parents, nor can they achieve the hegemonic masculine ideal, do they negotiate their sexuality within the spaces of their natal homes?
My field research yields differing data. Having lived with my father during fieldwork, I found that my own negotiation tactics resemble those of my consultants'. We all hide our gay-related and XXX-rated videos, comics, and magazines (sometimes in locked cupboards) to prevent parents from stumbling across these materials by accident. Accidental discovery can lead to family crises when the parents suddenly realize they have a gay son. We also talk about gay matters in English, because our parents often cannot understand this language. When friends come to visit, we also oblige them not to pecah our lobang (= “break a hole” in Malay) and blow our covers by “outing” us in our conversations. When my mother passed away from cancer shortly after I started my dissertational fieldwork, my friends from *TheBearProject* came to the wake to pay her their final respects. While we chit-chatted as I waited for the next round of funeral rites to begin, one of my friends commented very loudly about a cute guy he spotted sitting at the next table. The others echoed his assessment, so I turned to see the center of everyone's attention. My cheeks burned as I saw my straight and married elder brother. He must have heard the comments, even though later, he only asked me who my friends were. After the wake, I warned my friends in no uncertain terms not to risk “outing” me again in the same manner. They agreed, even though they still bring up the *faux pas* occasionally during conversations to joke about it.

Gay children may refrain from discussing their sexuality with their parents, but the parents still try “help” their stubbornly single sons. Like their co-ethnics in mainland China (Rofel 1999), Chinese-Singaporeans also consider marriage necessary for a child to become a full-fledged social adult. As such, parents often ask my informants whether they have girlfriends, or whether they will hold their wedding dinners soon. When my informants meet their friends and relatives during wedding dinners, Chinese New Year home visits and other occasions for social gathering, they are subjected to yet another round of questioning. Parents pester their children not to echo the state's call for early marriage that I discussed in Chapter 3. I never heard anyone justify their urging their children to marry because state officials told them to. Rather, parents do so more out of their
heteronormative assumptions that one should naturally want to marry and have babies. If one's child refuses to bear offspring of his own, who will take care of that child when the parents pass on? Even my Malay-Muslim consultants receive the same marriage queries. For example, Yasser insisted that his parents and relatives pressure him to marry not out of a sense of filial piety – a Confucian value that does not apply to him to begin with – but more as an insurance against old age. Seen this way, parental matrimonial concerns stem more from practical worries for the children's future welfare than from the state's pro-fecundity campaign, or even the Confucian imperative to bear children to continue the family line.

Some parents continue to make their inquiries even after their children came out to them. These “out” informants reckon that their parents see their homosexuality as a phase that they will grow out of. The parents hope that they will one day xuan ya le ma 悬崖勒马 (“to rein in one's horse at the edge of a sheer cliff” in Mandarin), realize their “mistake,” and get married. By asking about girlfriends and marriage dates, the parents hope to hasten the process. Yet, they unconsciously reify the state's pro-fertility ideology in doing so. Only two informants claim they were not questioned in this way. One came out to his mother, but she divorced from an unhappy marriage, so she welcomed the fact that her son would remain single. Another claimed he was so busy managing the multi-national company where he worked that his parents did not bother him about dating and marriage prospects.

Not surprisingly, most of my informants find the girlfriend and wedding questions a perennial vexing problem. I evaded mine by replying that I had to first finish my studies. “Why get married if I score poorly and fail to secure a good job? I can't expect my wife to support me, can I?” I told my relatives as I manipulated their perceptions of the “correct” gender order to my benefit. I was also lucky in that most of my straight peers and cousins married during my long years in graduate school. I did not have to attend their wedding dinners or visit them during Chinese New Year, so they could not ask me about my wedding plans. However, my consultants do not have the same
privilege. The wealthier ones sometimes go on vacation during the two-day official CNY holidays and avoid the questioning altogether. Others rationalize their bachelorhood economically, as I do, and claim they want to build their careers first. One said,

I was, like, currently, I have no interest in getting married … I see family-planning as trouble to myself because it involves a lot of money, and also time and effort … When couples talk about money issues, there're tensions between the couples. You know, sometimes the problems can't be solved again because of the money issues. That's what I'm worried about … [My brother] is now currently getting a new flat. Now, he needs a lot of cash in hand … It's kind of a taxing thing, you know, if you were to do such things, because at your current financial ability, you're not able to sustain such high costs … You're practically in debt every month, every year. Now [my brother and sister-in-law] have to borrow money from banks to purchase houses. In the future, they may have kids and they need to spend even more money.

A few were more determined to end the questioning once and for all. One day when a consultant's aunt visited his family, she asked him, “So, I heard you have a girlfriend. How's she?” “She died in a car accident,” he replied brusquely. That retort earned him a dagger-sharp stare from his mother. On another occasion, another aunt commented, “Oh, I heard you got married when you were in Taipei.” Again, he answered tersely, “Yeah, we divorced.” This got him another hard glare from his mother, but his tactic worked. None of his relatives bothers him with questions about girlfriends and weddings anymore.

I queried my consultants whether their relatives and friends tried to match them up with prospective girlfriends. All of them answered in the negative. Alan, an informant, surmised that his parents realize he is mature enough to know the implications of his actions, so they do not intervene here. My informants also do not attend the social activities organized by the Social Development Unit (SDU), the state match-making agency for university graduates. These events include trips to places of interests in Singapore, neighboring Malaysia and beyond, short boat cruises, tea parties, self-enrichment courses, and talks that give tips on maintaining and enriching one's relationship. Generally, they aim to enable busy Singaporeans to socialize with members of the opposite sex in the hope that they will start dating or, better yet, get married. My consultants realize the
heteronormative nature of these activities. In fact, Alan finds the SDU advertising brochures annoying:

I receive newsletters from them all the time, the latest issue of *Duet* ... It's automatic subscription [upon graduation from university] and it was unfortunate that I was too lazy to mail back the opt-out option, so they just keep flooding my mailbox with it.

Alan’s attitude towards the SDU reflects a larger nation-wide dismissal of the agency among single Singaporeans. They consider the agency a nuisance for interfering in what they think ought to be a private matter (see also Teo 2005). To them, SDU stands for “Single, Desperate, and Ugly (or Unwanted),” and only those burdened with such unfortunate attributes would attend its events.

In reality, both straight and gay singles make use of the SDU's services. Russell, a gay consultant who worked as a civil servant in the 1980s, recalled that he felt pressured to attend SDU activities after the agency’s formation in the aftermath of the so-called “Great Marriage Debate” (see Chapter 3). Given their college education, mid-ranking civil servants found themselves targeted first. These initial efforts, another gay former civil servant recalled, amounted to harassment:

HR was involved. They had to give the government a list of officers with degrees who [were] not married … In a way, they were almost hassling us. They were asking us, “Why don't you join? Why don't you join!” Of course, at the end of the day, there was only so much they [could] do, because you [could] only [participate in the SDU activities] during your private time.

In the end, this consultant did attend the SDU’s public speaking courses, but only to enrich himself. He claimed that while he was not adverse to meeting new people, he disliked feeling pressured to get married. Russell himself refused to go, but he said his colleagues did. I also heard from others that their gay friends went, not to meet potential partners, but to participate in SDU contests. One even won a refrigerator in a lucky draw. Another informant, who recently stopped working at the SDU, told me that straight Singaporeans typically approach the agency's in-house matchmakers for help only in their mid-30s. These clients realize they want to marry and settle down, but their busy
careers do not afford them the time to socialize. She estimated that the SDU handles approximately 300 such cases every year. Otherwise, the SDU events failed to work. She remarked that “those who go already know each other. They don't go to make new friends *lah*. They go because the events are cheap” from the heavy state subsidies SDU receives. The above examples demonstrate how citizens deploy what Scott (1985) calls “weapons of the weak” to passively resist overt state power and subvert the state's matchmaking goals.

As much as my informants try to conceal their sexuality from their parents, some parents suspect. Having lived together for so long, parents know their children's dispositions intimately. My mother used to tell me, “I know what you're up to the moment you shake your tail (i.e. move).” Yet, the parents' generally conservative attitudes towards sex and sexuality mean that they prefer to drop hints of their suspicions than to ask directly. When I talked to Gary and his long-term boyfriend Kenneth about these suggestions over dinner one evening, he remarked:

> Of course my mum dropped hints. Kenneth comes and stays overnight quite often, you see. And when he does, he sleeps in my room. So one day, my mother asked me all out of a sudden, “You know about AIDS, right? You should play safe, you know?” She didn't exactly say whom I should play safe with, but yeah, she knows about Kenneth and me.

Occasionally, even supposedly conservative parents can surprise their children, as my father did one Friday evening years ago. That night, he was washing the dishes in the kitchen. I went in to tell him that I would be going out later with friends. I did not tell him it was with some gay male friends. He asked me whether I was going out with my girlfriend. I said no. Then he asked me, “So, you are going out with your boyfriend then?” That question caught me completely off-guard. I would have answered “no” again, because my gay male friends are just that – friends who are gay and male. I did not, however, have the opportunity to reply. My mother overheard the conversation, and she jumped in immediately to change the topic. When I told Gary about this incident, he explained that my mother was in denial. She must have known on some level of consciousness about my sexuality, but she wanted to avoid facing up to reality. That was why she chipped in, lest I confirm my father's
Conceivably, some gay men succumb to the social pressure to marry. I never met such men, mainly because their desire for discretion makes them highly closeted and difficult to contact. Several of my informants, however, claimed that they had had sex with such men before. They warned me that if I were to involve myself sexually with such men one day, I should not make one into a boyfriend. If his wife found out about his extra-marital affairs, I would be branded a home-wrecker. Even if he did leave his wife for me, who could guarantee he would not cheat on me in the future? After all, he cheated on his wife to be with me in the first place. Worse, in their opinion, he might even leave me for a woman. Indeed, such men suffer from negative portrayal in both local straight and gay popular discourses that castigate them as irresponsible liars who betray their wives and children. Gary even remarked, “They already have their home-cooked meals, but they still want to eat out.”

I did, however, meet men who started having sex with other men after they married. Prior to the start of my dissertation fieldwork, I got to know a bisexual man who fit Gary's description. This man said he was originally straight, but he started having homosexual secret after his wife gave birth to their two children and lost all sexual interests. During fieldwork, I met someone else whose life experiences contradict the received wisdom of cheating married gay men. He came out to himself after he had his son two years into his marriage. Highly closeted at first, he found a regular non-boyfriend sex partner known in gay lingo as a “fuck buddy.” This buddy befriended him and helped him understand his sexuality better, so he did not experience the confusion and trauma typically described in many “coming out” stories. “There was no drama at all,” he assured me. However, he did exchange raunchy text messages with this buddy. These messages outed him when his wife checked his cell phone one day without his permission. Surprisingly, his wife did not react hysterically. She sat him down stoically some days later and asked him whether he wanted a divorce. He told me he would have agreed had he been childless. However, he came from a broken
family himself – his mother divorced his biological father, and her marriage to her second husband also turned out quarrelsome – and he did not want his son to grow up father-less. He and his wife decided to stay married to raise their son, though they ceased having sex together after the outing incident. He has not come out to his mother or his in-laws, so he still has family dinners with them and his wife and son on occasional. The wife knows that her husband will have sex with other men, so she forbade him from bringing these men back home. Unexpectedly, however, she also read up on safe gay sex on the Internet and made sure that he knows the necessary precautions. Doubtlessly, this second ethnographic example is more the exception than the rule. Most women would have demanded a divorce immediately upon discovering their husbands' affairs. Rather, I want to contest the stereotype of the “cheating” married gay man. To me, the rationale that made each man have extra-marital homosexuality should be assessed in its own terms before we make any moral judgments.

Lastly, I argue that gay men can reconcile their homosexuality somewhat with their families without having coming out to them. Conservative parents may object to homosexuality due to its negative discursive links with disease and moral degeneracy, but they do understand love and mutual care in kinship terms. Instead of “coming out,” gay men can “go home” (Chou 2000). Gay men who do so invite their boyfriends home where they initially introduce their partners as “normal friends.” With increasing visits, their families may realize that the couple shares something that transcends mere friendship. By couching their homosexuality in kinship terms that their families comprehend, gay men avoid the confrontational trauma of coming out and they still attain familial acceptance for themselves and their lovers.

In Gary's case above, he successfully “went home” with Kenneth. They never came out to Gary's mother, but she signaled her awareness of their relationship by reminding Gary to practice safe sex. She did so not to voice her objections, but more out of concern for his health amidst media reports that link homosexuality with HIV/AIDS. In 2010, she even invited Kenneth over to her Chinese New Year reunion dinner. Held on Chinese New Year's eve at the residence of the oldest
living family member (typically one's parents), the reunion dinner is a private affair that sees family
members traveling back home to eat together, even if they were abroad previously. In this light,
Kenneth's invitation signifies both a tacit approval of his relationship with Gary, and his acceptance
into the family by Gary's parents.

Russell Heng (2004: 75) provides another example:

R is a Chinese Singaporean who has migrated to Sydney to live with his gay Australian
lover, T. Two years into the relationship, R's parents wanted to visit him. R and T were not
sure how to receive them. Was this the opportunity for R to “come out” or should T and he
pretend to be flatmates and sleep in separate rooms for the duration of the parents' visit?
Finally, they decided they should just continue to lead life as they normally did. The parents
came and enjoyed their stay. They got along very well with T. Nothing was ever said about R
and T sharing a room with only one bed. Years later R's parents and siblings also migrated to
Australia. Since then, T is automatically included in the Chinese New Year family reunion
dinner, family birthday parties, or other important family occasions. T has become a
recognized member of the family but R never had to say, “Mama and Papa, I am gay.”

“Going home” also applies to non-Chinese-Singaporeans. In another example, Heng (ibid.) states:

G is a Malay (Muslim) Singaporean. He and his Swedish lover, J, have been together for
more than ten years. G lives with his parents but J visits every weekend and spends the night
in G's room where there is only one bed. In an Asian context, for people of the same sex to
share a bed need not arouse any suspicion so it was never clear what G's parents made of his
relationship with J. The challenge came when J had to return to Sweden and G planned to go
with him. G told his parents he was going to move to Sweden with J without saying the
“gay” word. The parents were saddened by the parting of their son but wished him well. By
then J was already regarded as a member of the family. One day, mother said to G casually,
“It would be nice if J converts [to Islam].” G believes that this was his mother's way of
signaling that she knows and even though Islam forbids homosexuality, her wishing that J
would convert was her way of expressing full acceptance of her son and his partner.

By citing the above examples, I do not mean that I support Chou's prescription of “going
home” as superior to “coming out” for Singaporean gay men. The prescription reifies the discursive
dichotomy between the “individualistic” West and a “consensual” Asia, as though individualistic
Westerners cannot be consensual nor consensual Asians individualistic. In any case, does “coming
out” and its individualism really not commensurate with socially oriented Confucianism? “Coming
out” emphasizes honesty and integrity, moral values that Confucianism also advocates. Moreover,
Confucianism does not seek to completely efface the individual self. Rather, it recognizes the
importance of individual impulses as long as they do not tear society apart. In this light, one can justify “coming out” in a Confucianist framework by removing the need to constantly skirt around the topic of sexuality, thus bringing parent and gay child closer together.

Empirically, “going home” also retards the local LGBT rights movement. Russell told me that even though he uses “going home” in his intellectual discussions, he ultimately advocates gay men to come out because it eases everyday conversations about sexuality. Unlike English, the other languages spoken in Singapore generally lack the lexemes for “coming out” and its related concepts. Educated Mandarin-speakers use such terms as *chu gui* 出柜 (“come out of the closet”) and *jiao ao you xing* 骄傲游行 (“pride parade”). They borrowed these awkward-sounding terms from their Taiwanese counterparts who first transliterated them. However, speakers of non-Mandarin Chinese languages have yet to absorb these new terms into their lexicons. Russell has not come out to his parents, but if he were to do so by telling them he wants to *chu gui* in their native Hakka, he would severely confuse them. They would comprehend the new term literally and wonder about his rationale for telling them such a banal incident. What was he doing in a closet in the first place that made coming out of it so special? Did he look for a favorite shirt that he thought he lost, or did he hide from a burglar? “Going home,” Russell reminds me, does not alleviate this linguistic problem because “it is too warm and fuzzy” and “it fudges out the need to come out.” “Going home” also does not challenge the heteronormative status quo. “Coming out,” in contrast, does. It relieves the dearth of words, because those who come out must create new lexemes to make the process meaningful to the people they come out to. In turn, these linguistic innovations challenge social misconceptions of homosexuality to drive the formation of new political discourses of sexual citizenship rights.

**Being Good at Being Gay in the Army**
The military presents another primary citizen-making site where gay men must negotiate their sexuality. Beginning in 1967, all able-bodied male citizens must serve at least two years of “National Service.” Unless they defer their enlistment to pursue higher education, they become full-time soldiers in the Singapore Armed Forces when they turn 16½. Women are not obliged to serve, but they may volunteer. While the enlisted men serve mainly in one of the military formations in the army, a smaller number serve in the navy, the air force, the police, or the civil defense force instead. After they have been discharged from full-time service, laws still oblige them to serve in a part-time capacity. Until they reach the stipulated age for full military discharge (i.e. 40 for non-commissioned officers and 50 for commissioned ones), they must also serve a maximum of 40 days a year for 10 years in the reserves. These 10 years need not be consecutive. Reservist soldiers attend in-camp training sessions that purportedly keep their military skills honed and updated. Depending on the part of the training cycle a reservist unit has advanced to, these sessions can range from “low-key” activities that last about a week or less (e.g. live-firing at ranges, and technical skills refresher courses) to “high-key” ones that last a month or more (typically full-blown military exercises held either locally or overseas). Medically fit reservist soldiers must also take the annual Individual Physical Fitness Test that consists of five stations (i.e. standing broad jump, chin-ups, sit-ups, shuttle run, and a 2.4 km run). Those who pass receive monetary rewards that vary according to the quality of the passes. Failures must attend remedial training that can last up to two months, depending on whether the attendees pass the physical fitness tests held during this extra training.

With so many men serving their military duty every year, NS makes a significant impact on Singaporean everyday life. Full-time soldiers must delay their entry into the working world, or the university and other post-secondary educational institutions. Reservist soldiers must also rearrange their daily schedules to accommodate their in-camp and physical fitness training. Linguistically, many Singlish terms originated as military lingo. For instance, company sergeant majors designate tasks to subordinates by placing arrows next to the soldier' names on the daily regimental
ordinances. This practice gave rise to the term *kena arrow* (*kena* = “receive” in Malay), used to describe the assignment of a boring or unpleasant task. Another term *OTOT*, abbreviates “Own Time Own Target.” It means to perform a task at one's discretion. It originated from a command given during live-firing exercises to shoot at one's own assigned target at one's leisure. Lastly, *confirm plus chop* indicates one's absolute certainty about something. Shortened from *confirm plus guarantee got chop*, the phrase originally means that one has filed all the necessary paperwork, and received approval to do something (*chop* derives ultimately from the Hindi *chāp* = “stamp” through the Malay *cap*).

The state demands military service from its male citizens ostensibly to deter would-be invaders who want to exploit Singapore's small geographical size. Despite its national importance, my informants profess mixed attitudes towards NS. David, for example, perceives the military as a badly managed organization and dismisses it as a waste of time. Recruits only serve for two years, so they need not be conscientious about their supposed national duty. Anyone who has served NS would have heard of or participated in incidents where someone would sleep while they were on duty (*tś’ak ts’ō’a*, or “eat snake” in Hokkien), feign an illness to avoid grueling tasks (*tś’aug*), or otherwise act nonchalantly about one's assigned tasks (*bō’tsap*). Knowing that recruits can at most attain only a certain rank (usually Third Sergeant as a non-commissioned officer, or First Lieutenant as a commissioned one), and that they wield very little influence as individuals, more senior officers sometimes exploit them to gain the attention of their superiors. When I served my NS, my unit occasionally ran outside our camp and sing songs along the way to boost our morale. During one such run, the unit's commanding officer pondered loudly why he could not hear my company sing. Later that evening, my company sergeant major ordered the entire company to stay back for another two hours that Saturday to sing. At that time, recruits typically stayed in-camp most of the week. They “booked out” to go home for the weekend only at noon on Saturdays. Naturally, we read the singing order not only as unfair punishment for something that hardly
counted as an offense, but also as the sergeant major's overt attempt to gain the commanding officer's favors, and perhaps even a promotion, at our expense. The loud protests that followed made the sergeant major change his mind. We still had to sing, but we only did so on Saturday morning. This left our “booking out” time unaffected.

Despite the military's manpower inefficiency and abuses, many of my consultants think of their NS experiences in positive terms. The rigorous military training readied them for the working world, they claim, by making them more mature and self-disciplined. Brian said, “It change[s] a person … Discipline-wise, I think it does help a lot … It also teaches you to listen to your superiors … It prepares you for work where you'll be under somebody. Even if you don't like the person, you'll still have to do it, which is what the outside world is going to be.” Ah Ren, a straight consultant, conceives of NS as a crucial component in the nation-building process:

I think that National Service becomes a defining sense of national identity, not because the government intends it to be so ... but because of the very processes of being stripped away of everything and being sent together to serve with other people [with nothing but] your shirt and your nationality. I think [it] forces you to investigate your nationality and bond with the people you're serving with, 'cos it's mutual suffering lah ... [Here in] Singapore, we talk about the four main races [of] Chinese, Malay, Indians [and] Others ... we talk about languages, we talk about respect for religion and a few other things, and you go into army, there're many people who have never met anybody outside of their religion, their ethnic group, their social class. Most of the time, the army is the first time you actually do [meet others]. You become Singaporean because then you really see Singapore ... If I randomly picked [men] off the street and threw them together, you could not get a better sample of what National Service is like other than that.

In fact, NS functions as Singapore's great social equalizer, because it forces recruits from different ethnic and social backgrounds to live, train, work, and suffer together. Otto, a gay friend, recalled how he partnered up with a farmer's son during his basic military training soon after he graduated from an elite high school. Instead of dismissing his partner as an uneducated bum, Otto came to respect him during a field exercise where they manually dug shoulder-deep trenches. Like many others in his platoon, Otto never handled a hoe before. He really did not relish the prospect of staying up the whole night to dig, and end up with blistered hands the next morning. Luckily, his
partner handled digging equipment all his life. The partner offered to let Otto rest, while he dug the entire trench by himself. Much to everyone else's surprise, the trench was ready by midnight that evening. This help enabled a grateful Otto to start the next day of exercises refreshed, while his exhausted platoon mates soldiered on. Otto's tale shows that NS creates an organic bond through which Singaporeans, albeit only the male half, can relate to each other across racial, religious, and class boundaries. More than any artificial nationalistic campaigns the state could have implemented, this bond provides a common base of lived experiences through which citizens can challenge their pre-conceived notions about other people of different backgrounds. They forge their own national identity this way. As Ah Ren pointed out:

You go into the army, it doesn't mean that your Chinese racism about Indians is going to disappear, or your Indian racism about Malays is going to disappear, but at least you get to know them when they’re there. In some cases, you might find that, “Hey, they're not too bad!”

To gay men, full-time service in the military's highly heteronormative spaces can be a trying two years. During my basic military training, a very feminine man whom everyone assumed to be gay worked in the quartermaster's office as a store clerk. When I went to the storerooms to fetch equipment, I often witnessed him getting teased not only by his peers and superiors, but also by recruits whom he technically outranked. His alleged homosexuality did not exempt him from his NS. Indeed, laws do not recognize sexuality as a valid reason not to serve. This means that gay recruits can remain closeted throughout the two years – I came out only shortly after my active tour of duty – or they can officially declare their sexuality at either their pre-enlistment medical examination, or any time later. The relative rarity of such cases and their highly confidential nature mean that most people know about the procedures that happen thereafter more through rumors than actual facts. Driven by a need to clear the mysteries surrounding “coming out” in the military, an enlistee called Lim Chi-Sharn not only outed himself, but also published his experiences online (Lim 2002a, 2002b). Lim's account cohere with the rumors that I heard, so I take it as representative
of what happens should one come out officially to the military. I summarize his story below.

Lim enlisted in 1998, but he disrupted his training in the Officer Cadet School shortly after to pursue an overseas university education. During his re-enlistment medical examination, he was given a checklist of questions, one of which asked him whether he had “any social problems (e.g. homosexuality).” He ticked “yes,” but scribbled “I don’t think it’s a problem!” next to the question. He reminded the doctor who saw him later of the tick. Caught by surprise, the doctor pulled out a thick, dog-eared manual, flipped to the page entitled “Homosexuality and Transsexuality,” and started reading earnestly. After questioning Lim whether he had sex with men and whether he cross-dressed – Lim answered in the affirmative to both queries – he assigned “D” to Lim's Physical Employment Status. This physical fitness rating means that pending further review, Lim was deemed temporarily unfit for military duty. In a follow-up review, a doctor called Julian Tan asked him more questions from a printed list: “How do you feel about NS?”, “Are you a homosexual?”, “Do you have a boyfriend?” and most pertinently, “Are you the man or the woman?” Upon Lim's protest of the last question's phrasing, the doctor clarified by asking about Lim's sex role.

Dr Tan said that the review gauged the degree of Lim's homosexuality using a scale that placed heterosexual men on one end, and women on the other. Purportedly, it ascertained the effects of Lim's sexuality on his military deployability, and his ability to fit into communal military life. Tan did not inquire whether Lim himself felt comfortable serving his NS, but he surmised that Lim could not serve in “sensitive” areas. However, he did not clarify what he meant by that. Tan assured Lim that the military laws would protect his rights to privacy. Only two people in Lim's unit, the manpower officer and the unit's commanding officer, would know the real reason behind his physical fitness rating. In reality, the military cannot keep such information as confidential as it should. Administrative clerks who otherwise should not be privy to this data may stumble upon it by accident when they file someone's personnel documents. Lim also claims that his gay friends had their civil service careers outside of the military hampered because of alleged information leaks.
This claim echoes rumors that any gay man who comes out to the military will receive a black mark in his files that prevents him from working in the government ever again.

After the review, Lim received a Physical Employment Status of “C1L3.” This rating excused Lim from up to two stations in the annual physical fitness test, even though he did not suffer from any disabilities that physically prevented him from taking the entire test. He ceased his officer cadet training, as he could now only be deployed for operational (read “administrative”) duties in military bases. Indeed, he was posted to the Ministry of Defense headquarters. At the new unit, Lim’s new manpower officer remarked with a little surprise that Lim did not look gay. He also said that because he already had an officially gay recruit working in his office, he would post Lim to another branch in the unit. Lim ascertained from the officer that the military policies specify that gay recruits must be spread apart. The officer told Lim that no one would harass him as long as he observed sexual proprieties on military premises. “There is no bias towards you, you know,” the officer assured him. Lim countered insightfully, “I know that people are probably not biased, but the system is.”

Lim’s encounters show that despite the many educated officers who staff the upper echelons of the military and write its policies, military personnel still comprehend gender and sexuality in antiquated terms. They confuse differences in biological sex with sex and gender roles, such that military medical handbooks equate homosexuality with transsexualism, and policies configure gay men as feminine in behavior and receptive during sex. These officers display little understanding that not all gay men cross-dress, or that actual cross-dressers may in fact self-identify as straight (Wheeler and Schaefer 1988). Neither do they see the possibilities of masculine gay men taking passive sexual roles, or feminine gay men taking active ones.

Lim’s account also dispels the myths that surrounds 302, the military medical designation for officially gay recruits. Lim (2002b) traces the number to the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (usually abbreviated as “ICD”), a list of known diseases
and medical disorders that the World Health Organization publishes. In it, the WHO codes each condition to facilitate medical administration. As a WHO member, Singapore uses the ICD. The WHO published its latest ICD revision, the ICD-10, in 1992. However, military policy-writers used an earlier revision, the ICD-9 published in 1977, to formulate policies towards gay recruits. The ICD-10 does not list homosexuality as a disorder. Strictly speaking, neither does ICD-9. Under the code “302,” ICD-9 lists zoophilia, transsexualism, pedophilia, nymphomania, satyriasis, and other “sexual deviations” often fallaciously attributed to homosexuality – but not homosexuality itself. The fact that the military doctors designate gay men as “302” attests not only to their limited comprehension of gender and sexuality, but also to the tardiness with which military bureaucracy adopts the WHO's new medical classifications encoded in ICD-10.

Purportedly, the military adopted its current policies towards gay recruits to shield the other enlistees from their alleged negative influences. Citing Lily Wong-Ip's article, "Understanding Homosexual Servicemen" in Council Link, a publication of the military's Counseling Center, Lim (2002b) highlights the rationale behind the military's gay policies. Military policy-writers assume that “gays would threaten discipline and morale,” that “the male bonding that takes place in combat would be jeopardised if its potential for erotic contact were condoned,” and that “gays are subject to blackmail in the military context.” Lim refutes all three justifications. Firstly, since homosexuality by itself does not provide exemption from NS, generations of gay men must have served without disclosing their sexuality, or causing disciplinary incidents. Lim insists that his openly gay presence did not affect his unit's work efficiency. Secondly, a person's sexuality has no causal links to his capabilities for self-discipline, professionalism, and teamwork. If gay men disrupt group cohesion through their alleged eroticism, then military officers should also ban women in an organization dominated by heterosexual men (including, ironically, Lily Wong-Ip herself) instead of actively recruiting them. Indeed, I was reminded of the illogic of gay men threatening unit cohesion by Lt Dan Choi, a US military infantry officer who was discharged after coming out famously on US
national television, when he visited my campus on 15 February 2010. He said that cohesion in his unit actually improved after he came out, because nobody needed to tiptoe around the issue of his sexuality anymore. Lastly, Lim acknowledges that while people with secrets to hide may be more easily blackmailed and turned into security liabilities, gay men who openly disclose their sexuality should logically become less susceptible to threats. Why then does the Military Security Department explicitly forbid openly gay personnel access to classified information and, with that denial, to promotion up the ranks? In effect, military ignorance about gender and sexuality creates a glass ceiling that contradicts organizational goals to clear up the red tape that chokes the military bureaucracy.

The military anti-gay glass ceiling appears impenetrable, but gay men have breached it. The ceiling bars the advancement of officially gay personnel, but no laws demand that gay men must officially declare their sexuality. A gay man may come out to all the people he works with, but as long as he does not declare “302,” the MSD will encounter difficulties to recognize him as “gay,” or to hold his sexuality against him. His homosexuality remains illegible to the state (Scott 1998). During my various fieldwork projects, I met a number of men who breached the glass ceiling with some success. One of them, Bryan, attained the rank of staff sergeant (i.e. a mid-ranking non-commissioned officer) as a career soldier with considerable access to classified information, before he was discharged honorably in 2004. He outed himself willingly to those colleagues and superiors who asked. He also said that he was neither harassed nor did he encounter problems commanding respect from his subordinates. However, he did not officially declare his sexuality, as he did not feel the need to. Bryan's treatment clearly did not stem from a gay-friendly environment in the military. Rather, he must have worked sufficiently well with his colleagues that his sexuality became a non-work issue.

Furthermore, military policies seem to take a pragmatic, result-oriented approach towards gay soldiers. Even an out, loud, and feminine gay soldier may find much room to maneuver in,
provided that he passes his physical fitness tests, produces other expected test results, and does not hinder his unit's operations. In other words, the ability to measure up to the military's standards of masculine performance can deflect the teasing and bullying that a physically unfit gay soldier would otherwise attract. Nick, a gay informant, illustrates this point perfectly. At the time I talked to him, he had just been discharged from active NS duty. Nick spoke in a loud, slightly feminine voice that reverberated through the quiet cafe where we met, and he punctuated his replies with emphatic gesturing. We talked about his life in the navy as an obvious bapok and ah qua. Nick never bothered to suppress his demeanor, perhaps because he realized the futility of it even if he were to try. Despite the teasing he received as a result, Nick disabused his detractors of the stereotype of the weak, feminine gay man by attaining the gold standard in his last physical fitness test. This meant, among other physical achievements, that he ran 2.4 km under 9 minutes 45 seconds, an astonishing feat that only the fittest soldiers could achieve. This led his commanding officer to choose him to give a speech to his ship's crew. Nick spoke on the need for more tolerance for sexual minorities in the military, which made his staff sergeant “puff his cheeks” and “bulge his eyes out like a bug,” but he was otherwise not punished for his audacity. I attribute this lack of punishment largely to Nick's excellent test results. Along with its results in the combat proficiency test, the marksmanship test, and other criteria, a unit's overall physical fitness adds to its competitiveness in an annual Best Unit Competition. Nick did not say whether his unit won the contest that year, but his physical fitness test scores definitely added to his unit's edge. Had he failed his test, I doubt that his commanding officer would have honored him with the speech in the first place.

The fact that both Bryan and Nick could thrive in the military despite their being openly gay suggests that ignorance about homosexuality afflicts the military more than homophobia. Officers make no attempts to turn their gay recruits straight, but they do require all personnel to measure up to the high standards for results that they set. Openly gay men who satisfy these demands can in fact thrive in the military as they are, and even change the inaccurate opinions their colleagues have
about homosexuality. Certainly, they appeal to the Chinese idea of *wu* masculinity that saturates the armed forces. As I argued elsewhere (Tan 2009), homosexuality by itself does not provide sufficient cause for dismissal from one's government job in today's Singapore. It may hinder an individual's career if he has a homophobic boss, but it must combine with corruption, incompetence, and other more pressing problems before the boss can reasonably dismiss a gay employee.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed hegemonic and subordinated masculinities, and the theoretical expansions that masculinity scholars must make to relieve the oppressive effects that these two meta-concepts have on women. Following this, I discussed the negotiations that gay men make in the two key sites of citizen-making at home and in the military. I began with an exposition on the social relevance of the seemingly global sexual identity label “gay” in Singapore vis-à-vis the local identity labels that gay men also use. Next, I questioned the relevance of “coming out,” a key rite of passage in Western gay ontologies, in the Singaporean context. Here, I traced the confrontational individualism inherent in “coming out” to the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy, and argued that this individualism contradicts the consensual Confucianism that informs Chinese-Singaporeans' social behavior. I suggested “going home” as an alternative and less confrontational strategy, but I also highlighted its retarding effects on the formation of LGBT rights movement.

Lastly, I examined the ways gay men negotiate in the military. With few exceptions, all able-bodied male citizens must serve two years of National Service, usually in the army. Although the military suffers from considerable abuses of resources and personal power, NS also functions as Singapore's great social equalizer. By forcing enlistees hailing from different ethnic and social backgrounds to live, train and suffer together, NS creates an organic bond that connects all Singaporean men. This bond enables these citizens to create their own national identity in ways no propagandistic government campaign ever can. However, a gay recruit can find the military's highly
heterosexualized spaces daunting. He can remain closeted, or he can officially disclose his sexuality. Through a rare account of the military's “coming out” procedures, I exposed the military's general ignorance of gender and sexuality. This does not mean that openly gay men cannot thrive there. Evidence suggests that those who satisfy the military's stringent standards of masculine performances can find not only considerable room to maneuver in, but also affect positive changes in the attitudes towards homosexuality in the people they work with.

In the next and concluding chapter, I will discuss possible avenues of future research on cultural and sexual citizenship in Singapore, and also predict what may happen to the local LGBT rights movement in the near future.
Chapter 6 – Conclusion

In this closing chapter, I summarize the arguments that I made so far in the dissertation, and map out three possible avenues for post-doctoral research. Looking back, the research proposal for this dissertation crystalized over a short period of time. Before I decided to investigate national belonging among Singapore gay men, I wanted to examine how these men discursively and materially construct and embody their masculinity and sexuality. Yet, that project was shelved in April 2007 after numerous proposal drafts, as its theoretical and empirical scope did not seem sufficient for a doctoral dissertation. With the final round of my comprehensive examinations scheduled in about four months away, I desperately needed a new project. During a brainstorming visit to a fellow graduate student's office that clarified the perimeters of my interests – the new research must be somehow related to Singapore and gay men – I decided on my current topic. After all, like the so many of my fellow citizens, I am never entirely comfortable with being Singaporean. I came to appreciate the good life that the governing PAP built for the country over the course of my research, but I remain fully cognizant of the fact that this “good life” is only material in nature and barely extends to social, intellectual, and political diversity.

With this ambiguous sense of national belonging in mind, I framed this dissertation in terms of citizenship. I conceptualized this thesis into two halves. Spanning the first three chapters, the first half sets the stage for the ethnographic discussion in the second half. In Chapter 1, after comparing the usefulness and distinctions of citizenship in its legal, cultural, and sexual forms, I ask how gay men react to the state's vision of proper masculinity and femininity. In Chapter 2, I outlined Singapore's history of nation-building using a racial lens, starting not from the country's founding as a British entrepôt in 1819, but earlier still as a port in the Srivijaya Empire in the thirteenth-century CE. I paid particular attention here to how various racial stereotypes arose during British colonial rule and their socio-political impact in the current post-colonial period. In Chapter 3, I examined the ways the state constructs the “proper” citizen through its policies and discourses. I divided this
myriad of state instruments into three large categories that seek to engineer citizens into embodiments of their state-designated race-cultures, industrious economic producers, and fecund biological reproducers. Such a dissecting illuminates the many inherent racial and gender inequalities in these policies. Few (if any can satisfy all of the strenuous demands that these policies place on them. The near-impossibility of performing this idealized citizenship explains in part why decades of pro-fecundity campaigns have yet to arrest and reverse plummeting birth rates.

In the second half, I move towards the ethnography proper. After the theory-heavy Chapter 3, I describe in a light-hearted interlude (an intellectual palate-cleanser, if you will) how my kiasu attempt to secure the best seat in my first foray into the annual National Day Parade came to naught. Picking up speed in Chapter 4, I continued the theme of national alienation, and argued that the PAP state's over-emphasis on the economy produced a national malaise of cynicism called “the Great Affective Divide.” As political apathetic citizens whose sexuality is criminalized, gay men are doubly alienated. Local gay rights activists tried to counteract this dearth of national affect. Using two case studies of such attempts, I maintained that activists who work with Singapore's communitarian ideals and locate gay men as socially embedded individuals tend to achieve better results than those who focus on gay rights as individualistic and socially dislodged human rights. In Chapter 5, I examined how gay men manage their gendered and sexual identities as both gay and men in the two key citizen-making sites of the family home and the military. I argued that while they know of the political importance of “coming out,” most gay men remain closeted to their immediate family members, mostly to avoid shaming their parents. In the military, the short tour of duty and an ignorant work environment founded upon antiquated concepts of gender and sexuality give gay men even fewer incentives to come out. Rather, the identity of gay soldiers as men subsume their sexual identity during the two years. Many recruits get discharged disgruntled about military practices, but a few recognize the crucial role that the military plays in the shaping of an organic national identity.
Citizenship thematically structures this dissertation, but insofar as citizenship critically supports the modernity project, this dissertation also inevitably comments on the meanings of modernity. What sort of modernity does Singapore exhibit then? Is Singapore really, as cultural studies scholar Audrey Yue observes, a queer case of “modernization without modernity”? It certainly appears so. Citizens can vote, but the current system of Group Representation Constituencies poses high barriers to entry to the Parliament to opposition parties, even as PAP leaders claim that the GRCs guarantee parliamentary representation of ethnic minorities (Tan 2005). Citizens also enjoy only limited freedoms of speech and of assembly, and the state still detains without trial through the much-criticized Internal Security Act. Indeed, Singapore fits the hallmarks of an illiberal democracy that Fareed Zakaria (1997) identifies (see also Plattner 1998).

Despite Singapore's current illiberality, I disagree with Yue. Singapore is undeniably modern, as it has always been cosmopolitan. Some five hundred years before Raffles even set foot in Southeast Asia, Singapore (as Temasek) already engaged the global as a Srivijayan trading port. Located at the southern terminus of the Straits of Melaka, Temasek serviced ships plying the monsoon-driven trade routes between China, India, and beyond. Raffles' arrival revived this role, and Singapore continues to function as a major trading port even today. We can only deny Singapore's modernity if we subscribe, as Yue undoubtedly did, to the Eurocentric view that posits Euro-America and its foundations in liberal democracy as the one and only available model of modernity for everybody else to emulate. Yet, if the anthropological record already provides ample examples of non-Western modernities in China (Rofel 1999), Japan (Inoue 2003), Zambia (Ferguson 1999), and elsewhere, why cannot we see Singaporean modernity as alternate too?

Indeed, Singapore's alternate modernity requires a re-formulating of what we comprehend as cultural citizenship. Previously, Siu (2005) highlighted the horizontal, transnational aspects of national affect to expose the limits of the over-simplistic bottom-up and top-down models that Rosaldo (1997) and Ong (1999) proposed respectively. In my study, I offer a fourth model, one that
profoundly stresses on the constantly negotiated vertical aspects of the same affect. In Singapore, I argue that citizens trade in their political acquiescence for material comfort. Relinquishing the right to determine the contours of their citizenship to the state, they can only react to the state's decisions. Discursively infantilized and feminized in relation to the father-state, citizens can protest in outrage or make impassioned appeals to the political leadership's sense of right and wrong, but success is never guaranteed. In the elections that followed the 1983 racist Great Marriage Debate, for instance, the PAP lost enough votes to make Lee Kuan Yew realize he committed a major error. Even then, the party only toned down but never abandoned its pro-fecundity policies. Reacting to a larger legal overhaul, activists in the 2007 campaign to normalize homosexuality had much better luck, despite opposition from those gay men and lesbians who feared that such actions would make the state clamp down on the vibrant gay entertainment scene. Although homosexuality still remains illegal, the campaign raised public awareness of the issue, and ended with the Prime Minister himself staking his personal honor on a promise to not enforce the anti-sodomy law. In a coincidental but intriguing continuation of the colonial past, this exchange of political rights for material well-being parallels with the situation faced by concubines and the men who kept them. As a social class, concubines were subjected to the men's whims. Certainly, the men could abandon them, or even sell them to other men without prior consultation. Yet, concubines gained prestige and access to valuable material resources through their associations, and many siphoned off the men's wealth to enrich themselves and their kin (Andaya 1998; Jones 2010).

So, What Now?

Now that this thesis has come to an end, I shall cast my gaze towards the distant, misty horizon of the future and attempt to fathom what may come to pass. Certainly, the PAP will remain a major (if not pivotal) actor in all domains of social life in Singapore. As one can plainly see in this dissertation, Singapore would not have been the thriving, economically thriving city-port that it is
today were it not for the PAP. Indeed, generations of Singaporeans (especially those born after 1965) know of no other government. Since the political stability the party provides accounts for much of the current economic prosperity, it makes little sense to remove it solely because of its authoritarian governance. Any socio-political benefits accrued would most likely pale in the face of the economic decline such a removal would herald.

Yet, Singapore's economic prosperity also ironically contributes to the absence of an organic sense of belonging among citizens. At its core, Singapore exists for commerce, but the unrelenting pursuit of economic excellence – which includes constant reminders to embody “proper” citizenship, and the PAP constructing for itself the image of the all-powerful father to whom the citizen-children owe their unquestioning loyalty – alienate the citizenry. If the PAP wants to be the father, then it should also behave benignly as one and cease its heavy-handed way of dealing with disagreement. The basic national ontological crisis that underlies Singapore's existence, however, means that the PAP cannot give up its quest for economic supremacy and state-citizen relationships cannot improve. So, can this paradox be resolved? According to Alex, a field informant, it can. In a radical re-imagining of state-citizen relationships, he suggests that since PAP leaders already run the country as if it were a company, then they should take the next logical step and make this “Singapore, Inc.” discourse official. Political leaders would be cast as the board of directors, citizens as permanent workers and share-holders, and foreign labor as employees hired on temporary contracts. In fact, such a discourse would also engender national belonging. After all, workers do take pride and ownership in the companies they help build in real life. The discourse's only caveat, Alex reminds me, is that the politicians must cease their frequent intrusions into the lives of private citizens. Real-life company directors do not tell their employees what language(s) they should speak, how “Chinese” or “Malay” they should be, or how many children they should have, and neither should politicians. Like directors, they should just focus on improving on the company's overall productivity.
The PAP's continuing relevance also does not signal a slowing down or even a freeze on gay rights activism to legalize homosexuality. Local activists have demonstrated a surprising capability to innovate in Singapore's restrictive social environment, and make the most out of each state-permitted small step towards social liberalization. In the near future at least, they will continue to display such creative flexibility. Changing global acceptance of gay men and lesbians, at least in other advanced economies, will aid the activists' cause. The PAP resists the trend now, but it must eventually legalize homosexuality. Persistent resistance sustains an illiberal social environment that deters global capital and labor flows, so it will only threaten economic growth and the party's political legitimacy. If nothing else, the PAP will decriminalize homosexuality out of self-preservation. The only question is how long gay Singaporeans must wait for the inevitable to happen.

In terms of research, I see three possible avenues for post-doctoral inquiry. The first one extends from my current research on national affection among Chinese gay men to the cultural citizenship of gay men from the minority ethnic groups. Malay and Indian gay men suffer not only from their stigmatized sexuality, but also from the sinocentrism implicit in state laws and policies. For instance, public housing laws limit the number of Malay and Indian residents in any given neighborhood to prevent the formation of inward-looking ethnic enclaves. In effect, these laws normalize Chinese ethnicity, while rendering Malay and Indian ones as unruly and in need of management. Given the problemization of a significant portion of their cultural identities, do Malay and Indian gay men see themselves as Singaporean citizens? How do they act out their sexualized ethnic identities in space? In my current research, the informants occupy the dominant social position as middle-class Chinese, so they may be unable or unwilling to see the pernicious effects that the minoritization of sexuality and ethnicity have on non-Chinese citizens. As such, pursuing this above line of inquiry will enable me to piece together a better picture of Singapore's ethnoscape, and to better articulate the theory of ethno-normativity that I outlined earlier in Chapter
2.

The second line of possible post-doctoral research seeks to examine state dynamics from the inside through the civil service. Consisting of numerous ministries, statutory boards, and government-linked private companies, the state is a major (if not the biggest) employer in Singapore. As bureaucrats situated between the upper government echelons that make national decisions and the ordinary citizens whom they purportedly serve, civil servants mediate state-citizenry relationships. Previous studies conducted in the West revealed, through Niskanen's (1971) seminal public-choice theory, that bureaucrats undermine the public's interests to expand their own budgets and spheres of influence (see Blais and Dion 1991 for an update). Herzfeld (1992) further argues that modern-day bureaucracies are no more “rational” nor less “symbolic” than the traditional societies that anthropologists study. Rather, we can only properly comprehend these organizations when we see their links with local concepts of opportunity, personal character, individual responsibility, and inter-personal relationships. Bearing Niskanen and Hetzfeld in mind, how are we to make sense of the Singaporean civil service? Do self-interests motivate Singaporean civil servants as much as they do Western bureaucrats? To what extent can civil servants mediate decisions made by their superiors in the upper echelons of government? More importantly, does this mediation have any national consequences?

The last avenue of post-doctoral research resurrects my original rejected dissertational topic to examine gay masculinity and Bear culture in Taiwan. Over the past decade, a minority among generally slim and smooth-bodied gay men became increasingly visible in Taiwan's capital city of Taipei. Calling themselves Bears, these men typically sport short-cropped crew cut hair, some form of facial hair, and large, sometimes gym-trained muscular, bodies. Testifying to the Bears' popularity, Taipei now boasts the Little Bear Village (xiao xiong chun in Mandarin), a vibrant and lively collection of Bear-oriented bars just behind the famous city landmark of the Red House, and a Bear-themed dance party every last Saturday of the month. This party attracts revelers from all
over East and Southeast Asia, the numbers of which swell dramatically when the party coincides with the annual gay pride parade, the year-end celebrations, and other special events.

How are we to make sense of this new cultural phenomenon? Why does it take root and flourish in Taipei and not any other Asian city? Furthermore, how does it inform our understanding of the globalization of ideas (in this case, those of masculinity and sexuality)? After all, the idea of the “Bear” originates from the United States, where it nominally refers to a larger-framed, hirsute gay man. Rejecting the hyper-masculine gay clone of the 1970s that Levine (1998) describes, Bears strive, above all, to look like regular guys by embodying a supposedly more authentic working-class masculinity. Even though they cannot agree on what “Bear” entails exactly (Hennen 2008), most identify facial / body hair and a stocky body as two key defining somatic characteristics (Bunzl 2005). Interrogating the figure of the Bear further, Hennen (2008) makes two crucial arguments. Firstly, he reveals the implicit middle-class whiteness encoded within the symbol of the Bear, as the Bear’s “authentic” masculinity harks back to older Victorian ideas that pit “pure” nature against “impure” civilization. More importantly, he argues that Bears simultaneously repudiate and reify hegemonic masculinity. While they reject the heterosexuality located at the core of the concept, they also reinforce it by attempting to eradicate all visible differences they have with heterosexual men.

However, Chinese men (and East and Southeast Asians in general) typically lack body hair. How then do the Bears among them envision their Bearness? Following Louie's (2002) crucial observation that any scholarly discussion of Chinese masculinity (and indeed, I insist, any masculinity within the Chinese sphere of cultural influence) must invoke the idea of wen-wu, a dyad whose cultural meanings center on two opposite but complementary poles of literary achievements (wen) and martial prowess (wu). As I already discussed in the previous chapter, the importance of wen and wu varied over time. In China's Ming (1368 – 1644 CE) and Qing (1644 – 1911 CE), wen masculinity was associated with elite men (Wu 2004) while its wu counterpart was associated with non-elite ones (Sommer 2002). These close associations between masculinity and class exist still
exist today (Louie 2002), even though the extent to which they hold true remains unclear. Louie himself does not give ethnographic examples to his *wen-wu* philosophizing, so my pursuit of this line of research promises to provide vital empirical data on the dynamics of gender in a modern Chinese society.
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### Appendix A

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income Tax Rebates</td>
<td>1973: Child relief in income tax returns only for first 3 children on or after 1 August, 1973. Previously, parents could claim up to fifth child.</td>
<td>1984: Graduate mothers could claim an extra 5 percent of annual income for their first 3 children. 1985: Could claim 5 percent for the firstborn, and more for second and third child (up to S$10,000 each). Scheme later extended to mothers with at least 5 “O” level passes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDB Housing</td>
<td>Before 1968, the minimum family size to get a HDB flat was 5. After 1968, families with 3 or fewer children also became eligible. 1973: Family size became a non-factor in deciding priority for flats.</td>
<td>No changes from previous period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School Registration</td>
<td>Phase 1 registration open to second child with a sibling in the same school. Priority for up to 3 children when mother was sterilized.</td>
<td>Phase 1 registration for child of mothers with at least 3 children and a university degree, and if the child has a sibling in the same school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaigns and Rhetoric</td>
<td>“Stop at Two” “Boy or Girl, Two is Enough”</td>
<td>Graduate Mother Policy The Great Marriage Debate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Bodies Formed</td>
<td>Singapore Family Planning and Population Board – to reduce the number of births and, later, to achieve zero population growth.</td>
<td>Social Development Unit Social Development Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash Grants and Hospital Fees for Having a Baby</td>
<td>Progressively higher hospital fees for each subsequent child. 7 days of unrecorded full-pay leave for women civil servants who sterilize after third (or later child).</td>
<td>S$10,000 cash grant for mothers under 30 years old who sterilize after their first or second child. Both parents must not have any “O” level passes and their combined income must be S$1,500 at most.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare Subsidies</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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Table A.1: State Natalist Policies 1966 – 1986 (Source: *The Straits Times* 2008a)
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<tr>
<td><strong>Income Tax Rebates</strong></td>
<td>1987: Child relief extended to mothers with at least 3 “O” level passes. Special tax rebate of up to S$20,000 per couple for a third child (and, later, fourth child).</td>
<td>No changes from previous period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HDB Housing</strong></td>
<td>Families got priority in flat allocation when they wanted a bigger flat after the third child's birth. Families with 3 or more children could sell their flats in the open market without satisfying the 5-year residence requirement.</td>
<td>No changes from previous period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary School Registration</strong></td>
<td>Third-child disincentives abolished. Children from three-child families got admission priority.</td>
<td>No changes from previous period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Government Bodies Formed</strong></td>
<td>Family Life Education Coordination Unit – to take charge of mass media promotions and to coordinate state pro-natal programs.</td>
<td>“Family Matters! Singapore Committee” that gave pro-marriage and pro-family ideas. Work-Life Unit worked with unions and employers to boost practices such as flexi-work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family-Planning Policies</strong></td>
<td>Compulsory pre-sterilization counseling for couples with fewer than 3 children.</td>
<td>No changes from previous period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cash Grants and Hospital Fees for Having a Baby</strong></td>
<td>No changes from previous period.</td>
<td>Baby Bonus Scheme rewarded mothers with cash for having second child (S$1,500) and third child (S$3,000). Rewards given over 6 years. Government matched dollar-for-dollar savings in Child Development Account for second and third child, up to a specified maximum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Childcare Subsidies</strong></td>
<td>Women civil servants got 4 years of no-pay leave. Working mothers got S$100 monthly subsidy for each child under 6 years old to help pay fees at approved child-care centers. Only for the first 3 children.</td>
<td>Working mothers had 8 weeks of paid maternity leave for third child. Pay was capped at S$20,000.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Income Tax Rebates</td>
<td>Education requirements abolished for working mothers. Child relief went to S$25,000 for each child and up to 4 children. Parenthood tax rebates of S$10,000 for second child, and S$20,000 for third and fourth child.</td>
<td>Child relief for working mothers increased, and capped at S$50,000. Parenthood tax rebates extended to S$5,000 for the first child, S$10,000 for the second, and S$20,000 for each subsequent child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDB Housing</td>
<td>For singles who marry, housing grant went up from S$11,000 to up to S$29,000.</td>
<td>No changes from previous period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School Registration</td>
<td>No changes from previous period.</td>
<td>No changes from previous period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaigns and Rhetoric</td>
<td>No changes from previous period.</td>
<td>Work-Life Balance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family-Planning Policies</td>
<td>No changes from previous period.</td>
<td>No changes from previous period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash Grants and Hospital Fees for Having a Baby</td>
<td>Baby Bonus increased and extended to award S$3,000 for each of the first two children, and S$6,000 for each of the next two children. Award given over 2 years, not 6. State contribution to Child Development Account increased. Fourth child also became eligible. Use of Medisave (medical savings account) for birth expenses of every child. Previously, only the first three children were eligible. More use of Medisave for in-vitro fertilization and other Assisted Conception Procedures.</td>
<td>Baby Bonus increased to S$4,000 for each of the first two children. Award given out in four instalments over 18 months. State contribution to Child Development Account extended to S$6,000 for the first child, and S$18,000 each for the fifth child and beyond.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare Subsidies</td>
<td>Paid maternity leave extended to 12 weeks. 2-day childcare leave for working parents with children under age 7. Infant-care subsidies went up to S$400 a month. Foreign maid levy reduced to S$250 from S$345 for households with children under age 12.</td>
<td>Paid maternity leave extended to 16 months. Number of childcare centers increased. Infant-care subsidy increased to S$600 per month. Childcare subsidy for older children less than age 7 went up to S$300.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A.3: State Natalist Policies 2003 – Present (Collated from The Straits Times 2008a, 2008e, 2008f)