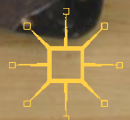


# TRANSIENT MOBILITY AND MIDDLE CLASS IDENTITY

*Media and Migration in  
Australia and Singapore*

Catherine Gomes



Transient Mobility and Middle Class Identity:  
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and Singapore

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and Middle Class  
Identity: Media and  
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palgrave  
macmillan

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ISBN 978-981-10-1638-7      ISBN 978-981-10-1639-4 (eBook)  
DOI 10.1007/978-981-10-1639-4

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016946996

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Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature

The registered company is Macmillan Publishers Ltd. Singapore

The registered company address is: 152 Beach Road, #22-06/08 Gateway East, Singapore 189721, Singapore

## PREFACE

My interest in transient migrants in Australia and Singapore stems from my own history and experience as a Singapore-born transient migrant in Australia and from my observations teaching and talking to the hundreds of international students I encountered in my classes. My first experience as a transient migrant took place in my late teens when I became an international student. After finishing my undergraduate degree in Perth, I returned to Singapore to work and to keep my mother company following the death of my father. My plan at the time was to live in Singapore for a year before becoming transient again as an international student; the study bug had bitten me and I was determined to do a PhD somewhere! However, due to family reasons I stayed in Singapore for a few more years, working in the civil service and completing a Masters degree at a local university instead.

Still, the aspiration for transience had arrived and I finally managed to save enough money to embark on a doctoral program in Melbourne. After completing my PhD, I was fortunate enough to be offered a yearly but renewable lectureship at another university where I became another type of transient subject—the temporary skilled worker. This aura of temporariness of place became permanent once I received my Australian permanent residence and became a continuing member of faculty. While I may be able to interchangeably call both Australia and Singapore home, I am still confronted by my own ideas of identity. I am unable to identify completely with Singaporeans yet have difficulty finding commonality with Asians who were born in or grew up in Australia.

Not being able to identify with Singapore society and the Asian-Australian community may simply be a result of differing experiences. The longer I am away from Singapore, the more I am alienated from the everyday experiences of my Singaporean counterparts. Although I voraciously read Singaporean news on a daily basis, this will never replace directly experiencing the everyday issues which confront Singaporeans. Likewise, while I am sympathetic to Asian-Australian concerns, I will always be a 'new' migrant since I first came to Australia as an international student entering university. Hence issues of schoolyard racism and institutional racism which my Asian-Australian friends experienced simply because they are Asian were not experiences I could easily identify with.

Complicating my connection to ethnic Chinese-dominated Singaporean society is the fact that I am Eurasian and thus have a hybridised ethnic cultural identity. Growing up in Singapore I longed to be Chinese, since I believed that would allow me to feel a sense of belonging amongst my peers. Because I clearly do not look Chinese or, for that matter, Malay or Indian, the other two more obvious official ethnic groups in Singapore, I am often mistaken for a non-Singaporean. Singapore, as I point out in this book, is a magnet for foreigners working in skilled and unskilled occupations and, increasingly, a hub for international education. There have been a number of times when I have been mistaken for either a Filipina or an Indonesian foreign domestic worker because of the way I look.

Needless to say, issues of identity have always intrigued me. From talking to the international students in my classes it became apparent that identity is not always a clear-cut notion for them either, as they attempt to make sense of who they are and who they might be becoming due to their mobility. Mobility, in other words, creates spaces where identities become flexible and adaptable. With this in mind, I embarked on a book that is aimed at discovering the evolving cultural and social identities of transient migrants and their related networks in a comparative study of Australia and Singapore. The choice of Australia and Singapore as my case studies goes beyond being rooted in my continuing personal and professional relationship with both countries and is, I hope, the start of a wider attempt to unpack the developing complexities individuals encounter as transnational and temporary mobility becomes a way of life.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research documented in this book would not have been possible without an Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Award (DECRA) fellowship and funding from RMIT University. I am indebted to Basil Alzougool, Amber Lim, George Moratidis and Joshua Wong, who earnestly helped at various times with both my fieldwork and the large amounts of data I was juggling. I am also thankful to Shanton Chang, who has become a dearly valued friend as well as collaborator, and to Jonathan Tan, co-author of the chapter ‘Christianity: A Culture of Transnational Mobility’ for bringing his extensive knowledge of Christianity to the fore. So much thanks and appreciation go out to my editors at Palgrave Macmillan and Springer, Sara Crowley Vigneau, Connie Li and Nina Li, for having faith in this project and for providing incredible support in bringing my words to print. I would like to thank the production team at Springer Nature, Palgrave Macmillan and SPi Global for proofreading and copyediting my work. Much thanks goes out to Kirpal Singh and the Wee Kim Wee Centre at the Singapore Management University for hosting me as a visiting research fellow while I conducted fieldwork in Singapore. I am also grateful to David Murcott, Frank Smith, Jonathan O’Donnell, Tania Lewis, Jo Tacchi, Larissa Hjorth, Chris Hudson, Supriya Singh, Sharon Smith, Mary Ann Seow, Cathy Greenfield, Sharyn Taylor, Marsha Berry, Roland Burke, Nikita Vanderbyl, Nadia Rhook, Tracey Banivanua-Mar, Susan Leong, Peidong Yang, Ly Tran, Michiel Baas, Sarah Pink, Heather Horst, Fran Martin, Betty Leask, Fazal Rizvi and Gracia Liu-Farrer and Dora Constantinidis for all the assistance, support, mentoring and friendship I received before and during my fellowship resulting in this book.

Thank you ISANA for allowing me to present my research in its various forms and for the thought-provoking comments and encouragement.

Heartfelt thanks are also due to Carol Newlands for taking care of our little Sally whenever I had to travel interstate and overseas in connection to this project, and I am eternally grateful to Andrew Newlands for his love and unwavering patience during the entire period I took to research, analyse and document my findings. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank all respondents who took the time to talk to me, fill in surveys and document their everyday lives. Without you, this book would never have become a reality.

Some of the ideas presented in this book first saw the light of day in previous publications including ‘Negotiating everyday life in Australia: unpacking the parallel society inhabited by Asian international students through their social networks and entertainment media use’, *Journal of Youth Studies*, no. 18, pp. 515–536; ‘Where to Next after Graduation?: International Students in Australia and their Aspirations for Transnational Mobility’, *Crossings: Journal of Migration and Culture*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 41-58 and ‘Christianity as a Culture of Mobility: A Case Study of Asian Transient Migrants in Singapore’, *KritikaKultura: A Refereed Electronic Journal of Literary/Cultural and Language Studies*, first published 21 September 2015, <http://journals.ateneo.edu/ojs/index.php/kk/article/view/KK2015.02512/2277>.

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# Introduction

Global migration for work, study, lifestyle and humanitarian reasons is a daily reality for increasing numbers of people, with the UN estimating fully 3.3 per cent of the world's population (244 million people) is made up of international migrants (United Nations Sustainable Development Platform, 2016). Included in this mix are individuals who not only leave their nations of birth or citizenship permanently but also temporarily. The circulation of both skilled and unskilled labour forces together with a growing number of students flowing between nations has thus become commonplace. The presence of these transient migrants has been acknowledged to have favourable economic effects on the host nation, such as contributing to the growth of local industries, while simultaneously increasing the diversity of local ethnicities and cultures. Yet at the same time, transient migrants face challenges in their everyday existence with issues such as loneliness, homesickness, xenophobia and difficulties with integration and assimilation into the local community. Despite the increasing transnational movements of people and the everyday issues they face while overseas, research in the area of transient migration is still in its infancy.

In the Asia-Pacific region, for instance, two of the most popular destinations for transient migrants are Australia and Singapore. By June 2013, there were 1.67 million transient migrants in Australia (Markus, 2014) and 1.55 million transient migrants in Singapore (National Population and Talent Division, 2014). Of these guest migrants in Australia, 37 per cent are international students (including exchange students), 23 per cent are

on working visas (457 subclass visa business holders) and 19 per cent are working holiday makers. Meanwhile in Singapore international students (including exchange students) make up about 6 per cent of the transient migrant population. Transient working migrants in Singapore are classified into three groups with specific regulations on their visas: unskilled/semi-skilled/low-skilled workers, mid-level skilled workers and higher-skilled workers. In Singapore, 14 per cent of the labour force are foreign domestic workers (unskilled workers), 46 per cent are semi-skilled or low-skilled workers (e.g. in construction), 8 per cent are mid-level skilled workers (e.g. technicians) and 12 per cent are higher-skilled workers (e.g. managers) (National Population and Talent Division, 2014).

Research on transient migrants and transient migration, in short, has been almost exclusively focused on three areas: the poor working conditions and treatment of unskilled/semi-skilled/low-skilled workers (e.g. Constable, 1997; Ford & Piper, 2007; Kathiravelu, 2015); recruitment, study and well-being of international students studying in the international education hubs of Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the USA (e.g. Arkoudis et al., 2010; Bolsmann & Miller, 2008; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008) and, increasingly, the issues surrounding asylum seekers and refugees due to the escalating numbers of displaced people crossing borders in the past decade.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, very few studies exist which examine the spectrum of lived experiences undergone by working middle-class migrants in addition to the sociocultural spaces they and international students occupy. There is also a dearth of significant work on the development and maintenance of transient migrants' various self-perceived identities and almost none on how these identities help shape their everyday life in transience.

Through ethnographic and empirical work, this book provides insights into the everyday lives of these transient migrants who while on the one hand are part of the ethnographic and economic landscapes of their host nations, yet on the other hand are not really part of the host nation's society and culture by the very fact of their transience. In other words, they are not only treated differently because of their residential status but, as this book reveals, also consider themselves unique compared to their host nation societies and, surprisingly, even to their home nation peers. In order to provide a glimpse into the daily experience of transient migrants, this book centres its discussions on everyday aspects of their lives, namely their self-perceived identities, social networks (friendship groups), communication (social networking sites, particularly social media), media engagement and entertainment habits.

Here I look collectively at the educated and mobile middle class—international students, exchange students and workers—living in the two significant transient migrant hubs of Australia and Singapore. All international and exchange students included in this book were enrolled in post-secondary education, whether at diploma, degree or higher degree level, while exchange students were all enrolled in undergraduate programs. Workers, meanwhile, were white-collar workers and working holiday makers—the latter specific to Australia. All the white-collar workers featured here were degree holders, while working holiday makers had post-secondary education at a minimum diploma level. While Australia is a key player in international education, host to almost half a million onshore international students and a popular destination for working holiday makers from 29 different countries (Tourism Australia, 2015), Singapore is a magnet for white-collar temporary workers occupying various income levels and also hosts international students. Additionally, a study that includes Singapore also opens up another discussion on migration and mobility which has heretofore almost exclusively centred on non-Western people migrating to Western countries.

In this book I argue that transient migrants develop complex and creative strategies to navigate life in transience which, are rooted in their self-perceived identities. These identities may be categorised as existing (e.g. nationality), recent (e.g. new-found religion), temporary (e.g. international student) and developing (e.g. perception of oneself as a global citizen). While these self-perceived identities may be interlinked, recent identities may still be developing and temporary identities contribute to developing ones (e.g. international student and working holiday identities are part of a developing global citizen identity), they allow transient migrants to occupy social and cultural spaces exclusively occupied by fellow transient migrants and thus steer their future endeavours. Adaptability, connections and disconnections, community, identity formation, maintenance and (re) discovery, English as the language of mobility, (North) American in particular media and identity and aspirations for further transient mobility are the thematic patterns which are recurrent throughout this book and these anchor discussion on the strategies transient migrants use in navigating their everyday lives overseas. I also touch on how these themes may be useful for policymakers and practitioners who work in the diverse spaces connected with transient migrants, such as international education, community relations and advocacy.

## SINGAPORE AND AUSTRALIA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

There is thus substantial justification for a study of transient migrants that focuses primarily on Australia and Singapore. Besides being regional neighbours, both Australia and Singapore are settler societies with separate histories as colonies of the British. While Australia was largely settled prior to the abolition of the White Australia Policy in 1973 by Europeans, Singapore was settled mainly by people from the region (e.g. Chinese and Indians) during its colonial era.<sup>2</sup> Both nations have different policies of multiculturalism since they are not only historically destinations for settlement but have also become increasingly welcoming of new permanent migrants from the world over.

Both countries, for various reasons, are thus magnets for transient migrants. Australia, for instance, attracts international students and working holiday makers who contribute to its economy as both consumers and producers. Meanwhile Singapore recruits workers across the skills spectrum as much-needed manpower to fuel its varied industries. While all working holiday makers and many international students work casually or seasonally at low- or mid-level skilled roles, many of Australia's working migrants are also skilled, with increasing numbers employed as what is colloquially known as 'fly-ins and fly-outs' who service the mining sector and its related secondary industries (e.g. transport). Fly-ins and fly-outs usually spend a few weeks staying onsite and a week or two back home, repeating the process thereafter (Berry & Gomes, 2015).

Singapore arguably attracts international students not only because of its stated intention of building itself up as an international education hub but, more importantly, because it sees international students as a potential workforce for the nation. As part of its national agenda in grooming a workforce for the future, Singapore actively recruits and invests in international students by providing generous yet bonded scholarships. By contrast, international students in Australia are not promised future employment in the host nation, even though studies show that at least one-fifth of them intend to stay on as permanent residents (Harrison, 2010). Instead, they are viewed as clients who are in a financial arrangement with education providers and related industries such as tourism and realty.

Let's take a closer look at the transient migrants featured in this book. While I stated in the beginning of this introduction that my focus would predominantly be on students and workers, I would like to point out that individuals who were on bridging and dependents visas were also included.

This is because they too live in transience and are often employed in part-time work.

## *Australia*

### *International Students*

International students have been in Australia since the enactment of the Colombo Plan in 1951, which saw recently decolonised nations and former colonies of the British Commonwealth sending sponsored students to be trained in skills that would assist in the economic, infrastructural and social development of these nations. By the 1980s, Australia had become a global player in the export of education throughout the region by offering courses and qualifications which attract students from Southeast Asia and, increasingly, from Northeast and South Asia. In 2014–15, education services brought in AUD\$18.774 billion through full-fee-paying international students.<sup>3</sup> By the end of 2014 there were 589,860 international students (including exchange students) enrolled in education institutions throughout Australia (Department of Education and Training, 2015). These students came from a range of different countries throughout Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, the European Union and elsewhere. Nonetheless, the majority of international students come from Asia, with the top countries in 2014 being China (152,898), India (63,096), Vietnam (30,121), Republic of Korea (28,016) and Thailand (25,642) (Australian Education International, 2015).<sup>4</sup> While there are high-school-level international students in Australia, their numbers are not comparable to those who are undertaking post-secondary study in universities, vocational education and training (VET) institutes and English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) colleges.<sup>5</sup>

International students in higher education further contribute to the Australian economy through seasonal and casual work. As a condition of their visa, international students are not allowed to hold full-time permanent jobs since that would entail a separate working visa. They are, however, allowed to work a total of 40 hours per fortnight (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2014a). This means that they usually work part-time, whether in contract or non-contract positions. International students often work in service-type industries such as retail, hospitality, tourism, agriculture (e.g. fruit-picking), sales and telemarketing, administrative or clerical roles and tutoring. Postgraduate international students,

particularly doctoral candidates, frequently take on sessional tutoring jobs at universities (Australian Trade Commission, 2014, 2016). In 2009–10 the median weekly income of students in employment was AUD\$564 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). Because their international student fees are high, international students find work to support themselves. The Australian government estimated that in 2014, an undergraduate degree cost between AUD\$15,000 to AUD\$33,000, a postgraduate Masters degree between AUD\$20,000 to AUD\$37,000 and a doctoral degree between AUD\$14,000 to AUD\$37,000 (Australian Trade Commission, 2016). Meanwhile, the estimated cost of living in a one-bedroom student apartment in Melbourne city in 2016 was AUD\$28,500 to AUD\$36,700 per annum (The University of Melbourne, 2016).

In the meantime, 22 per cent of all tertiary students in Australia are international students. New South Wales and Victoria support the majority of such students with a combined share of 58 per cent of the entire Australian market (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Fifty-five per cent of the combined New South Wales and Victorian international student population, meanwhile, live and study in the city of Melbourne (City of Melbourne 2013). These international students attend universities, VET institutes and ELICOS colleges within the city and many occupy residential apartments in the heart of the Central Business District (CBD).

### *Exchange Students*

Exchange (or ‘study abroad’) programs allow international students to study in Australia anywhere from a single semester to a full year. These students study full-time in an Australian school or university while maintaining enrolment in their home institution; and it is the home institution which grants them their resultant award (diploma or degree). In 2013 there were 15,907 exchange students in Australia, making up 6.4 per cent of the international student cohort (Institute of International Education, 2013).

### *Working Holiday Makers*

The working holiday maker program was started in Australia in 1975 to ‘foster closer ties and cultural exchange between Australia and partner countries, with particular emphasis on young adults’ (Department of Immigration and Protection, 2014b, p. 3). According to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, the program ‘enhances the cultural and social development of young people, promotes mutual understanding

between Australia and other nations and is an important part of the tourist industry' (Department of Immigration and Protection, 2015). While partner countries initially comprised just a handful of Commonwealth nations, the list has grown to include 29 countries across Europe, the Americas and the Asia-Pacific region. In the second half of 2013, Australia granted 133,317 visas under this program. The top countries travellers came from were the UK, Germany, Taiwan, France, South Korea, the USA, Chile, Thailand, Argentina and Indonesia (Department of Immigration and Protection, 2014b, p. 8). Working holiday makers, as I mentioned earlier, contribute to the economy in two ways: as consumers (travelling tourists) and as producers (seasonal or part-time workers).

The working holiday maker program allows young people without dependents between the ages of 18 to 30 to travel and work in Australia for a period of one year, with the opportunity to extend for an additional year. In their first year, working holiday makers are required to work 88 days in rural Australia and they are not allowed to work with a particular employer for more than six months. These conditions are intended to preclude working holiday makers from 'squeezing' locals (Australian citizens and permanent residents) out of permanent work. The work these holiday makers perform tends to be low-skilled and unskilled roles in areas such as hospitality, education, retail, telemarketing, office administration, mining, agriculture and construction. If working holiday makers extend their time in Australia into a second year they are required to work in the mining, agriculture and construction industries, primarily because of the seasonal nature of the work.

As travellers, working holiday makers usually backpack their way around Australia. They live in established temporary accommodation such as backpacker hostels, or rent with others in shared flats and houses. Increasingly, working holiday makers source their accommodation through online sources such as *Couchsurfing* (<https://www.couchsurfing.com/>) and *Airbnb* (<https://www.airbnb.com/>) which provide free or cheap accommodation with home owners or renters. Working holiday makers usually find jobs to support themselves in the states that they travel to. Some conditions under the working holiday worker program allow for study periods of up to four months.

### *Temporary Work (Skilled) Visa*

The temporary work (skilled) visa, commonly known as the 457, allows skilled foreigners to work in Australia. Workers holding this visa can work

for a specific employer for up to four years, whether under contract or employed in a permanent position. They must also be sponsored by the employer. Employers can only sponsor someone on a 457 visa if they are unable to find Australian citizens or permanent residents to perform the role. Employers are also required to advertise the position in Australia for at least eight weeks before hiring.

### *Bridging Visas*

Bridging visas are interim visas which allow holders to legally remain in Australia while waiting either to leave the country or for the outcome of a visa application (e.g. for permanent residence). There were five different types of bridging visas available at the time of writing (Visa Australia, 2015), and generally holders of these visas are allowed to work. The maximum period of stay in Australia for some of these visas, however, is only three months.

### *Dependent Visa*

A dependent visa allows accompanying family members and partners to live and work legally in Australia. Dependents are not allowed to study and must apply for an international student visa if they intend to pursue an education in Australia.

## *Singapore*

### *International Students*

Singapore, in the early 2000s, began to reinvent itself as a global education hub, host to a range of public and private institutions of higher learning attractive to international students from the region and elsewhere. This was achieved through the Global Schoolhouse initiative, which witnessed a diverse array of institutions and programs establish themselves throughout the nation-state in 2002. This was followed in 2003 by the launch of the Singapore Education brand, which was intended to promote Singapore as a 'premier education hub' with the specific aim of attracting international students (Dessoiff, 2012). Taking the higher education sector alone, Singapore has two public universities (National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University), three government-supported universities (Singapore Management University, Singapore University of Technology and Design and the Singapore

Institute of Technology), private universities (e.g. Singapore Institute of Management, which administers foreign university degree programs in addition to their own) and branch campuses of foreign universities (e.g. James Cook University and Technische Universität München). In addition, Singapore has five government-affiliated polytechnics which provide industry-specific diploma and degree programs (The Complete University Guide, UK, 2014; Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2014). Yet the Global Schoolhouse initiative is not confined to serving solely international students. By 2011 Singapore had around 70 registered private higher education providers, catering to 47,500 full-time and part-time Singaporean students (ICEF Monitor, 2012).

Besides making inroads into the lucrative international education market, turning Singapore into a global education hub was a key strategy utilised by the government in their efforts to transform the city-state into a knowledge-based economy. This approach saw Singapore strengthen its position as both a regional services hub and as a manufacturing base for multinational companies (Sanderson, 2002).

In order to attract top international students to its publicly funded universities and polytechnics, Singapore's Ministry of Education administers tuition grants worth about SGD\$210 million each year (of which 6 per cent of the 1700 polytechnic students and 13 per cent of the 2200 public-funded university-going undergraduates are recipients).<sup>6</sup> The grants also heavily subsidise the fees of international students, who upon graduation are then bonded in Singapore for three years to work for locally based companies (Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2014). In addition, Singapore also has scholarships, grants and fellowships that are specific to the region. These include the Singapore Government Scholarships for Southeast Asians and the ASEAN Foundation Scholarships in Development, Environment and IT for ASEAN Nationals. International students without scholarships, however, would find that Singapore's international student fees are now comparable with those in other popular education hubs such as Australia, New Zealand, the USA and Europe. As of 2015 an Arts and Social Science degree undertaken at Singapore's premier tertiary institution—the National University of Singapore—costs SGD\$32,250 per annum, while the same course costs approximately SGD\$28,897—\$32,669 per annum at the University of Melbourne, a top-ranked Australian university.<sup>7</sup> (National University of Singapore, 2015, p. 3; University of Melbourne, 2015, p. 4).

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in 2012 there were around 86,000 international students in Singapore,<sup>8</sup> and at the beginning of 2014, international students made up 18 per cent of the country's university-going cohort. Unlike other global education hubs such as Australia, the UK, Canada and the USA, which aim to increase their international student intake since international education is a lucrative market supporting secondary industries, Singapore nevertheless aimed to *decrease* its foreign enrolments to 15 per cent by 2015 in order to create more vacancies for local students at university-level. Singapore's initial aim of increasing its international student population to 150,000 by 2015 was reviewed after the 2011 General Elections when voters turned against the ruling People's Action Party, accusing them, among other issues, of favouring international students over locals whom they felt were denied places in local tertiary institutions. Singaporeans have, since the late 1990s and increasingly throughout the 2000s, become upset and angry with the government for letting in skilled foreigners and international students into the country. They see the presence of these foreigners as unfair competition for employment for instance as well as threats to their cultural and social identities. Growing local resentment together with other issues such as the financial collapse of some of the offshore campuses in Singapore (e.g. University of New South Wales Asia) brought the Global Schoolhouse project to a screeching halt.

### *Workers*

Since the late 1990s, Singapore has been actively recruiting skilled foreign workers in order to address local labour shortages. These labour shortages are caused by a 'brain drain' as a result of skilled Singaporeans relocating overseas (Gomes, 2009) and, in more recent years, as a direct result of low birth rates. Unlike the unskilled/semi-skilled/low-skilled workers who are often employed as foreign domestic workers and labourers, skilled foreign workers are professionals. They are often to be found in management positions, typically hold university degrees and work in mid-level jobs (e.g. as technicians) or higher. Colloquially these workers are known locally as 'foreign talent'.

There are different visa categories for foreign talent, who hold either work passes (for professionals) or S-passes (for mid-level skilled workers). Work passes are further hierarchically subdivided into employment passes and personalised employment passes (PEP). Foreign talent migrants on a work pass must be on a minimum fixed salary of SGD\$3300 a month for young graduates with a recognised tertiary education. Older workers

have a higher expected salary. Meanwhile, those on PEPs must earn a fixed monthly salary of at least SGD\$18,000, compared with S-pass holders who must draw a minimum fixed monthly income of SGD\$2200. If foreign talent workers want to bring their dependents (children and legally married spouses only), they are only entitled to do so if they earn a fixed monthly income of SGD\$8000 for employment pass holders and SGD\$4000 for S-pass holders. Those on PEPs are automatically allowed to bring their dependents, since they are already categorised as high-end earners (Ministry of Manpower, Singapore, 2014, 2015a, 2015b). Foreign talent migrants usually become permanent residents, while work permit holders are not provided with this option. International students studying in post-secondary and tertiary institutions have also been classified as ‘foreign talent’ since they may eventually take up white-collar positions in Singapore.

### *Identities, Social Networks, Social Networking Sites and Entertainment Media*

Thanks to the availability of prolific and affordable air transport as well as the proliferation of mobile and online communication tools, transient migrants are better connected than ever to their home nations. More significantly, they are increasingly transnationally mobile in the sense that they either have experience living in countries other than those they were born in or, as I discuss in a later chapter, have the intention of doing so. Being transnationally mobile, in other words, has become very much a normal global phenomenon. This book is thus fuelled by a need to expand the current understanding of the transient migration experience because of the multiple cultural links transient migrants have and their intentions to expand the migration experience beyond the initial move from one country to another. In order to understand the strategies transient migrants use in order to navigate their everyday lives, I turn to the interrelated aspects of their self-perceived identities, social networks, social networking site use and entertainment media engagement.

Individual and group identities have become increasingly challenging to define, specify and even recognise because of globalisation and its resultant circulation of people, ideas and cultures facilitated by the spread of communication and media technologies. Arjun Appadurai (1996) correctly noted that that global cultural flows and the circulation of people, finances, technologies, media and ideas have created new collectives and thus new identities. These new collectives are unique, having become what Benedict Anderson (1983) famously called ‘imagined communities’ which exist outside geographical and national boundaries. While Anderson

looked specifically at how communities maintained national and cultural identities outside their homelands, his template allows us to build upon his notion of the imagined community in order to unpack the complex identities which are evolving as part of the globalisation process. As Nadarajah, Mulligan, Singh and Chamberlain (2015) have pointed out, as individuals circulate globally they create new communities that serve their needs through commonality. These communities are, in other words, made up of individuals who bring with them social networks which are based on their self-perceived identity(s).

While there is a correlation between identity and social networks where individuals in the network have common singular, multiple or overlapping identities, this book is interested in what drives the maintenance, formation and (re)discovery of such identities and their resultant social networks. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) notion of *habitus*, in which cultural production is based not only on the individual's everyday experiences but also on their self-interest, and on Anthony Giddens' (1991) theorisation that an individual's identity is not merely based on past experience but is constructed in order to keep a particular individual narrative going, this book explores the maintenance, formation and (re)discovery of identities and social networks as dynamic, ongoing mechanisms which possess both function and purpose. So while transient migrants may be transient for now, their individual identities and social networks exist for a future purpose and are possibly intrinsically linked to the adopted nation yet still connected in some ways to identities and social networks of past and ongoing experiences.

The eclectic work on society and culture conducted by Anderson and many others, such as Stuart Hall (1973, 1992b), Frederick Jamerson (1991), Rey Chow (1993), Homi Bhabha (1994) and Ien Ang (1985, 2001), attempts to make sense of the subject of identity by investigating and unpacking collectives, their lifestyles and their products, which include art, literature, architecture and digital technologies. Recent work in the area of migrants and digital technology (Hjorth & Arnold, 2011; Martin & Rizvi, 2014 and Wong, 2014, 2015) has shown that digital technology allows migrants to remain connected to their home cultures and societies by creating virtual networks, as well as by providing direct communication with friends and family residing in the homeland and elsewhere. The rise of social media has also provided consumers with unprecedented broadcasting power, as well as with new determinants of belonging, identification (self-)description and representation.

While acknowledging the role played by digital technologies in the migration experience, this book uncovers how the wider field of media (including entertainment media) comprises a vital and helpful platform that positively aids the migration experience through self- and communal empowerment.<sup>9</sup> In other words, this book views entertainment media as a tool which allows users to function as both facilitator and as a medium for inquiry into the creation and (re)discovery of identities and networks. An example of the creation of identities and networks would be those formed within the adopted nation, such as the joining of local volunteer and sports groups, while an example of (re)discovery might be related to the ethnic cultural background of the transient migrant, for instance in the case of an ethnic Indian who was born in Singapore and who (re)discovers their Indian identity through their enjoyment of Bollywood films.

Exploring the complexities of the migration experience in a creatively indirect and investigative manner, and considering the tremendous impact digital technologies such as social networking sites and entertainment media have had both in affecting and empowering transient migrants, I went about developing a mixed methodologies framework for my data collection (van Mol, 2013).

### *Methodology and Findings*

During 2013 and 2014 I conducted qualitative research through face-to-face interviews and document analysis of journals written by respondents, and quantitative data collection through online surveys. Respondents were recruited in Australia and Singapore through advertisements on student groups, message boards and through the ‘snowball effect’.<sup>10</sup> In Australia, face-to-face interviews took place in Melbourne while the online survey was launched nationwide. All respondents are referred to in this book by means of pseudonyms. Respondents of the online surveys provided consent by taking part in the survey. Table 1 below provides an outline of the data collection process in Australia and Singapore.

As Table 1 shows, the empirical methodology utilised incorporated 202 face-to-face interviews, 40 respondents for the journal/face-to-face interviews and 313 online survey respondents. I used the online surveys and journals to compare and validate the results generated by the face-to-face interviews. Appendix 1 provides a demographic breakdown of respondents who took part in the interviews and online surveys. The examples and excerpts featured in this book represent the recurrent patterns that emerged as I went through the data.

**Table 1.** Outline of data collection process

<i>Data collection</i>	
Face-to-face interviews	One hundred respondents in Melbourne and 102 respondents in Singapore took part in either small group or individual interviews. Each interview session lasted for anywhere between 30 and 60 minutes. All respondents filled in a short survey which captured their demographic information. Questions were the same for interviews in both countries. Respondents were remunerated with AUD\$30/SGD\$30 shopping vouchers for their time.
Journal entry and face-to-face interviews	Twenty respondents from each country were invited to keep a journal (five entries over two weeks) on their communication and media use and to attend a final interview of approximately 30 minutes based on their journal entries. The respondents were selected based on their willingness to take part in further research. Journal and interview questions were the same in each country. Respondents were remunerated with AUD\$60/SGD\$60 shopping vouchers for their time.
Online survey	An online survey adapted from the face-to-face interviews and journal entries was launched Australia-wide with 201 respondents and Singapore-wide with 112 respondents starting and completing different stages of the survey. Not all online survey respondents completed the entire survey. Respondents had the option of entering a lucky draw where they had a chance to win one of three AUD\$150/SGD\$150 shopping vouchers.

There is no question that the transient migrants I surveyed and spoke with were unique in terms of the purpose of their transience, their countries of birth/citizenship, the country of transience and of course their own individual personalities. Still, as I navigated and reflected on the data the strategies which they used to adapt to life overseas emerged as remarkably recurrent. The examples and excerpts featured in the chapters that follow are indicative of these patterns.

In order to guide our understanding of the new trends that are emerging in transient transnational mobility, I have divided this book into three sections. These sections present the strategies transient migrants use in order to cope with everyday life in transience, the challenges which they face and embrace (particularly in relation to identity formation) and the cultures of mobility which are now becoming commonplace.

The first section, entitled ‘Approaches to Living in Transience’, examines the ways in which transient migrants create for themselves a home away from home. It suggests that transient migrants are highly adaptable

individuals who have creative approaches to dealing with life overseas. These approaches, which are facilitated by their social networks and communication and media use, allow them to remain connected to their home nation and its culture. In the Asia-Pacific, the circulation of skilled labour together with a growing number of students from within and outside the region has become commonplace. Work on transient migration is firmly committed to examining the conditions, treatment and difficulties transient migrants face as they adjust to life overseas (e.g. international students in Australia). There is unfortunately very little written on the ways in which those in transience cope with everyday life away from both their home nations and their families.

The first chapter in this section thus provides a profile of transient migrant adaptability. By looking at a range of interrelated everyday activities such as hobbies, communication patterns and media use, I suggest that transient migrants use these variables as strategies to cope with life in transience. Chapter ‘Replicating Everyday Home Life in Transience: Connecting to the Home Nation through Social Media and Entertainment Media’ looks at the ways in which transient migrants replicate their everyday home life. Here I look at the creative ways in which transient migrants use social networking sites and entertainment media to connect to their home nations, while also acknowledging that because they are overseas they may have an ambivalent relationship with both their nation of origin and the social networks they left behind.

Section Two, entitled ‘Transient Migrant Identities’ unpacks the notion of identity within transience and concentrates on the different identities of transient migrants throughout Australia and Singapore. It reveals that identities are created in transience which may or may not have connections to the host or home countries. Instead the identities that the transient migrants have are either temporary because they specifically emerge while in transience in the host nation or that transience allows opportunities for a re-examination of identities which are connected to the home nation. This section acknowledges that identity was significant to each of the transient migrants who took part in this book. They revealed that they are always thinking about their identities, since they often felt as if they could not wholly identify with either the host nation or with the home nation. Moreover for a few transient migrants, particularly those in Singapore, their experience of transience was not associated solely with the present host nation. Instead, they had the

experience of being transient prior to their arrival in Singapore, either because they grew up living in transience or had studied or worked in countries other than their place of birth before coming to the city-state. The chapter 'Identity on My Mind' introduces us to the impacts of transience on the self-perceived identities of transient migrants. It points out that transient migrants are complex, self-reflective individuals who are both aware and actively engaged with their self-perceived identities. The chapter 'National Identity in Transience: Significance and Cultural Practices', meanwhile, examines the significance of homeland identities. These are identities which are intrinsically connected to the nation of birth/citizenship.

The chapters 'Connections and Disconnections: Forming Parallel Societies in Transience', 'Christianity: A Culture of Transnational Mobility' and 'The Globetrotting Migrant: Aspirations for Transnational Mobility' comprise the final section of this book, which investigates cultures of transient mobility. By examining the communities they inhabit, the chapter 'Connections and Disconnections: Forming Parallel Societies in Transience', for instance, looks at the disconnectedness transient migrants feel towards their host country's society and culture, suggesting that they form parallel societies with other transient migrants as a way of coping with their transience. This chapter also continues the discussion on respondents' lack of connectedness to the home nation. The chapter 'Christianity: A Culture of Transnational Mobility', which is co-written with Jonathan Tan, further explores the ways in which transient migrants create faith-based strategies to cope with being away from their homes and families. Finally, in the chapter 'The Globetrotting Migrant: Aspirations for Transnational Mobility', I discover that transient migrants see themselves as global cosmopolitan subjects, frequently holding aspirations for future transnational mobility in the big cities of Europe, North America and Asia. This chapter dives into the strategies respondents use to continue their transient migrant mobility. These chapters point out that international students and workers are not always at a disadvantage if disconnected from their domestic peers. Instead I suggest that transient migrants use their disconnectedness with locals to create parallel societies for themselves in the host nation, based on their identities as temporary migrants or diasporic nationals. These parallel societies, while impermanent, exist for the benefit and support of their members throughout their transience.

## NOTES

1. At the end of 2013 there were an estimated 51.2 million refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons worldwide (Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, 2015).
2. The White Australia Policy was a racially based policy that governed migration into Australia. It was in place from 1901 until its abolition in 1973 (<http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/a-z/immigration-restriction-act.aspx>). The policy dictated favourable migration from certain European countries, particularly Great Britain.
3. While Australia is host to students on exchange/study abroad programs, this paper does not include them under the banner of ‘international student.’ International students as defined by this paper are full-fee-paying students. In other words, their education in Australia is not subsidised by the Australian government in the way local students’ are subsidised. International students fund their education in Australia primarily through private means. In other words, they or their families pay for their education and living expenses. Some students might be funded by scholarships from their home nations, with a few also obtaining funding from Australian programs such as the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and International Postgraduate Research Scholarships (IPRS) scholarships (Study in Australia, 2014).
4. Figures for 2015 were not available at the time of writing.
5. The term ‘overseas student’ was used more frequently in the 1980s and 1990s before the current term ‘international student’ took precedence.
6. In 2013, Singapore’s Ministry of Education spent SGD\$5.1 million on tertiary education alone (Matthews, 2013).
7. The Singapore government used to heavily subsidise tuition fees for international students but has been increasingly raising fees after voter backlash from the 2011 General Elections, which saw the People’s Action Party (PAP) garner just 60.14 per cent of the popular vote—the lowest in party history. Anti-foreign sentiment, which included the lack of discrepancy between international and local student fees together with the high number of international students at local universities, were key issues in the elections.
8. Figures for 2014 were not available at the time of writing.
9. Explaining entertainment media platforms these days is not so simple. Before the appearance of video players in the 1980s and DVD players the following decade, entertainment media platforms were primarily made up of the core three: radio, television and cinema. It was also not uncommon for films which were once screened in cinemas to be rescreened on television. Today, however, the internet has become a platform that is all-encompassing and which performs the functions once exclusively the

domain of radio, television and cinema. Music, television shows and films are available either through a pay wall, for free or via illegal download, meaning it is no longer necessary for viewers to watch their favourite television shows on a television screen. Instead, they are able to download or stream them from the internet. Hollywood, the most popular and successful entertainment media industry in the world, has even started producing content exclusively for the internet. These programs such as *House of Cards* (Willimon, 2013) and *Blunt Talk* (Ames, 2015), which might once have been made for television, are known as ‘web series’. Web series provide audiences with flexibility, requiring only Wi-Fi access in order to be watched online anywhere and at anytime. Moreover, the internet is a democratic platform which allows users (individuals and groups) who are not necessarily part of an organised media industry to upload scripted programs and videos.

10. Recruiting participants in Singapore proved to be one of the most challenging aspects of this project. While recruitment in Australia was easily done by advertising on trade websites such as Gumtree, this procedure did not prove successful in Singapore. My research assistants, one of whom is Singaporean, and myself advertised on various websites frequented by foreign talent such as Gumtree, Craig’s List and Expats Forum with no positive result. We found more success when we advertised in hostels and online in university student groups. Permission was sought prior to doing so. This strategy, coupled with canvassing for participants on the local university campus we were attached to, assisted us tremendously in recruitment.

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# Transient Migrants: A Profile of Transnational Adaptability

Throughout the process of interviewing respondents for this book, I was struck by how confident they were. Not only were respondents unreserved in answering any of my questions, but they also provided replies which showed them to be well-adjusted to living life in transience in Australia and Singapore respectively. As one of my respondents—John, a 32-year-old Indian postgraduate student in Australia—told me:

I found myself happy living equally well outside India...in fact these are one of the best days of my life...

John, who had been in Australia for four months at the time of the interview, was undoubtedly taking his life in transience as an opportunity to gain new experiences which he would otherwise not encounter back in India. While I am not saying that everyone I interviewed for this book was equally happy living in transience, since a few respondents told me that they sometimes experienced negative feelings such as homesickness and loneliness, I started to wonder how John and others whom I spoke to about their transience were able to cope. What I found was that transient migrants adapt to their temporary environment through a combination of means which facilitate connections to (transient) community and place. While the theme of adaptability runs throughout this book, this chapter specifically considers the role played by previous experiences in the transient migrant respondents' ability to adapt to everyday life in temporality overseas. The experiences transient migrants bring with them include

a combination of aptitudes and abilities stemming from practices in the home nation and, for a growing number, from previous experience living, working and studying in places other than their country of birth.

The respondents I spoke to in Australia and Singapore demonstrated considerable self-awareness with regards to living in transience and were able to develop strategies in order to acclimatise themselves to their situation. For many respondents from multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual home nation environments, for instance, adapting to and practicing a variety of languages was an aspect of everyday life. Malaysians for example, were used to hearing a number of languages (including Chinese dialects and creolised Malaysian English known as Manglish) spoken daily back in Malaysia. Meanwhile for a portion of the respondents who appear in this book, previous experience living overseas either as permanent settlers and/or transient migrants armed them with practical skills for living in transience as well as with flexible attitudes towards notions of home.

Nevertheless for the majority of respondents who had never been transnationally mobile for any significant or meaningful amount of time, their everyday lives in their home nations were shaped in large measure by changes, improvements and variations in communication use and media consumption. Transient migrants' everyday lives, in other words, are dominated by ever-changing communication platforms. It is thus not far-fetched to conclude that respondents have been able to functionally adapt to media productions from outside their national, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and that these have facilitated their ability to both navigate and create approaches to deal with their temporality.

Nearly all the transient migrants in this study were 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001)—young people below the age of 30 who grew up for most of their lives with the Internet and with the changing waves of information communication technologies (ICTs) and social networking sites (SNS). SNS include social media which allows users an unlimited number of contacts and for mass broadcasts (e.g. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) while instant messaging applications sometimes allow for a maximum number of contacts (e.g. Path) and limit the number of people users can communicate with, as in peer-to-peer communication (e.g. WhatsApp). In other words, instant messaging applications have only chat functions, while some social media platforms have both mass broadcasting as well as chat functions. Many users in this study were 'ambidextrous' when it came to their social media use, maintaining different platforms and frequently engaging in different languages (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, WeChat

and Kakao Talk) and on different ICTs which included mobile media (e.g. smartphones, tablets and laptops) and non-mobile media (e.g. desktops).

Additionally, the transient migrants who grew up in multilingual societies or have an interest in popular entertainment outside their own linguistic cultures have had their access to foreign productions facilitated through cinemas, film/genre (e.g. anime) festivals, DVDs and cable television. Increasingly, however, such media is predominantly accessed by means of legal and illegal entertainment websites (Berry & Farquhar, 2006; Smith & Telang, 2009). For instance, Japanese pop culture, Korean New Wave cinema, Hong Kong cinema and Canto-pop and, to a lesser degree, Bollywood and Telugu cinema, are widely circulated in the Asian region where the majority of respondents came from (Fu, 2003; Lu & Yueh-Yu, 2005; Swamy, 2015). While much of the time respondents may have had only a rudimentary understanding of these foreign languages, they were still able to enjoy these productions through subtitles for any visual medium (e.g. television shows, films, productions for the Internet) and through melody in the case of music productions.

Transient migrant respondents in Australia and Singapore, in other words, were experienced with coping with constant and shifting change.

### LINGUISTIC ADAPTABILITY

English-language competency is necessary for global mobility, a topic which I discuss in detail in the chapter 'The Globetrotting Migrant: Aspirations for Transnational Mobility'. English is arguably the language most often used in global situations such as international business transactions, international relations, entertainment, news and advertising media, travel, safety and education, irregardless of the mode of communication (e.g. face-to-face, telephonic or online) (Clark, 2012; Crystal, 2003). Yet while English may be the universal language of choice for international and intercultural communication, it is not necessarily the language spoken in the domestic and personal spaces. For many transient migrants from non-English-speaking backgrounds, English is a second and sometimes a third or a fourth language (Jessner & Cenoz, 2007). While living, studying and/or working in Australia and Singapore though, English is the language used. In Australia, English is the official language of the nation while in Singapore, English is the language used in education and in government. English has attained predominance in Singapore even though the nation-state has four official languages (English, Mandarin, Bahasa Melayu

and Tamil) which are representative of its multicultural citizenry makeup (Chinese, Malay and Indian) (Gomes, 2015a). English would thus not be an entirely new language for almost all respondents, since they would have learnt it in their home nations. Some respondents come to Australia to specifically learn English (Australian Trade Commission, 2015a) while for others in both Australia and Singapore, English-language lessons are part of their preparation prior to entering higher education institutions. In Australia, some universities also require international students from non-English-speaking backgrounds to have an IELTS (International English Language Testing System) certificate before being considered for entry into certain programs (Australian Trade Commission, 2016).

It is thus not unusual for transient migrants to communicate in multiple languages as they go about their daily lives. The respondents who came from non-English-speaking backgrounds stated that while they speak in English with their co-workers, teachers, lecturers and friends in Australia and Singapore, they converse in the language they grew up with when communicating with their parents. So Chinese respondents would be communicating in Mandarin when talking to their parents on the phone, through online mediums such as Skype or via SNS such as Renren (the 'Chinese Facebook'). Some other respondents would also manage more than two languages other than English in their daily lives. For instance, ethnic Chinese-Singaporeans living in Australia might speak to their parents in their dialect group (e.g. Hokkien) but converse with their friends in Australia and in Singapore in Mandarin. This balancing of languages takes place in part because Mandarin is a compulsory second language in the Singapore school system for any student who is ethnically Chinese (Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2015).

Similarly, in multicultural and multilingual Malaysia an ethnic Indian-Malaysian who is Tamil will communicate with friends and family in Tamil, English and Malay. Malay is also used particularly among non-Malay Malaysians to communicate with ethnic Malays and sometimes even with their non-ethnic counterparts. Moreover, Malaysians of all ethnicities would know Malay and English since these are taught in all Malaysian public schools (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2013). For some respondents, such as 21-year-old Kala, juggling multiple languages was not uncommon. Kala, an ethnic Indian-Malaysian undergraduate studying in Singapore, speaks different Indian dialects such as Tamil in addition to being fluent in both English and Malay. She also enjoys watching Bollywood films which are in the Hindi language. Kala explained:

An interesting fact that I'd like to reveal here is that my mother tongue is actually Tamil because my home town is in south India, okay, but I tend to watch more Bollywood and Hindi stuff. The reason behind it is I don't actually watch a lot of Tamil anymore, like one or two once in a blue moon really, because when I was younger I actually like watched Hindi movies to teach myself how to speak Hindi. Yeah, so for some reason because I taught myself that language I actually—I've use—I've practiced it so much it's become as much of a mother tongue to me as English or Tamil I'd say ... In that point of time I was in Malaysia and people there they love Bollywood movies, so every Saturday two o'clock on this particular channel they'd play a Hindi movie and it come with Malay subtitles. Because I knew Malay by then I could just translate the things and see which words meant what, yeah ... So when I used to—I would learn it through the subtitling basically. After a while though I started catching onto things without subtitles and the rest of the things that I did not understand I could piece together through like context, the context they use in these words and I'd figure out what they meant over time and that helped ... And part of the reason was at that particular time the content of these movies or songs or whatnot—it was Hindi—tend to had, tend to have better stories and better content, so we were just sick and tired of Tamil content so we just moved on.

Bollywood productions are incredibly popular in Malaysia (Seneviratne, 2001). In the above extract Kala told me of the immense joy Bollywood productions bring her, to the point where she feels that Hindi is now 'a mother tongue' to her. This is because in order to understand and enjoy Bollywood cinema, Kala taught herself to speak Hindi. Kala here has adapted to the language of her personal choice, which is dictated by the most popular Indian entertainment available: Bollywood. India 'has the largest film industry in the world, making over 1250 feature films and larger number of short films every year' (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2015) with Tamil films constituting a sizable presence in that group. Still, the most well-known Indian films, of course, are those produced by Bollywood in Mumbai (northwest India). So even though Tamil cinema features prominently in the Indian filmmaking industry, Kala preferred Bollywood productions despite the language hurdle. In other words she adapted her linguistic repertoire in order to enjoy a version of Indian culture that is neither from the same region as her family (southern India) come from nor in the dialect that they speak.

Multiple fluencies in language were not the only competencies which respondents carried with them into their host nations. Respondents revealed that a significant method they utilised to adapt to life in transience

was flexibility in interpretations of the concept of home. Numerous respondents stated that home has a variety of meanings to them, rather than being a fixed place or a static concept.

‘HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS’, OR, HERE, THERE  
AND EVERYWHERE

One of the questions I asked the respondents was ‘What is home to you?’ I left the question open-ended and did not go into further specifics (e.g. home as a physical space or as a concept) in order to understand the different kinds of perspectives respondents had with regard to this term. Respondents, particularly those in Australia, acknowledged that they sometimes found it difficult to call Australia home since they were only in transience. Working holiday makers, for instance, were in Australia essentially as tourists first and workers second, while international students and workers stated they would only consider Australia home upon receiving permanent residence. Meanwhile, exchange students in both countries were usually only there for six months and expected to return to the countries where they were undertaking their degrees—which for some of them was not their country of birth or citizenship. Yet for the majority of respondents in both the face-to-face interviews and the online surveys, the host nation was, in a variety of ways, home to them. The variety of responses I received to this question revealed that transient migrants approach the concept of home differently depending on the period of time they have been in transience in the host nation. Typically the longer they were there the more ‘at home’ they felt and the better they were able to assimilate their experiences with transnational mobility and develop strategies in order to create a home for themselves overseas.

In his book *The Meaning of Home*, Edwin Heathcote lyrically defined home as ‘our base, a place that roots us to the earth, to the city or the landscape, (which) gives us permanence and stability and allows us to build a life around it and within it’ (Heathcote, 2012). Above all, he stressed that because home is both permanent and stable, so too are the narratives which we create around the concept. This is not surprising since the notion of home has almost always been exclusively connected with the tangible and conventional idea of the house (e.g. Rybczynski, 1987). Studies of migration and diaspora still habitually consider home within the meta-narrative of the nation of birth (e.g. Chow, 1993; Ong, 1997) but also

in relation to settlement (e.g. Handlin, 1951; Owen, 2005). Discourse around notions of home frequently becomes contentious, as the processes by which both migrants and citizens attempt to achieve varying levels of acceptance, integration, assimilation and acculturation can be both difficult and painful (e.g. Ho, 2008; Jakubowicz & Ho, 2014). Sometimes, migration leads to individuals being forced to deal with serious issues of health and well-being as they attempt to cope with the very fact of being different (e.g. Veling, Hoek, Wiersma, & Mackenbach, 2010). However, these studies are almost always rooted in permanent migration and new citizenship rather than on temporary transnational mobility.

### HOME IS MANY THINGS

Respondents in this study considered home to be more than just tangible, as described by Rybczynski (1987), or permanent and stable, as proposed by Heathcote (2012). Instead, they considered home to comprise a combination of variables both corporeal and conceptual. While on a surface level many respondents noted that their nation of birth or citizenship (or towns and cities within them) as home, some others considered the host nation as home to them. The notion of home, however, is complex and dynamic once respondents thinking about what they considered home to be. Here respondents provided me with more interesting answers to the question of home, stating that they considered family, friends, food, hobbies and interests (e.g. playing or watching sport), material goods, romantic partners and their current neighbourhood to constitute home to them. Respondents' conceptual notions of home thus took the form of cultural practice (e.g. ability to celebrate festivals) and involve feelings of safety, independence, belonging, relaxation, peace, happiness and comfort. Moreover, home was a place where they felt comfortable in their ability to communicate with others. It was also a place inhabited by people who cared for them.

Home, in other words, is not necessarily connected to the place of birth and/or citizenship. The varied notions of home reveal that respondents are proficient at adapting to their transient environments by creating support structures (e.g. social networks within the host nation) and positive, frequently aspirational attitudes towards the host nation (e.g. the possibility of staying in the host nation on a long-term or permanent basis). Home, respondents reveal, is more than just a singular notion of

place. For instance Sulin, a 20-year-old Singaporean international student in Australia, and 38-year-old American Cathy, who worked in Singapore, both provided vagaries of their idea of home—issues I discuss further in this chapter. Sulin felt that she has ‘different kind(s) of home’, whereby both Singapore and Australia functioned as home to her but in diverse ways. Cathy, meanwhile, who studied in the USA but worked in China and the UK, clarified that for her home was ‘wherever I drop my backpack’.

For many of the respondents, home was more than the country of their birth, citizenship or residence. While home comprises a number of variables, the most common concept of home for respondents revolved around family, with the majority of participants mentioning this at the outset of being asked to describe what home meant to them. For some the link between home and family was also aspirational, with both being connected to the respondent’s future. This was the case with 25-year-old Mingli, a former international student currently working part-time in a local university in Singapore, who told me:

Home to me is my family ...Yeah, and my future family life.

For Mingli, family was not only of the present but also of the future. While Mingli provided a specific answer to the question of what home was to him, other respondents provided more complex answers. While they acknowledged family to be a vital component of what they considered home to be, this was far from the only variable for them. For instance Filipina respondent Mary, who was working in Singapore, and Ly, who was from Vietnam but studying in Singapore, noted:

Family home ... structure building, but it’s where you feel yourself very ... comfortable, yeah, there are no limitations for what you want to express, and it’s more of the people you’re with. (Mary)

Home used to be Vietnam, of course, but I’ve been away for so long and my mum’s not even there anymore, she migrated to Germany, so yes ... that’s like all over the place. Home is also like the flat where I’m staying now because it’s really fun and with all the people I’m close to, so I don’t know where it is, so I guess it’s a bit cliché to say home is where the heart is...Yeah I guess it’s true and to me it’s not a—it’s not a specific physical place yeah so when I’m in Germany ... staying with mum a few days home and here in my flat is also home and when I go back to Vietnam during the holidays that’s home as well. (Ly)

Both explained that being in transience means that home is multifaceted and conceptual, comprising their surroundings (e.g. dwelling and material goods), support structures (family and friends) and their notions of independence and selfhood, as noted by Mary ('no limitations for what you want to express'). Home is thus not merely what Heathcote (2012) considered as a place of permanence or stability which one builds narratives around. The creation of support structures that take the form of social networks, in particular, is both a key theme in respondents' efforts to make the host nation feel like home and a prominent avenue by which they create a workable existence for themselves in transience, as the excerpts in this chapter and elsewhere in this book demonstrate. In previous work I have conducted with colleagues on international students in Australia, we found that respondents created a 'home away from home' through vibrant social networks which reflected their different identities and which were based around a number of variables such as nationality, region, hobbies, program of study and neighbourhood (Gomes, Berry, Alzougool, & Chang, 2014). As Mary said, home is 'the people you're with', while to Ly it was wherever he happened to be surrounded 'with all the people I'm close (to)'.

While dwelling was part of the interpretation of home for both Mary and Ly, notions such as permanence and stability were not. Ly, for instance, considered home to comprise not just a singular (national) place but multiple places—specifically Singapore, Vietnam and Germany. Singapore was home because this is where she currently resides, while Germany was home because that is where her mother lives. While she acknowledges Vietnam as her birthplace, she sees it more so as a holiday destination rather than her place of citizenship. Her response was interesting in the sense that she, similarly to other respondents, considered the concept of home to be multifaceted and not straightforwardly located in the host or home nation. Instead she brought in a third place whose only connection to her was its status as residence of her mother. Home thus is taken to another conceptual level which blends notions of the family-as-home with the physical place.

### HOME IS RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW

There were also a number of respondents—the majority being in Singapore—who despite their transience felt that their host nation was in fact home to them. This was for a variety of reasons. Those in Singapore

felt that the city-state constituted home primarily because they spent their formative years there, irregardless of whether they were tertiary students or working adults at the time I was conducting research for this book. Singapore was thus the only significant place they had known to be home, since the majority of respondents in both the face-to-face interviews and the online survey had spent more than a third of their lives there. A number of respondents in Australia, while typically spending less time there, nevertheless admitted that they eventually came to consider Australia as home.

These interpretations of Australia as home were not straightforward, however, since respondents considered the host nation a different kind of home in light of how different Australian society and culture were to that of their home nations. For some, their interpretation of Australia as home was aspirational, since they saw the possibility of the host nation being part of their future and thus actively worked to make Australia their home. The following statements from respondents who took part in the face-to-face interviews illustrate these points:

At the beginning I would say I didn't feel it was home, but now after establishing networks, friends and after you get used to everything around you, I'm slowly beginning to feel like this is like home as well. But it's definitely different from Singapore, it's a different kind of home. I don't know how to explain it, but I guess maybe I was adapting to the environment here ... Well in Singapore, everything is more closed up, whereas here, people are more open about their ideas and how they see things. I guess here ... expressive compared to in Singapore ... Yeah, freedom of speech, like opinions about ... freedom, like ... that kind of stuff ... And I feel that the government takes care of you here, a lot more than in Singapore. Singapore ... society, so we always have to work for what we want. Here, I mean they give you certain amount of money, if you're not employed and stuff ... For me, I kind of want to stay here, if possible. But it all depends on whether I can get the job. So as it is, I'm starting to get more the flow of Australian society... (Singaporean Sulin, international student in Australia)

Just a place that makes me relax, peace, home means peace to me. It can be either in Australia or in Iran, I'm not really—I mean I try to get on well with the fact that I immigrated [as an international student] here, at least I'm going to be immigrated here by choice, by my choice and I can't really go back to Iran because of military service or whatever politics and these things, so I have to make Australia my home. So that's what I'm trying to do at the moment by making friends from other countries, improving my English

to help myself survive in this society ... I moved to a place with my friend, just two of us and that was good. He was Iranian and he's a PhD student as well, so we had the same kind of same lifestyles so that was easy, you know I have one privacy and it was good. But I can say the best place that I've ever been as a home in Australia is my current place. Because my housemates, the guy is from ... and he is a PhD student, so we have mutual understanding of our situation, and the Aussie girl is really nice ... I call it really home. I mean except the typical meaning of home which can be interpreted by the presence of parents, except that part and family I can call this home. (Iranian Arash, international student in Australia)

Both Sulin and 25-year-old Arash felt that Australia was beginning to constitute (a type of) home to them. Moreover, as the excerpts reveal, they were open to making Australia their home on a long-term basis. While the process of making Australia feel like home may take time, as expressed by Sulin, the host nation becomes home primarily because respondents, as both Sulin and Arash expressed, want to make it their home in the future. Arash in particular worked to make Australia home because he felt unable to go back to Iran due to the political situation there. Iran, which is known officially as the Islamic Republic of Iran, is ruled by very strict and conservative laws under which freedom of expression and freedom of speech are severely curtailed. Arash, who described himself as being critical of the politics of his country, cannot foresee a future there. The picture of what home means to transient migrants becomes even more complex when we look at respondents who have been living in different countries, whether permanently or temporarily. Home, in other words, can be anywhere and everywhere, particularly for transient migrants who have a history of transnational mobility.

### ‘HOME IS WHERE THE WI-FI IS’: VETERANS OF TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY AND THEIR POWERS OF ADAPTABILITY

In recent years there has been substantial interest in the area of mobility and connectivity (Hjorth & Arnold, 2012). Not surprisingly, there has been a growing sub-branch within this area dedicated to international students and their connectivity with the home nation, primarily because of concerns about their well-being during their overseas study sojourn (Martin, 2014; Martin & Rizvi, 2014; Wong, 2014, 2015; Ye, 2006).

Work in this area generally highlights the significance of online communication platforms such as Skype and social media (Martin & Rizvi, 2014; Wong, 2014) to keep connected with the home nation, and the importance of online ethnic and national communities in cross-cultural transitions (Ye, 2006). Looking at Chinese international students in the USA, Ye discovered that respondents found the transition from China to the USA significantly easier when they were able to form connections with those in similar situations as themselves. Such connections were based primarily around ethnic and national affiliations (i.e. ethnic Chinese and from China). Ye's respondents told her that they could relate more to these social communities since each member was experiencing similar transitional issues. While the researchers mentioned above each looked at international students who were away from the home nation for the first time, what about those transient migrants already armed with experience living in transience?

The respondents in this study had varied experiences of living outside their countries of birth. Not all respondents in this project held citizenship in the countries of their birth. In other words, the country in which they held citizenship was not the same country they were born in. In the face-to-face interviews, 4 per cent of respondents in Australia and 2 per cent in Singapore reported that the countries they hold citizenship are not their birth nations, while 5 per cent of online survey respondents in Australia and 9 per cent of those surveyed in Singapore said likewise. Other respondents held dual citizenship, and many had previous transnational transient experience living, studying and/or working in countries other than their current host or home nations. Thirty-six per cent of respondents interviewed in Australia and 39 per cent of those in Singapore, in fact, stated that they had lived in transience before their current sojourn. In the online surveys, 19 per cent of respondents in Australia and 33 per cent of respondents in Singapore had previously lived in transience overseas. More respondents in Singapore had thus lived in transience than those in Australia, frequently coming from families who were transnationally mobile because of their parents' work.

Living overseas prior to their current transience in Australia and Singapore respectively provided respondents with the experience of having lived in foreign nations. For respondents such as John, the Indian student I referred to at the beginning of this chapter, living in transience was something which he not only enjoyed but an experience he had had prior to coming to Australia. John, who studied in Belgium and worked in Turkey before embarking on his PhD at a Melbourne university, said:

I'm absolutely comfortable, I'm not homesick, I'm not uneasy, I'm not frightened ... I'm absolutely comfortable, I'm not homesick, I'm not uneasy ... in Australia ... and a similar thing happened when I was Europe ... otherwise I would stay in India, so being in India or being around Indians does not give me any extra sense of security, happiness, relaxation, comfort or do all the things that you'd associate with home, so home for me is not necessarily India, what is a comfort zone for me, where do I find myself comfortable, when I'm working in my area of work, when I'm interacting with people who ... [are] ... similar ... I find some people from my religion who work here, I enjoy interacting with them.

What John clearly highlighted in this excerpt was his ability to feel 'at home' outside India. Living elsewhere other than India did not prevent him from creating a home for himself wherever he went. He stated that there were different ways for him to feel at home while overseas which included working on his PhD—an activity which presumably took up most of his time in Australia since it was the very reason he was there—and making friends with people who were similar to him, in this case other practicing Hindus, since religion, he told me, was important to him. Like other respondents, having strong social networks was a crucial strategy for living in transience.

For other respondents, such as the American Cathy and Indonesian Arun—both working in Singapore yet with substantial experience living elsewhere—home, as they explained, was a matter of momentary and current place. In other words, home was wherever they happened to be living at the time. As Cathy, who had lived in China and the UK before coming to Singapore, enlightened:

Home is wherever I drop my backpack and it has been that way since I graduated from college. So more than fifteen years now, home is wherever I drop my backpack.

Twenty-six-year-old Arun, meanwhile, told me that 'home is where the Wi-Fi is'. Because he had lived in transience in other countries such as the USA and Malaysia before coming to Singapore, he explained that home is really wherever he is at the moment. He clarified:

[E]ven within Indonesia we don't have ... [a home] ... like we moved around within Indonesia as well ... So I don't know a single place where I can say that my roots are still there ... move around a lot ... As for now I always take the present situation so my home is actually now here in Singapore.

It's where I will spend my week and ... of my friends...Yeah it's just a place where I feel comfortable, where I'm fully aware of everything around me. Like I know my way around Singapore and I know how to get places, I know who to look for and who to contact when I need stuff.

Arun here raised the notion that the host nation can be home to him for the simple fact that it is where he is currently based. He provided a picture of a life in transience and explained that even within Indonesia, his family was nomadic (his father was an academic who took his family with him to whichever university he was working for at the time). Arun had thus become adept at living life in transience, where he created a comfortable space for himself by being aware of his environment. Like John, Arun also had social networks which provided him with companionship and camaraderie.

One of the recurrent themes I signposted earlier was the significance of social networks such as friendship groups in allowing transient migrants to create a conceptual notion of home while in transience. Making friends with others who are similar to them through shared activities and interests is a primary way in which respondents coped with life in transience. Transient migrants, in other words, create communities based on temporary and permanent variables of similarity such as visa status (e.g. international student and working holiday maker) and nationality (Gomes, 2015c; Gomes et al., 2014). The impact of social networks on the transient experience is explored in more depth in the coming chapters.

### KEEPING BUSY: COPING WITH TRANSIENCE THROUGH HOBBIES AND ACTIVITIES

Part of adapting to everyday life in transience involves keeping busy. Studies on new permanent migrants reveal that an important coping strategy many migrants use when they first settle into a new country is to occupy their time with hobbies and activities which are of personal interest. These hobbies and activities, which often are replications of pastimes practised in the home nation such as involvement in the creative arts (e.g. photography) and cooking, help recent migrants to create communities in their adopted nation (Gmelch, 1993; Long & Oxfeld, 2004). Transient migrants such as international students, meanwhile, are often advised by their peers (Sansagiri, 2014) and by stakeholders in the international education industry such as institution-based international student advisers (Careers and Employment, The University of Melbourne, 2011) to

keep busy as a way of coping with loneliness—a key negative symptom of transience. International students are frequently encouraged to pursue interests and join societies within the institutional framework which are fun and non-study oriented.

While all respondents were overseas for a specific purpose, be it for study or work, they still found opportunities to engage in various hobbies and activities in their leisure time. They did so despite being full-time students—some of whom have part-time jobs—or full-time workers. Here, respondents reported engaging in activities and hobbies which allow them to keep them occupied, particularly since they are away from family. The activities and hobbies in which respondents took an interest often created avenues for them to socialise with others and/or were linked to their consumption of media (e.g. watching YouTube videos). In general, respondents in the interviews and surveys in both Australia and Singapore listed their hobbies as Internet surfing, using social media, playing computer games, playing sports or exercising, going out with friends, cooking or baking, craft making, gardening, reading, watching television programs, watching films, listening to music and dancing. A number of these activities overlapped and interconnected with each other. While I discuss Internet/(entertainment) media/social media use later in this chapter, the most popular activity outside of these was going out with friends. In other words, social networks feature strongly in the everyday lives of transient migrants—a significant theme throughout the course of this book.

As stated earlier, the activities and hobbies of a number of respondents were engaged in before they came to either Australia or Singapore. For instance, soccer was a passion brought over from the home nation for 32-year-old Ewan from Ireland, who was on a bridging visa, and students Marcus, 25, and Juan, 28, from Colombia, who were both studying English. All three were avid spectators of the sport as well as recreational players, soccer being the national sport of their respective homelands. When I interviewed Ewan, Marcus and Juan in Melbourne in 2013, they explained that they were planning on going to pubs in order to watch the 2014 FIFA World Cup qualifying matches on the big screens whenever their national teams were scheduled to play. While they did not generally form strong or meaningful relationships with random fellow football supporters in such settings, the activity nonetheless allowed them the opportunity to create inroads for such friendships. Juan, for instance, revealed in a later interview that one of his flatmates was another football enthusiast from Germany whom he got on very well with because

of a common interest in the sport, particularly during the lead-up to the World Cup. Others, such as Kevin from India, joined a photography club while in Melbourne. Twenty-seven-year-old Kevin, who was on a dependent's visa, came to Australia with his partner, an international student. He explained that his interest in photography began in his hometown in Kerala, and he joined the club not only to develop his skills further but in order to meet other likeminded people.

One of the activities which respondents engaged in and which allowed them to create a firm network of friends was membership in Christian churches and/or groups. While there is an undeniable amount of media, public and government interest in migrants and Islam because of concerns about cultural and social integration and assimilation, together with the fear of terrorism due to radical Islamists, there is little in the way of academic literature on transient migrants and Christianity. In Australia, international students from Asia can be seen on weekends attending Christian services either in churches or at organised venues for the purpose of worship (e.g. rented halls or rooms in educational institutions). The Cross Culture Church of Christ in the heart of Melbourne city, for instance, conducts three services on Sundays to packed congregations. The church, which seats approximately 700 people, is a convenient place of worship for international students living in the city area. The Melbourne Central Business District (CBD) has numerous apartment buildings which are occupied extensively by international students.<sup>1</sup>

In Singapore, the Christian and Catholic Churches hold special services and masses in both Bahasa Indonesia and Tagalog in order to service the growing numbers of Catholic Filipinos and Christian Indonesians, respectively.<sup>2</sup> During the process of conducting fieldwork in Singapore, I interviewed 29-year-old Elaine and 27-year-old Andrew, who were Indonesians working in Singapore at a Methodist Church in the heart of the CBD. This church holds special services conducted in Bahasa Indonesia by an Indonesian pastor and also has several fellowship groups catering exclusively to Indonesians. My interview with the respondents who attended this church took place after their Monday night bible studies meeting. They informed me that they regularly attended this bible studies group, travelling from different parts of the island after work just to participate in the sessions.

Christian respondents in Singapore were either converts to Christianity, such as 24-year-old Malaysian worker Crystal, or already practising the faith in the home nation, as in the case of Indonesian student Charlene.

For 19-year-old Charlene, living in Singapore allowed her to actively practice her faith even more openly than she did in Indonesia. Like Elaine and Andrew, she attended a Christian church which catered primarily to fellow Indonesians. Not dissimilar to John who we met earlier and who is Hindu, Charlene, Elaine and Andrew also made use of religion to engage in meaningful relationships with people who are similar to them. For Charlene, Elaine and Andrew, the fact that their commonality extended to both religion and nationality provided additional avenues for enhancing their relationships with other Indonesian Christians in the Singaporean churches they attended. For 31-year-old Indonesian student George, meanwhile, the practice of faith was largely conducted online, with George stating that he subscribed to a number of Christian YouTube channels featuring pastors and preachers. While Christianity in transience was a significant theme which arose from the interviews and online surveys conducted in both Australia and Singapore (and which will be discussed in greater detail in the chapter ‘Christianity: A Culture of Transnational Mobility’, George’s mention of media consumption allows me to launch into a discussion of respondents’ navigation of the Internet for media and communication purposes.

### ADAPTING TO LIFE IN TRANSIENCE THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

The increasing body of literature on communication media, particularly social media, tells us that these platforms allow migrants and travellers to keep in touch with the home nation (Wong, 2014, 2015; Martin, 2014; Martin & Rizvi, 2014; Ye, 2006; Cemalcilar, Falbo, & Stapleton, 2005; Chen & Wellman, 2009). Social media creates countless opportunities for diasporic individuals to keep connected to home by allowing them to be constantly in communication with their loved ones, particularly when such social networking platforms are easily accessible from mobile devices (Hjorth, 2011). Furthermore, individuals are able to document their experiences and travels outside the home country and send them to the home nation. Family and friends are able to access these documents, which can take the form of writings, photographs and video productions. These documents thus function not only as a (personal) record of life for the individual but also as public communication for family, friends and others who are connected to the person through their social media account. Social media, in other words, functions as a public intimate record of the adventures and banality of everyday life abroad.

The respondents in this study told me that they used social media as part of their everyday practice, with Facebook being the most well-used platform. Some stated that they were pushed to use Facebook primarily because they were travelling outside the home nation. As 27-year-old working holiday maker Jenny from Scotland explained:

Yeah, I never had a Facebook account until I came to Australia. So before I left everyone was like, that was a good way of obviously keeping in contact with people being so far away.

Others such as Indian postgraduate John in Australia saw Facebook as more than a tool for communication. Firstly John explained that Facebook provided him with an opportunity to not only document his experiences but also to reflect upon them later. He stated:

For myself, I will post on interesting things about me any good thing that I found on the Facebook, when I say that not for others to see it, but five years later when I go back and see, how was my life been going, that gives me a very nice summary to see what's up, what the good things that I have done ... People keep a diary right? So I make Facebook into my diary.

Secondly, John reasoned that Facebook allowed him to connect with people who may be helpful to him while in transience. These would be individuals who are not back in the home nation but in the host country. He explained:

[O]ccasionally I wanted to look up some friend, I heard he is Melbourne let's find him, that would be a rare thing to use it. Otherwise also on Facebook, any tool for that matter, if I need to talk to some person, I need to get in touch, I will look at his profile or there are 20 comments that come in, I just glance through them, okay what's happening, that kind of thing, nothing more.

While John did not clarify if he was reconnecting with friends who were themselves transient or permanent in Australia, he clearly used Facebook as a way to connect on some level with the host nation. I have argued previously that as transient migrants in Australia, international students form a parallel society for themselves for reasons strongly associated with their status and experience as foreign students. Such students feel a sense of belonging in Australia but not to Australia. For John, perhaps includ-

ing fellow transient migrants in Australia into his social network reflected an attempt to connect on some level with his host nation. I discuss the issue of transient migrant parallel societies in greater depth in the chapters ‘Connections and Disconnections: Forming Parallel Societies in Transience’ and ‘Christianity: A Culture of Transnational Mobility’.

While Facebook not only allows for connections to the home land, as in the case of Jenny, it also allows old connections to be rekindled, as was the case with transient migrants such as John, who used it to reconnect with individuals he had encountered in the past both in his home nation and overseas. The phenomenon of social media, though, does not stop with just Facebook. Respondents revealed that they were dexterous in their use of SNS, with those coming from non-English-language backgrounds particularly adept at balancing bilingual sites.

### MAINTAINING A SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE SMORGASBORD

Almost all respondents in this study used social media. They were, like other young people in their age group, multiprofit when it came to social media use (boyd, 2014). In other words they were easily able to juggle different types of SNS. In introducing their concept of polymedia when looking at Filipino and Caribbean transnational families, Madianou and Miller (2012) explain that individuals and groups who are mobile keep connected to their home-based friends and families through the use of a variety of technologies. This happens for three reasons: they have access to a wide range of mobile and internet-based media; they are literate in digital media; and the cost of access to internet-based communication technologies is increasingly becoming free (e.g. free yet sometimes limited wifi access in public spaces).

Almost all respondents, as I mentioned earlier, were Facebook users. Yet it was not uncommon for respondents to balance Facebook with other social networking sites such as Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr, LinkedIn, MSN Messenger, Microsoft VChat, Snapchat, personal blogs, YouTube channels and Google Plus. The most-utilised combination of social networking sites reported by respondents was comprised, unsurprisingly, of Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. Meanwhile Snapchat and Google Plus were the SNS least popular with respondents. While balancing different SNS is not unique, as seen by the number of platforms that help users organise their many social media accounts (Moreau, 2015), what made these transient migrants different was the fact they took this balancing of platforms to the next level.

In their introduction to *Beyond New Media: Discourse and Critique in a Polymediated Age* (2015), Herbig, Herrmann, and Tyma further discuss the Madianou and Miller's concept of polymedia by observing that people use different platforms to maintain different types of interactions and relationships. However while Herbig, Herrmann and Tyma's collection as well as Madianou and Miller's research exclusively looked at users who communicate in a single language, my work with transient migrants adds language as another dimension to this developing discussion of polymedia.

The transient migrants in this study in other words, not only made use of different SNS but also platforms in various languages. For instance, Facebook can be programmed to support languages other than English. Many respondents also noted that they balanced SNS prominent in their home nations on top of the globally used Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Indonesian respondents, for instance, made extensive use of BlackBerry Messenger (BBM), Line and Path, while South Korean respondents were frequently active on KakaoTalk.

When it comes to balancing a smorgasbord of SNS that are nationally based and globally accessed, it is the Chinese who top the rest. Having famously banned Facebook and Twitter, China instead has its own SNS such as Renren, QQ, WeChat, Tencent Weibo and Sina Weibo, all of which are heavily utilised by Chinese users. QQ and Renren are the Chinese versions of MSN Messenger and Facebook respectively, while WeChat and Weibo are the Twitter alternatives.

Chinese transient migrants thus come to Australia and Singapore as experienced and often heavy users of these different Chinese platforms. The face-to-face interviews and online surveys conducted with Chinese respondents revealed that their use of these platforms has not lessened over time. The reason why they do not relinquish use of these uniquely Chinese platforms was because they are *the* social media sites which facilitate communication and connections between Chinese students and workers with their family and friends back home. Over time, Chinese transient migrants instead adopt non-Chinese platforms such as Facebook, which they add on to their smorgasbord of SNS. During interviews, several Chinese international students explained that because they were now making friends with non-Chinese (international) students who were not familiar with the Chinese SNS, they felt they were required to adopt the commonly used platforms of Australia and Singapore in order to maintain friendships with their new non-Chinese friends. So they ended up balancing different platforms: one for family and friends back in China and their Chinese

international student cohort in Australia and Singapore, and another for non-Chinese friends they were making in the host nations.<sup>3</sup> A number of the international students and workers from China who were interviewed in Singapore reported spending their formative years there. So the development of Chinese SNS took place while they were not physically present in the home nation, and for them the adoption of such platforms served the purpose of reacquainting users with their Chinese homeland connections. Still, social media allows for more than just home-host country connections.

The South Koreans I interviewed in both Australia and Singapore were typically active users of KakaoTalk. While this platform allowed them to keep in touch with family and friends back home, it was also used to connect to other South Koreans also in transience in the host nation and elsewhere. The utilisation of country-specific social media platforms alongside Facebook, in other words, plays an important role in allowing users to maintain their national and cultural identities.

In a journal she kept about her media and communication use as part of the research for this book, Kim, a 23-year-old fifth-year medical student from South Korea studying in Melbourne, explained that she has specific platforms for different groups of friends. At the time of completing her journal Kim had spent about seven years in Australia, having completed her high school education there as well. While she preferred face-to-face communication with her Australian friends and maintained a Facebook presence primarily because of them and for the university clubs she joined, she also kept an active KakaoTalk account so that she could chat with Korean friends based both in South Korea and Australia. KakaoTalk and Facebook kept her connected and allowed her not to feel left out. She noted:

It's almost like routine to [use] Facebook and KakaoTalk. If I don't then I feel like [I'm] missing out.

Kim mentioned in her journal that she spoke to her Korean friends on KakaoTalk frequently. She implied too that the majority of her Facebook friends were Korean and that she often looked at what they are up to. Her Korean friends in South Korea and in Australia were clearly very important and significant to her. Furthermore her Korean identity was reinforced daily through these social media connections. I will discuss more about the connections to home through social media and through other means in the next chapter.

## TRANSLOCAL EXPERIENCE AS A COPING STRATEGY

As mentioned earlier, in their work on Chinese international students in Melbourne, Martin and Rizvi argued that their respondents created a translocal experience for themselves in the host nation through their engagement with social media (Martin & Rizvi, 2014) (translocal here refers to the transplanting of the home nation experience overseas) (Martin & Rizvi, 2014, p. 1023–1024). They further described how social media allows international students living in cities such as Melbourne to connect with their home nations through active and everyday use of country-based platforms (e.g. Chinese Weibo). Yet they also imply that verbally and visually communicating with family and friends in real-time through platforms such as Skype can also inadvertently lead to a fractured and somewhat disengaged existence with the chosen host city. This disjuncture in the transient overseas experience, though, may simply be a condition of time ; and, they add, reduced if Chinese apps used have localizing functions. The Chinese international students thus will be connected with fellow (Chinese) users of China-based social media apps who are in Melbourne and therefore extending the translocal experience to include diasporic co-nationals in there.. In his exploration of international students in Australia, Wong (2014) provided an example of a respondent who had daily ‘live’ Skype sessions with her family back in the home nation. These sessions took place at dinner time so that the family could have their meals together virtually. The respondent, who was in her fourth year of study at the time, stated that this routine was engaged in only during her first year in Australia. While the transient migrants I spoke to were seldom as extreme in their translocal experiences as Wong’s example, my respondents did reveal that keeping in touch with the home nation and co-nationals was important to them in terms of connecting with both the country of birth and with their wider national communities around the world.

Twenty-four-year-old former international student and South Korean national Joan, who was in Australia on a bridging visa, used KakaoTalk and Facebook in much the same way as Kim. For Joan, her balancing of KakaoTalk and Facebook was more than just keeping in touch with people she knows but rather a way of keeping informed about what is happening in South Korea and in the Korean diasporic community of Australia and elsewhere. Joan wrote in her journal that she talked to friends through Facebook, WhatsApp and KakaoTalk, spending around two hours each time looking at status updates on Facebook. She was further able to multitask communication platforms depending on who she was talking to—Australians or Koreans. She also read posts on a Korean web forum based in Melbourne. However, she reported finding this forum only ‘50 per cent’

useful since a lot of people who used it were Korean backpackers or visitors with whom she felt she had little in common:

I read posts and comments on Korean community in Melbourne forum irregularly. I visit to stay up to date with what's happening in the community, and for gossip ... With the Korean forum, I identify with the general public who reads it, as we're probably all going to be Korean. 99.9% of posts are made in Korean, and are usually about other Koreans, Korean restaurants, or other things relating to living in Australia as Korean ... With the Korean forum, half and half. As I mentioned a lot of them are working holiday makers, so their lifestyle and interests slightly differ from those of us who are here for uni.

So even though Joan connected with Koreans in Australia, she was quite discerning with regards to their current living situation and how this may impact their potential compatibility. Despite being a university graduate, Joan still felt that she had more in common with those who were still studying than with Korean working holiday makers. She saw the Korean forum as useful because it allowed her to keep in touch with the politics and current events of Korea. She did this because of her own interest in South Korea and also because the topics she encountered in those forums provide her with material for talking with her (Korean) friends:

But when I see posts re: political issues in Korea, I can relate to them much more than I can to Australian issues. I guess I'm still a bit torn whether I'd like to migrate here permanently. Also whether I would be able to cut ties completely with Korea—which by the way would be impossible.

Social media is versatile, so communicating with family and friends in the home nation and with others of the same nationality is easy. However two-way communication SNS (e.g. Facebook), as Joan alluded to, is not the only way of connecting with the home nation and with the diasporic national community transient migrants belong to. The accessibility of simple-to-use video-making technology available on tablets and mobile phones allows everyday people to record themselves and post the recordings online. YouTube, for instance, is a social networking platform that allows users to upload videos and create channels featuring their work. YouTube, like many social media platforms, thus doubles up as a communication and entertainment arena. Additionally, YouTube videos are widely shared through social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF YOUTUBE IN TRANSIENCE

Celebrities and politicians who have been the staple of traditional broadcast mediums have used their YouTube channels to launch their creative work (e.g. singers such as Madonna releasing singles from their current albums) and to make announcements (e.g. Hilary Clinton announcing her candidature for the 2008 and 2016 American Presidential elections). The Internet is also a medium that is accessible to rising talent. There is a new breed of celebrities who have launched their careers through YouTube (e.g. Justin Bieber). While not everyone can become a sustainable international star solely through the power of the Internet, there are a rising number of entertainer-broadcasters who find moderate success by creating their own shows broadcast solely on YouTube. Performers from backgrounds outside the mainstream such as migrants and ethnic minorities have started using YouTube to create shows based on their own experiences. Often comedic, their work highlights situations of intercultural encounters, over-the-top portrayals of ethnic, national and cultural stereotypes as well as diasporic identity formations. Performers such as The Fung Brothers (USA), Linda Dong (Canada) and DigitalRev TV (UK) have a healthy number of subscribers to their YouTube videos, with some, such as The Fung Brothers, also appearing at comedy festivals. Respondents whom I spoke to and surveyed online subscribed to channels which reflected their developing interests and (evolving) self-perceived identities, not only as a way of adapting to and coping with transience but also as a way of understanding the layering of their identities due to their transnational mobility.

Respondents explained that they subscribed to channels featuring transients living in Asia and the West for a variety of reasons. There were Asian respondents who subscribed to channels featuring Asians outside their literal and cultural place of birth, predominantly transient Asians and Asian-Americans. Those in Australia did not subscribe to any Asian-Australian YouTube channels. One reason for this—which I explore in more detail in the chapter ‘Connections and Disconnections: Forming Parallel Societies in Transience’—could be because the Asian respondents I spoke to vocalised that they did not identify with Asian-Australians since they felt them to be more Australian than Asian (Gomes, 2015c) and thus they had few, if any, Asian-Australian friends (Gomes et al., 2015). So unlike audience studies literature (e.g. Davis & Baron, 1981; Moores, 1993; Morley, 1980), which often argues that the media shapes culture and therefore society, in this case because respondents were often limited in their experience of (Asian)Australian culture, they may neither have identified with it nor

been particularly influenced by it. Additionally, respondents may have considered Asian-Americans more ‘cool’ since they are the most well-known diasporic Asians, thanks in large measure to the salience of the US film and television industries. Here actors such as Lucy Liu, Kal Penn and Russell Wong come to mind. It was far more likely for respondents to subscribe to channels in which their national identity featured strongly. Consistent with this, a lack of identification with Singapore-made YouTube productions was also a predominant trend amongst transient migrants in Singapore.

For instance, Heng, a 29-year-old male PhD student from China, subscribed to a YouTube channel designed for Chinese students in Australia even though he was studying in Singapore—a country whose national culture is heavily influenced by that of China since the majority of Singaporeans are ethnic Chinese. For Heng, the channel was a way of gaining insight into the experiences of other Mainland Chinese diasporics. He put it plainly:

[T]here are many ... Chinese students want to get a higher degree in Australia like [at] Melbourne University, ANU [Australian National University] and so there are many students who want to share the experience [of studying] in Australia.

Heng subscribed to this YouTube channel because it allowed him to identify with Chinese migrants elsewhere while also comparing his situation to theirs. Doing so enabled him to learn about how other diasporic Mainland Chinese take practical steps in their everyday transience as international students. Heng, in other words, identified with other Mainland Chinese who were similar to him, that is, other Chinese international students.

For Langit, a 29-year-old Indonesian postgraduate student who had spent his adult life in different parts of Indonesia, subscribing to YouTube channels was likewise not unusual. His preference was for channels that allowed him to understand his own position both as an Indonesian and as a transient migrant. Langit thus subscribed to YouTuber Sasha Stevenson’s (2009–) channel. Stevenson, a Canadian who has been living in Indonesia for more than 15 years, makes weekly comedic videos about life in Indonesia and explains the purpose of her YouTube channel thusly:

On this channel I basically talk about and act out funny stuff I have seen while living here (2001–present). The cases I re-enact involve those who claim to be ‘orang biasa’ or ‘normal people’ in Indonesia but normal is all upside down and all of these differences are certainly good for a laugh!

For Langit the appeal of Stevenson's comedy was twofold, not only reminding him of Indonesia but allowing him to enjoy the humorous perspective of a Western foreigner who appreciates the country yet is also able to see the idiosyncrasies inherent in its society. Langit's regular watching of this channel and his clear fondness for it was notable in the sense that he was not at all annoyed that a Western woman featured Indonesian idiosyncrasies as the focus of her comedy. Instead, he felt that her performances were accurate portrayals of Indonesians and Indonesian everyday life. As an Indonesian abroad he appreciated the foreign-yet-localised lens employed by Stevenson, advising me that in a way he too felt a sense of 'foreignness' towards Indonesia, at least while he was away from his home nation. For Langit, being an Indonesian living overseas was simply not the same, identity-wise and experience-wise, as being an Indonesian in Indonesia. He appreciated Stevenson's perspective perhaps because he too was both detached as well as connected to Indonesia while living as an international student in Singapore. By his own admission he felt that he was not connected to any place within Indonesia, and further stated he thought he might well be comfortable living in transience within Indonesia at some point in the future.

Research in the area of migration and belonging has almost always concentrated on the difficult relationship temporary and permanent migrants (or children/descendants of migrants) have with their adopted countries (e.g. Ang, 2001; Hage, 1998, 2008a, 2008b; Holdsworth, 2009; Khoo, Hugo & McDonald 2010; Nagel, 2005; Zhang & Goodson, 2011) and on the emotional and largely positive homecoming émigrés and their children receive in the home nation (e.g. Lorente, Piper, & Shen, 2005). In referring to her own experiences, Ang, for instance, discusses the difficulties non-Anglo migrants have in assimilating into Australia, while Hageun reservedly points out that migrants who are non-Anglos (and non-Christian, particularly Muslims) face blatant racism in Australia.

In *Negotiating with Wolves: Affirming and Transcending Multiculturalism* (2008a), Hage situates his discussion on the 2005 Cronulla Riots in which Lebanese-Australians and Caucasian-Australians violently clashed. Here Hage argues that the Lebanese-Australians resorted to violence because they needed to feel a sense of belonging in a country whose Prime Minister at the time, John Howard (1996–2007), was critical of multiculturalism and favoured Anglo-Celtic culture as the de facto national culture. Howard further evidenced his bias for Anglo-Celtic culture by advocating the view that because Australia had been colonised by the British in 1788, modern Australia should also be founded on British values. This notion of the host

or adopted nation being difficult for migrants leads to an emphasis on the more positive experiences which occur when émigrés, their children and descendants ‘return home’. Discussing the positive experiences of the authors who wrote about homecoming in her 2008 book *Growing Up Asian in Australia*, Alice Pung stated:

Homecoming is all about recovering a feeling of home, whether it is an actual physical journey like Kylie Kwong’s return to her family’s ancestral home in China, Jacqui Larkin’s sweet tale of a return to childhood, or Sim Shen’s reflections on having his first child and ‘returning’ to South-East Asia.

While Langit’s experience represents a shift in the ways in which we view a migrant’s relationship with their home nation, his use of YouTube to gain perspectives on culture was not unique. Whereas Langit used YouTube to understand his own country’s culture from an identifiably ‘foreign’ lens, others used it to obtain insights into their host nation’s society and culture.<sup>4</sup> In Singapore, many respondents subscribed to YouTube channels for exactly this purpose. Raj, a 22-year-old Indian male undergraduate, explained that he watches a YouTube channel which features humorous takes on aspects of Singaporean culture, such as picking up girls, in order to learn more about Singapore’s culture and society. While realising that these videos are intended to be comedic he still found them worth watching in order to help understand Singaporeans, observing:

Yes, because although they’re very funny and stupid, I would say. They’re deliberately stupid. I think they present the culture in a very obtuse way, but you still get to see a part of their culture and things that they do.

Meanwhile others like Crystal, the 26-year-old Malaysian working in Singapore who was mentioned earlier, subscribed to the channels of certain Asian YouTubers because the content reminded her of her home country. She told me:

Yeah. Most—I like the Asian, especially the Singaporean and Malaysian YouTubers because they ... [are] ... quite closely related to home. Like ... [they] ... are related to Malaysia ... Or like how Malaysian drivers drive ... it’s funny, but at the same time it’s very true how we usually behave in real life. So I found it quite funny.

For Carol, subscribing to YouTube channels that reminded her of the idiosyncrasies of Malaysia helped her think about her home country. Being

humorous they may also have helped her adjust to life in transience in Singapore. What is significant here is that respondents did not typically look at YouTube videos from their home nation but rather at culturally similar ones that reflected the culture and society of the home nation from a transient perspective. There were thus elements of both connections and disconnections—topics I explore in various sections of this book—in their choice of YouTubers and YouTube productions.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Transient migrants are complex individuals with a wealth of cultural knowledge and experience which does not necessarily represent the country they are from or the conventional tropes of the ethnic culture they belong to. Increasingly, their countries of birth and/or citizenship do not reflect their national experience. In other words, they may hold a certain country's passport but have little or no experience of that nation.

In Australia, academic institutions need to recognise that any discussion of diversity on their campuses must take into account the fact that international students are themselves culturally diverse individuals. They need to plan programs and develop courses that allow this diversity to shine through. Australian institutions are increasingly proactive about creating collaborative, student-centred curriculum designed to arm graduates with tools to work in a global environment (e.g. overseas). Perhaps institutions should develop curricular that tap into the diverse cultural knowledge and experiences of their international students in order to help both local and international students appreciate the effects of globalisation on individuals. Doing so might also help address an often troubling trend in the Australian classroom whereby international students are often silent observers rather than active participants.

Policymakers in Singapore, meanwhile, need to realise that integration between educated transient migrants or 'foreign talent' and locals will not happen organically. While transient migrants are welcomed by the government, they are looked upon with fear, suspicion and anger by a Singaporean citizenry which perceives them as a direct threat to their personal welfare and economic security. Government agencies and organs of state need to emphasise the diversity of cultural knowledge and experience represented by transient migrants in an attempt to bridge the gap between them and their native counterparts. Singaporeans, after all, pride themselves on being cosmopolitan—perhaps they will respond positively to transient migrants if such similarities are highlighted.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have painted a picture of transient migrants as adaptable ‘actors’ who develop strategies in order to cope with life in transience. By looking at a range of variables that are part of everyday life I have suggested that they are multidimensional individuals who rely on a combination of practical tools (e.g. keeping busy with hobbies and interests which reflect their identities and actively engaging with online platforms, particularly social media) and flexible attitudes (e.g. multifaceted notions of home) they developed both prior to and during their current sojourn in either Australia or Singapore. In so doing I have also demonstrated that through their ability to adapt to life in transience, the respondents in this study are redefining conventional ways in which we interpret concepts such as home.

In the next chapter I look at how transient migrants incorporate strategies to better cope with transience by creating connections to their home nation. I point out though that respondents do not have a straightforward relationship with their home nation and the social networks they left behind, and describe the ways in which transient migrants transpose their everyday life in the home country onto the host nation. In particular I look at transient migrant engagement with the Internet—their main source of communication, entertainment and news. The chapter will look at the significance of communication tools, entertainment media and social media in helping transient migrants cope with everyday life overseas, suggesting they utilise these tools in order to create connections to their respective home nations.

## NOTES

1. They find the city a convenient place to live in since the area is host to a number of institutions of higher education, private colleges and English-learning centres which are either within the Central Business District or within walking distance from it.
2. Some services in Mandarin and Tamil already existed to service the ethnic Chinese and ethnic Indian Singaporean congregations. Temporary and permanent migrants who speak these languages would be able to attend these services if they so choose.
3. The significance and reach of Chinese SNS is recognised by non-Chinese users. Former Prime Minister of Australia Kevin Rudd—a fluent Mandarin speaker—for instance, famously has a Weibo account with more than 500,000 Mainland Chinese followers (Shandwick, 2013).

4. More respondents in Singapore than in Australia subscribed to YouTube channels and websites in general. This could be because Wi-Fi is free in public places in Singapore and Internet service providers offer cheaper rates than those in Australia.

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# Replicating Everyday Home Life in Transience: Connecting to the Home Nation through Social Media and Entertainment Media

In the previous chapter I alluded to the significance of the home nation to transient migrants in the navigation of their everyday lives while living overseas. I briefly mentioned how respondents transposed or recreated their home nation lifestyle in the host nation by communicating with family and friends, by reminding themselves aspects of their country or birth or citizenship (e.g. cooking food from the home nation) and through their social networks. The majority of transient migrants I spoke to and surveyed online had strong desires to live overseas as workers and/or students in future, with a few expressing a desire to one day retire in countries other than the ones they originally come from or had even lived in previously.<sup>1</sup> In other words, there were respondents who saw themselves extending their transnational mobility for many years to come. Yet while yearning for more international experience through such a lengthening of transient transnational mobility—a topic explored in detail in the final chapter of this book—an awareness of the home nation still continued to occupy their thoughts and steer their actions while functioning as a strategy to help navigate everyday life overseas.

We are currently in the ‘age of hyperconnectivity’ (Chen & Wellman, 2009; Wellman, 2001). The expansion of mobile technologies, web applications and social media has dramatically altered the way subjects network, particularly the means by which transient migrants connect to their home country and its culture. Literature in the field of global communication platforms and social media remains fascinated by the ways in which

mobile subjects utilise information and communication technologies, or ICTs, to connect to their networks (Castells, 2009) and particularly to the home nation (Gomes, Berry, Alzougool, & Chang, 2014; Hjorth, 2011). Social media especially is arguably the fastest-growing means of communication. The Pew Research Centre, for instance, observes that Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and LinkedIn are heavily employed in the USA because '[s]ocial networking sites are increasingly used to keep up with close social ties' (Pew Research Centre, 2015). Part of this chapter is thus dedicated to unpacking transient migrants' social media use in terms of how they utilise it to feel connected to the home nation—in particular, to their friends. Here I argue that while social media plays an important role in allowing transient migrants to connect to their home nation, this connection is not clear-cut in the sense that it does not constitute a direct two-way communication between friends. Moreover, as I discovered, neither were the ties between respondents and the friends they left in the home nation particularly strong. Instead I point out that the transient migrant respondents featured in this research did not have strong friendship ties with people in the home nation yet kept up to date with what was happening in their lives through what they posted on social media. Doing so allowed respondents to vicariously keep up with the happenings and activities in the home nation.

Surprisingly, while social media is widely recognised as a way for transient subjects to keep connected with loved ones and issues happening in the home nation, there is little research exploring the role that media productions (e.g. film, television and music) play in transient transnational mobility (Gomes & Alzougool, 2013). Work in this area is often limited to settled (non-English-speaking) migrants, centring around the lack of representation and stereotyping of migrants in the media (Ang, 2006; Cunningham & Nguyen, 2000) as well as the significance of ethnic media on migrants (Ang, Hawkins, & Dabboussy, 2008). The present chapter aims to start plugging this under-researched area of migration and entertainment media. Media studies, cultural studies and audience studies scholars have long argued the significance of the media in influencing and shaping society's culture. Entertainment media, as Hall (1973); Ang (1985); Chopra and Gajjala (2011) and others (Davis & Baron, 1981; Moores, 1993; Morley, 1980) claim, plays a significant role in disseminating culture through media productions. Meanwhile, others such as van Zoonen (2013); Lewis (2014a, 2014b) and Martin, Lewis, and Sinclair (2013) argue that entertainment media such as reality shows allow

for individuals to have a sense of identification with what they see being depicted in these programs.

The respondents featured in this chapter admitted that entertainment media is important to them and that they consume it every day via the web. They also stated that they hardly watch any local films or listen to any local music, with barely any of them noting that they watch local television. They were still able to access these types of music and shows online but chose not to. Instead, they reported consuming the kind of entertainment they listened to and watched back in their homeland, which was predominantly American.<sup>2</sup> I suggest thus that while entertainment media is critical in allowing transient migrants to connect to the home nation, it is partly by means of globally dominant American productions that they do so, since these are the kinds of productions they were used to back in the homeland.

### CONNECTING TO HOME THROUGH PASSIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

The transient migrants interviewed for this book were active participants on social media, posting status updates, photographs and links (e.g. videos and articles) as well as liking, sharing and commenting on the posts of others. Literature on social media tells us that social networking sites (SNS) allow people living outside the homeland keep connected to friends and family back home (e.g. Hjorth & Arnold, 2013; Martin & Rizvi, 2014; Fortunati, Pertierra, & Vincent, 2012). In their study of mobile media use in Asia, Hjorth and Arnold tell us that while individuals are on the move and circulating throughout Asia, they are connected daily to their homeland through social media applications accessed primarily on their mobile phones. In the previous chapter I referred to the work of Martin and Rizvi (2014), who observed that Chinese international students in Melbourne create a translocal experience for themselves through social media. They stated that even though the students may be living in Melbourne, they were able to reproduce the homeland through sight and sound through Skype for instance, by their constant connection with friends and family from the homeland in real time.

Farah, a 26-year-old Indonesian postgraduate student in Australia, explained that she communicated with her friends through Facebook but created a certain persona which she felt would be non-threatening to them. Talking to her, I started to understand that her posts were thoughtful

and considerate towards her friends in Indonesia. She explained that she uploads photographs of what she thinks are Australia-centric items which are not common in Indonesia and which Indonesians thus might like to see, stating she behaves this way because her Indonesian friends are her link to her Indonesian culture. Her Indonesian identity, as she elaborated, was very important to her and she saw maintaining some form of interpersonal relationship with friends back in the home nation as allowing her to keep connected to that identity:

So I don't want to add other social networks [sites]. So I just go on Facebook. And when I post something, sometimes it's not really me. I mean—because I still have that Indonesian culture in me, so I really need to think, whether this is polite to say in the public. So that kind of things, but I think I don't have any problem. I feel like, okay what I'm doing right—I mean, I'm here, but then sometimes I'll be back to Indonesia. So I still need to keep that good relationship with my people back home. So that's why sometimes, my—I guess show what it can be considered good, it can be considered very motivational for some others. It can be really interesting for them to see. Sometimes for example, I just [post] pictures of the bus stop, you know, simple bus stop. Because I don't see that in Indonesia. So it seems like, I make my social network, for source of information, for those who doesn't have that kind of opportunity to be here. So it's more about giving the information.

Social media, as Farah pointed out, allowed her to consciously connect to friends back home and vice versa. Work in the area of social media and mobility confirms this, seeing mobile subjects able to still directly communicate with the home nation through their mobile phones while they travel outside the home nation (e.g. Fuchs, 2014). Farah, though, was more the exception than the rule among the respondents featured in this book. This is because others whom I spoke with implied that while they may use social media to keep connected to friends in the home nation, they do so in impersonal and indirect ways. As is explained later in this chapter, this is perhaps because the dynamics between respondents and social networks in the home nation are different once transient migrants are overseas.

In his work on mobility and communication technologies, Michael Jensen (2011) notes that because we use communication technology as a way of connecting to a place in lieu of physically being there, we lose authentic connections to that place. Jensen states:

Such technologies erode the clarity of our spatial connection to cultural identity as all forms of human contact, relationships of social power, and historical forms of domination are stretched globally at an increasingly accelerated rate, thus deepening their impact exponentially. These circumstances invite questions concerning our cultural ability to retain, reconstruct, or recall our traditional structures of meaning, especially those associated with our spatial understanding of the world (p. 55).

For transient migrants, however, communication technologies are the primary ways in which to stay connected to family and friends in the home nation and to keep up to date as to the happenings there. As John Urry (2007) explained in his seminal work *Mobilities*, we are experiencing a ‘mobilities paradigm’ whereby our postmodern condition is fixed in a state of flux by the very fact of its being mobile (p. 41). Because individuals are not in physical contact with people in the home nation, the connectivity they once had changes and distorts by the sheer absence of physical proximity.

The social media connections between respondents and their friends in the home nation were thus somewhat impersonal, simply because respondents did not tend to have intimate conversations with their friends in the home nation. Instead, they posted generic and frequently guarded comments and photographs (as implied by Farah) for friends back home to read, view and possibly interact with. Their communication with friends in the home nation, in other words, was not on a one-to-one basis, even though on certain social media platforms such as Facebook there is a chat function which they could utilise. Alternatively, they could communicate with friends back in the home nation through other means such as emails, Skype and telephony applications such as WhatsApp, which some respondents reported using.

Social media, as Farah also implied, allows for an indirect way of keeping in touch with the home nation through posts, or in the case of Instagram, photographs. While Jensen’s warnings on cultural identity are not unwarranted, he does realise that we need to learn how to negotiate and integrate the real with the virtual as part of everyday life. Quoting Paul Virilio, Jensen observes:

The real and the virtual must coexist as twenty-first century modernity becomes a matter of simultaneous existence—part situated in the ‘real time of our immediate activities’ overlaid by a mediated realm that ‘privileges the *now*... to the detriment of the *here*’. (p. 56; Virilio, 1997, p. 37).

Communication technology is thus a vital tool in this age of mobility where users seek to remain almost constantly connected to family and friends in their home nation. Being mobile subjects, we move from one place to another regardless of geographical or national boundaries, which may be permanent or temporary. Hence we indulge in a performance of memory which allows us to retrieve our moments in mobility. Urry explains:

Much mobility involves the active development and performances of ‘memory’ of other people, places and especially meetings. Recovering such memories necessitates methods that qualitatively recreate how photographs, letters, images, souvenirs and objects are deployed within large social groupings or within family and friendship groups. (p. 41)

When discussing their social media use, respondents in both Australia and Singapore stated that they upload photographs in order for friends and family back home to keep track of what they are doing overseas. So instead of directly communicating with each other, respondents and their friends (and families) in the home nation broadcast their activities through the visual image rather than through direct and exclusive communication with each other. The nature of social media is to communicate with a network of friends and followers on particular social media sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Weibo, Renren and KakaoTalk) by means of broadcasts, rather than via intimate small group or one-to-one communication patterns. The added benefit of these broadcasts is that transient migrants are able to also keep in touch with the events of the home nation from various sources and perspectives while letting others keep up to date with their own activities—and in their own time.

Research on social media users generally also reveals that they are not static in their participation but involved in a mixture of activities such as lurking, liking, linking, posting and commenting (e.g. Chang, 2011; Lubke, 2007). While all respondents in this book had a varied presence on this social media platform, the majority admitted that their most common activity was to ‘lurk’ (Bishop, 2007) meaning their participation on social media was more focused on observation rather than active interaction and engagement with friends (Bishop, 2007). Respondents admitted that they enjoyed keeping track of what their friends were up to, particularly those from their homeland, regardless of whether they were still there or overseas. Keeping track of homeland friends who were overseas themselves revealed that respondents were more interested in what others similar to

them (fellow transients from the homeland) were doing. Social media is thus a platform for communities to thrive in (Castells, 1996). More often or not these communities are grounded in friendships based on commonality of experience, as the ongoing Global Social Media Impact Study, led by Daniel Miller (1999–2015), is uncovering.

Taking the example of Facebook—the most well-used SNS among respondents—I was informed by respondents that they often looked through their newsfeeds (posts by their friends and subscribed groups) and entered pages of friends to view their posts and photographs to see what they were doing and to keep track of their lives. As 20-year-old Sulin, a female Singaporean undergraduate studying in Australia, described:

Yeah, news feed or I search people, I just click and click and click and click.

In discussing her Facebook usage, Sulin told me that she not only followed newsfeeds but randomly searched for people in her friends list in order to look at their pages and click on their photographs, comments and links. While respondents generally did not overtly state that there is a method to their lurking, they did let me know that they liked to view photographs of friends as this action allowed them to keep abreast of what happened in the lives of their friends. This took place even though a number of respondents noted that they did not actively keep in touch with those friends. As York Chiu, a 23-year-old Singaporean male undergraduate in Australia, let me know:

I don't really comment a lot or like stuff ... I just look through, to see what's going on.

For him, Facebook presented a window into a world he was absent from, while 'lurking' provided him with the process to engage with home without active two-way communication. Viewing friends' status updates and photographs thus served as a constant yet subliminal reminder of home. Such avenues allow transient migrants to stay connected in real time to everyday life in the homeland. Even though they may not be physically present, transient migrants are able to keep in touch with the events and changes the home society is experiencing through passive engagement with their social media friends on social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook.

So why are respondents passive rather than active or interactive in their social media engagement with friends from the homeland? Speaking to respondents during the face-to-face interviews in Australia and Singapore, I found them to feel disconnected from their friends in the home nation, most commonly because of the increasingly different experiences which they had undergone.

### DISCONNECTIONS WITH FRIENDS IN THE HOMELAND

In his study of identity and belonging among international students in Rio de Janeiro, Nigel Bagnall (2015) recognised that these students were children raised outside their home nation, otherwise known as Third Culture Kids (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). He noted that these individuals no longer had cultural or national ties to their original homeland and that as ‘global nomads carry a challenged sense of belonging’ to the home nation. Referring to the work of Fail, Thompson, and Walker (2004), Bangall explained that part of the problem of a lessened sense of belonging to the home nation is the inability to identify with peers back home due to different experiences. Further, the students he interviewed felt that their peers in the home nation did not understand them and thus felt marginalised from their social networks there. This occurred despite his respondents’ demonstrated ability to cope with the overseas experience—an issue discussed in the previous chapter. He stated:

Despite their ability to cope and adapt to new settings, internationally mobile children tend to harbour ambiguous and ambivalent feelings towards their roots. Studies show that many become socially marginal, existing in a world that is ‘apart of and apart from’ their peers. Sadly, they usually feel misunderstood by their peers who do not have overseas experience and must stow away that part of who they are so that they can make friends and adapt to the new situation (Fail et al., 2004, p. 322).

While Bangall was referring to children below the age of 18, what about young adults undertaking higher education and working adult professionals? Do they experience similar dissonance with their peers in the home nation?

While a few respondents kept in touch with friends back in the home nation, most transient migrants I spoke to both in Australia and in Singapore admitted having difficulty connecting with their home-based

social networks. The primary reason given was the fact they were living overseas. They explained that because of their transience, friends in the home nation found them uncomfortable to be with and sometimes questioned their home nation identity. While there are discussions in the online press on the difficulties transient migrants have readjusting to the homeland (e.g. Bruno, 2015) and increasing and necessary work in areas of transient migration such as international students returning to the home nation (e.g. Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Gribble, 2014; Szkudlarek, 2010), there is, at the time of writing, very little literature on the difficulties and challenges transient migrants have in maintaining their relationships with the friends they had left behind.

Most respondents in Singapore, more than those in Australia, admitted to not having very strong connections with friends back in the home nation. This was because respondents in Singapore had spent an average of seven years there, with many of them commencing their sojourn during secondary school or junior college. Both current international students who were at university and current white-collar workers might have once been in secondary school and/or junior college in Singapore. Some of the white-collar workers might also have come to Singapore at university level rather than starting their studies at secondary school or junior college. Those white-collar workers who did complete their studies in Singapore may have either been successful securing a job in Singapore after finishing university, or serving out a three-year bond as a condition of a local government scholarship. Because a number of respondents spent their formative teenage years away from the home nation, they were thus more likely to make friends with people in Singapore. These, though, would include people from the home nation, from Singapore and perhaps from elsewhere who at some stage were their school friends. The respondents also added that the friends they knew in the home nation were often their secondary school friends and junior college mates rather than the result of friendships that developed in the home nation. Ironically, the social networks that they had in the home nation were not organically developed there but rather while in transience.

Generally more respondents from Australia than in Singapore stated that they kept in contact with their friends who remained in the home nation. Unlike their counterparts in Singapore, respondents in Australia spent an average of only three years there. Most of the respondents who did previous study in Australia were former English-language students, postgraduate students who had completed their undergraduate degrees in Australia

and former international students and working holiday makers who were waiting for permanent residence. While there were respondents who had completed their high school education in Australia and were current undergraduates, this number was insignificant compared to those respondents in Singapore.

I would point out here that while respondents (particularly those in Australia) were quick to state that they still maintained healthy social networks back in the home nation, this particular aspect seemed to fade as we got further into the interviews and respondents became more comfortable talking about their friendship groups. While some respondents stated that they felt that it would not be too difficult for them to pick up where they left off with friends back home, others mentioned that because of the distance and time spent away they were no longer as close to friends in the home nation. For instance, respondents said that more than anything else, family was what signified 'home' to them. Only a few stated that friends from the home nation comprise part of their meaning and definition of home. Some respondents were forthcoming about the disconnection they felt from the friends they left behind. Siti, a 24-year-old Indonesian student studying in Australia, for instance, explained that she got along better with friends from the home nation who themselves have lived and studies overseas than with those who had never left. She explained this was because those who had lived in transience tended to have more shared experiences, regardless of which country they had lived in.

Some respondents spoke honestly about their relationships with friends from the home nation. Twenty-three-year-old South Korean student Kim, for instance, felt irritated that her (South) Korean friends tended to question her 'Koreanness'. Kim had been in Australia for eight years at the time of her interview, had completed high school here and was currently in her final year of a medical degree. She stated:

[W]hen I'm talking to Korean people I don't know as much as they do. I haven't been in [my] country for so long, like eight years ... and I'm not in the same situation, so I feel like I'm distant away from Korea, but do I want to feel like I'm Korean ... Well like I want to be Korean. I was born in Korea and my native language is still Korean and I watch a lot of Korean dramas, and when they call me Australian I'm not like fully Australian citizen or anything ... I'm not belonging to Australia, as in like government-wise, I don't have a Centrelink payment, I'm on like a public health system and I'd be like foreigners and on job-wise, same thing. Because I recently applied for

jobs and the restrictions were different for foreigners, so I don't feel like I'm fully belonging to Australia yet because I have a restriction on me in terms of getting jobs and things.

Kim explained here how her 'Koreanness' has not changed since living in Australia, primarily because to her being Korean referred not only her nationality but also her cultural identity. However, because she had been in Australia for so long, her Korean friends in South Korea labelled her as 'Australian' even though she did not feel a sense of belonging to Australia since she was officially a 'foreigner'. As a non-citizen or permanent resident she did not receive the same welfare benefits or employment opportunities as locals. Kim explained that the dual cultural experiences she has had as a Korean living and studying for a number of years in Australia has led to her friends in South Korea questioning her Korean identity. She stated:

I think, because I have a mixed cultural experience ... my identity is more unique not just Korean Korean, and sometimes when my Korean friends call me all Australian, I'm like, oh that's hurtful.

Kim did not hide her feelings about the attitude her friends in Korea express when they question her Korean identity. She strongly identified herself as Korean and felt hurt whenever her Koreanness was attacked. Kim clearly revealed how difficult it is to straddle between two culturally different national societies and how she was affected by friends in the home nation questioning her Korean authenticity in light of her overseas experience.

In his description of cultural identity, Paul Adler (1998) argued that an individual's cultural identity is not primarily based on the culture they come from but rather a combination of culture, biology and psychology. Adler, in other words, observed that cultural identity is individualised, even though individuals come from and identify with a cultural community. Transient migrants perhaps widen the boundaries of Adler's observations, in the sense that geographical circulation and other factors related to the overseas and international experience influence the make-up of their self-perceived cultural identities. This, as Kim pointed out, unfortunately leads to individuals finding difficulty identifying with the rest of the community and vice versa.

Likewise 26-year-old Indonesian Arun, who, working in Singapore, found it difficult to connect or identify with people in his home nation

and vice versa. This was because he had been living overseas with his parents since he was young. He had spent his childhood in the USA, followed by several years in Indonesia and Malaysia before arriving in Singapore to commence his high school and university education. Unlike Kim, who identified herself as Korean primarily because that was her place of birth and citizenship, Arun, who was ethnically Malay and also Muslim, felt his identity was not as clearly defined. This could be because, even though he was born in Indonesia and still has citizenship there, he had spent significantly more time living overseas than in his country of birth. He pointed out that people back in Indonesia have difficulty relating to both his choices of friends (Singaporean non-Muslims) and the absence of an Indonesian accent, primarily because of the lack of experience they have overseas and his limited time in Indonesia:

I find like the people back home in Indonesia ... [are] ... kind of conservative. They're not used to the mix of races and religions. Like when I tell them well most of friends are, you know, Singaporeans or non Muslims ... You know it's like just the population ratio and everything. I mean I don't close myself to ... only ... friends with a certain background or identity. But in terms of my own identity then [that] becomes really really mixed, really blurred you know. [P]eople don't realise I'm an Indonesian, you can't tell from my accent or something. Where's your Indonesian—I say 'I don't know'. I think it's ... [because I was] ... coming from the US [previously, so] I didn't really develop I guess a thick Indonesian twang you know when you speak English kind of thing.

Here Arun highlighted his inability to connect with fellow Indonesians, primarily because both sides view each other differently due to their divergent life experiences. Arun considered his fellow Indonesians to be conservative, while he felt they consider him too liberal primarily because of his international mobility. Furthermore, he was aware that part of the reason why Indonesians may not really connect with him is because he speaks differently to them, specifically, with an American accent. Arun's story fits in well with Anthony Giddens' (1991) description of how self-identity is constantly evolving due to the experiences of the modern world being marked more by change, due largely to globalisation, than the consistency of tradition that was routine in pre-modern societies.

If directly connecting with friends from the home nation is made difficult due to a combination of evolving differences and the creation of

separate identities, as prescribed by Giddens (1991), in what other ways do transient migrants connect with the home nation? The next section explores this question by looking at an aspect of everyday life for respondents—their consumption of entertainment media.

### ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA: CONNECTIONS TO HOME AND DISCONNECTIONS TO THE HOST NATION

Regardless of respondents' country of origin, entertainment media allowed for a subliminally active and continuous sense of belonging to the home nation through familiarity of content, displays of home culture, familiarity of characters and language, and other means (Martin et al., 2013). Entertainment media was an avenue which gave respondents the opportunity to replicate aspects of their everyday lives in the home country while living in transience. Work on migrants and the media indicates that migrants enjoy consuming entertainment media from their homeland because they are readily able to identify with the productions. Cunningham and Nguyen (2000) pointed out that the Vietnamese migrants they spoke to watched Hong Kong (martial arts) films, particularly those featuring Jackie Chan, as well as Vietnamese films and television shows, and listened to New Wave Vietnamese music (which included Vietnamese cover versions of English songs). Lewis and Hiranon (2000), meanwhile, observed that watching Thai media productions allowed the Thai diaspora who came to Australia in the 1980s and 1990s a form of cultural identification.

The respondents in this study admitted to connecting to their homeland through their choice of entertainment. A few respondents noted they often watched films that were in their native language or reflected their culture, viewed television shows from their home nation and listened to music in their ethnic language—the latter of which I discuss later in this chapter. It is worth noting that while respondents may have stated that they watched films from their culture or language, these films may not necessarily be from the home country, for example, a film in the Chinese language of Mandarin may be from Taiwan rather than from China.

Respondents also consumed entertainment products outside their cultural and language groups, mostly films, although a smaller number also did so when it came to television shows. Only a few respondents reported listening to music in a language other than English or their native tongue. Respondents who consumed media that was not in English and not in

their native language did so because this is what they were used to in their home nation. Such music was exclusively (South) Korean or Japanese—the two most popular entertainment industries in Asia. The popularity of the Japanese and Korean pop culture industries among Asian international students is not surprising. J-Pop and Korean Wave have had a foothold in Asia for the past few decades and their cultural impact across the Pan-Asian region has been the subject of serious academic concern (Chua, 2012; Jung, 2011). Respondents in this study actively maintained cultural links to the homeland by means of engagement with their favourite entertainment industries (Gomes & Alzougool, 2013). It is also worth noting that other than respondents who came from nations with highly prolific and regionally (if not globally) popular national entertainment centres, namely South Korea, India and Japan, respondents did not generally engage with the entertainment from their nations. Those who came from nations whose languages are unique to that country, such as Vietnam and Indonesia, listened to music from their home nations yet were unlikely to be keenly watching films or television shows produced in the home country.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF AMERICAN (HOLLYWOOD) ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA

While I was conducting my fieldwork for this book in 2013 and 2014, Thailand was undergoing a tumultuous protest movement that targeted the military government. Thousands of Thai citizens formed a resistance movement aimed at challenging the military government's rule of their country. While political unrest in Thailand is not uncommon, with military coups and forced changes of governments taking place frequently throughout Thai contemporary history, what was noteworthy about the political unrest this time around was the remarkable influence the Hollywood film *The Hunger Games* (Ross, 2012) had on protestors.

*The Hunger Games* is a successful science fiction Hollywood film franchise based on the novels by Suzanne Collins. Set in a dystopian world dominated by extreme income disparity where the very wealthy rule the poor majority with an iron hand, the only way in which the downtrodden are able to demonstrate a sense of unity and resistance is through symbolism. A particular motif of resistance featured in *The Hunger Games* universe is the three-fingered salute. This hand gesture was adopted by the Thai protestors as a symbol of resistance against the incumbent government, resulting in its use being officially banned in mid-2014 (Lennard, 2014). On 19 November 2014, a group of university students who used

the hand gesture to protest the Thai military-led government during a speech by Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha were promptly arrested. At the time of writing these students are facing possible prison sentences of up to 10 years (Hawley, 2014). As a result of the arrest the Thai government banned the latest instalment of *The Hunger Games* film called *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay, Part 1*, which at the time of writing was being screened worldwide. The *Hunger Games* hand gesture has no doubt become the unofficial symbol of the anti-military protest movement in Thailand and is recognised not only in Thailand but also by the world's media as such. At the time of writing, when I Google-searched 'The Hunger Games', 'Thailand' and 'news', I received 9.92 million results.

On one level, I could read the effect of *The Hunger Games* on the Thai protestors as a result of the successful global distribution of the Hollywood film industry. The first *Hunger Games* film that was screened in 2012, for instance, had a US\$45 million marketing budget which 'made aggressive use of the Internet, including a game on Facebook, YouTube videos and a blog on the site Tumblr dedicated to the film's fashion' in order to reach the film's target audience of younger viewers (Grover & Lauria, 2012). On another level, the effect of the film on Thai protestors could be read in terms of the similarities between their own situation and the plot of *The Hunger Games*. Some commentators have suggested that the three-finger salute is localised by the Thai protestors to represent their primary concerns, namely the desire for no further coup, the desire for liberty and the desire for democracy (Hinck, 2014; Lennard, 2014). So while the film is set in a fictional land called Panem and the narrative driven by an anti-capitalist theme, the idea of symbolic resistance was not wasted on the Thai protestors. In the film the heroes are key figures in a resistance movement designed to overthrow their government which is motivated purely by capitalist interests. Protestors, in other words, drew parallels between their situation and that of this fictional Hollywood production, even though their motives differed from those of the characters in the film.

Throughout the research for this book almost all respondents—face-to-face and online—declared a preference for (North) American-made English-language film, television and music productions, even though a few admitted they also enjoyed visual and/or audio productions from their home nation and/or from their ethnic group (e.g. diasporic Chinese enjoying music in Mandarin from Taiwan and/or in Cantonese from Hong Kong). The (North) American domination of the entertainment market as it related to respondents is not surprising since America exports its entertainment industry on a global scale. These American productions

are intended primarily for North American audiences, but because of the power of the USA's global distribution machinery global audiences become familiar with and identify with American culture. This is seen in the replication of American culture in the everyday life of its global audience, for example, the adoption of hip-hop culture by Malay youth in Singapore (Kamaludeen 2011). Other global audiences such as North Asian international students have aspirations for living in the West, believing they will be able to replicate what they have seen in American productions in the lives they will occupy upon arrival (Kim, 2011). The popularity of American-made English-language productions can be read as a result of transnational flows, as theorised by Appadurai (1996). In his pioneering work on defining globalisation, Appadurai was cautious about interpreting the global flows of technology and media described in his work as being American-centric. However, Appadurai was formulating his theories in the early days of scholarship on globalisation, and the ensuing years have clearly seen the domination of American culture through the media. It is predictable, then, that when transient migrants live overseas they look for the same kinds of entertainment they were accustomed to in their home nations.

(NORTH) AMERICAN ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA: LESSONS  
IN ENGLISH PROFICIENCY, REMINDERS OF HOME, MAKING  
NEW CONNECTIONS IN THE HOST NATION  
AND IDENTIFYING WITH AMERICAN VALUES

Respondents listened to (North) American popular music and watched popular Hollywood television shows such as *The Big Bang Theory* (Lorne & Prady, 2007—present)—a sitcom about the lives of four scientists—and, particularly in Singapore, *Suits* (Korsh, 2011—present), a drama about recent graduates in a New York City law firm. Hollywood blockbusters were, perhaps unsurprisingly, the films of choice. Many respondents, as mentioned elsewhere in this book, stated that they did not own radio or television sets. Respondents also admitted that they did not go to cinemas in order to watch films. Instead, they listened to and watched American media online by means of legal and illegal downloads. Hyunh, a 20-year-old Vietnamese international student in Australia, for instance, subscribed to American artists:

Yeah, I subscribe to [a] singer—[an] American singer on YouTube.

Hyunh and many other interviewees from non-English-speaking backgrounds admitted that while they valued and saw the usefulness of the English language, they tended to speak to their peers in the host nation in their native language. They reported communicating with family and friends back in the homeland in their native language as well. So why was American entertainment so popular with respondents, considering so many came from non-English-speaking backgrounds? While I understand that American entertainment is global entertainment with an impressive distribution system, surely there must be more to the appeal of this perennially popular mega-industry.

For many respondents in both countries, engaging with American entertainment productions allowed them to improve their English-language skills. They felt that the more they were exposed to American productions such as television shows, films and YouTube videos, the better they could master the English language. As 24-year-old Chinese international student in Australia Lijuan clarified:

Yeah in China it is legal to download ... so I will go to a Chinese website to download some American movies. And it's also a good way to practice my English.

Watching American entertainment media was their method of choice for improving their English, over and above conversing with native English speakers in their host nation. Respondents admitted that their social networks were made up of fellow transients—a theme I pursue in various parts of this book—rather than of locals who are fluent in English. These locals would all have been well-educated in the English language, since the medium of instruction in both countries is English. Respondents explained they were able to follow the English spoken in television shows and films, particularly with the assistance of subtitles. Chinese respondents, for instance, informed me that they were also able to download popular American television shows and films from China which come with Chinese subtitles even though they were outside of China.

Additionally, respondents from non-English-speaking backgrounds stated that they watched and listened to American productions back in their home nations. For a few, such as 23-year-old Colombiann student Ana Maria, who was learning English in Australia, American productions allowed her to connect with her homeland. She explained the significance of American entertainment for her in this exchange with me:

Ana Maria: Yes because in my case I write, all my life I have been in contact with a Hollywood, like American entertainment because I am from America—but from South America but we have not America and all that entertaining come to us is life for us you know. And here and when I talk with my friends or I saw on Facebook one thing—everybody is starting to talk about a movie they like, I want to watch it too because I don't know how they are talking about you know. I think it's for that reason.

Me: So the American movies actually remind you of home?

Ana Maria: Yeah ... I ... know what the movie is talking about ... and everybody laugh about a new joke and talk about their life and their character and if you don't see you feel lost.

She was familiar with American entertainment because it was what she had become accustomed to in South America. More significantly, the American films and television shows she watched allowed her and her friends back in Columbia to find some form of commonality. Discussing these productions, in other words, provided Ana Maria with an avenue that kept the relationships she had with people back home alive. Interestingly she also noted that American films remind her of home since they are screened in Columbia. She implied that the familiarity of American productions provides her with some form of comfort ('if you don't see you feel lost') and thus contributed to helping her navigate her sojourn in Australia.

Consuming American productions thus provided respondents with a means of connecting to the home nation, in the sense that they were able to practice their everyday home life in transience by watching American television shows and Hollywood blockbuster films as well as listening to the American music they were used to. American media, in other words, becomes an anchor in transience primarily because of its global and transnational dominance. Indonesian student Farah, whom I referred to earlier in this chapter, admitted that she listened to American music and watched shows via streaming as part of her everyday routine (e.g. when on the tram or while doing housework). These activities, she implied, allowed her to transpose her everyday (current) life from Indonesia into Australia subliminally and unconsciously. Her choices of music, as she explained, were both for entertainment as well as for making her feel at home. She listened to globally popular American Billboard top-selling boy band One Direction because the group is 'very easy listening and I guess I love their

cute faces too'.<sup>3</sup> Farah, who also listened to Islamic music in order to feel a sense of spirituality in Australia and watched Indonesian films to remind herself of her home nation, had, at the time of our interview, booked a ticket to the 2013 One Direction world tour concert in Melbourne, where she studied.

American productions also assist in allowing transient migrants to create connections with each other, particularly if they are from different countries, cultures and/or ethnicities. Farah noted:

And sometime I just [like to] be with my international friends. I watch ... One Direction concert ... so it's like I guess I feel like I should know about this so when I talk to my friend I have something to talk about ... I think my [entertainment] activities really [help me] when I miss my family or I want to be with friends or just hang out...

While the boy band One Direction appealed to her simply because she found them attractive and their music easy to listen to, they served a subliminal purpose whereby they became a way for her to connect with people (other transient migrants) outside of Indonesia and outside of Islam. One Direction, in other words, functioned as an avenue of commonality, thus allowing her to widen her (international student) social networks in Australia.

At this stage, I should also point out that respondents from non-English-speaking backgrounds were slightly more comfortable with American television shows and films than with music. They revealed that the music they listened to tended to be reflective of the language(s) they grew up speaking in the domestic space. Caroline, a 20-year-old ethnic Chinese international student in Australia who is a New Zealand citizen, stated:

the American music is really bang, bang, bang—very high. And very excited, enthusiastic. And it's good to listen to sometimes. But then they'll get really, really sick and tired of it and it goes on and on and on. So I like the Chinese music more, because of—well first off, I like pop music.

Caroline, who was born in China but migrated to New Zealand as a young child, expressed a clear preference for Chinese music despite having lived in New Zealand for 10 years. She declared openly that her liking for Chinese music could be culturally related, explaining that to her, Chinese music is

much more gentle to the ear. The only American songs Caroline listened to were those by artists such as Avril Lavigne and Mariah Carey because, according to her, their music, presumably like the music of China, is ‘soft and clear’.

Perhaps one of the most surprising patterns to surface during my research for this book was the manner in which respondents drew parallels between American values and the values they had grown up with. Respondents implied that they watched American television and films and listened to American music because they could relate to and identify with the values in those productions. This was particularly true of Asian respondents, who felt that American values reflected their own national, cultural and ethnic values. Here some of the Asian respondents in both Australia and Singapore noted that the reason they found American entertainment productions so appealing is because they feel that American values are Asian values. They are, in other words, able to see their own cultural values reflected when they engage with American entertainment media. As Yi, a Chinese international student in Australia, and Binh, an international student from Vietnam undertaking undergraduate study in Singapore—both in their early 20s—explained:

I tend to watch [American] movie that I can understand the language and so I can relate to the culture. (Yi)

I mean, sometimes I also think that [American] movies also reflect who I am. (Binh)

Khush, a 23-year-old Indian postgraduate student in Australia, and James, a 19-year-old Indonesian undergraduate student in Singapore, were more specific when revealing why they are able to relate to American productions. As pointed out earlier, the American sitcom *The Big Bang Theory* was enormously popular among respondents. Khush stated that one of the reasons why he liked it was because of Raj, the ‘one Indian guy’ in the show. He explained that while Raj, played by British-born actor Kunal Nayyar, was popular among his friends in Australia, they did not understand this character in the same way he did. Khush described:

it seems like [when Raj] says something and they don’t get it and I get it because I know what he’s talking about ... like if you see someone from your own ethnic group you tend to pay a little more attention to what he’s saying.

Khush implied that he was able to appreciate and identify with the character of Raj because the way he was portrayed resonated with Khush's understanding of Indian culture. At the same time he was generally critical of the portrayal and reception of Indian characters, and of India itself, in American and trans-American productions. He noted:

I had a lot of friends after watching *Slumdog Millionaire*<sup>4</sup> they tend to have generalised ... the whole South Asia to that stereotype. I said its nothing like that. I mean, there are places like that there, but it's not exactly the same.

This stereotyping of non-(North) American nationalities was also a concern of Colombian Ana Maria. She explained that her social encounters in Australia often involved comparisons with perceived identity markers attained from the media. Ana Maria did report getting annoyed when people she met in Australia assumed that fictional characters who appear in the media are representative of reality. Of such encounters she stated:

They say you speak like Gloria and [assume] ... all my [Colombian] friends speak like this.

'Gloria' refers to the popular character portrayed by Colombian actress Sofia Vergara in the American sitcom *Modern Family* (Lloyd & Levitan, 2009—present). Her character is often portrayed as glamorous and exotic but also as occasionally vapid and overly emotional. Her Colombian accent is frequently played up for laughs.

For 24-year-old Canh, originally from Vietnam but studying in Australia, American depictions of his home nation were what he had grown up with. He felt he had come to appreciate American representations of Vietnam and specifically watched American entertainment in order to see representations of his own country. For instance, Canh explained that he watched the American program *The Amazing Race Vietnam* (Doganieri & van Munster, 2012—present) because it featured Vietnam. *The Amazing Race* is an American reality show which began airing in 2001 and which has since franchised internationally to feature specific countries with their local citizenry as contestants. Canh explained:

I also watch Amazing Race Vietnam. That's cool; it somehow reminds me of Vietnam. Because I watched the Amazing Race [Australia] here last year and it doesn't interest me a lot because I didn't know about Australian cultures, landscapes or the buildings but in Vietnam most of them are really familiar with me.

*The Amazing Race Vietnam*, in other words, provided Canh with the opportunity to look at Vietnam, even though it is done through an arguably American template and lens.

James too identified with the situations portrayed in American entertainment media, adding that television shows such as *Suits* provide him with examples of ways in which to conduct himself in various personal and professional situations. He stated:

Like somehow I can relate to the situations or maybe sometimes—I don't know—first like maybe give some kind of comfort of maybe like from *Suits* I learn the—like how they talk and how they rebut people.

This notion of learning about daily life from American television was emphasised by 21-year-old Malaysian Pushpa, who was studying in Singapore. She said:

I learn a lot from TV and especially so from the American, English shows. It doesn't seem obvious but certain general knowledge things you gain from it and from there you understand okay this is what these things mean and later on you—I tend to use it in my everyday life.

Besides, respondents felt that watching American television shows made them more cosmopolitan and 'globalised' as 22-year-old Suong, a Vietnamese student in Singapore noted:

I guess it would make me feel everywhere because mostly, I mostly listen and watch American stuff yeah it's ... globalised.

American entertainment media clearly has an impact on transient migrants in ways that go beyond mere mass consumption, due to global flows (Appadurai, 1996). Respondents clarified that American entertainment arms them with life skills and provides them with meaningful familiarity as they navigate everyday life in transience. Respondents saw American entertainment as providing links between themselves and the home nation, while at the same time opening up avenues for engagement with other people in the host nation. In addition, American entertainment was seen to carry identifiable cultural tropes valued by respondents as their own. Did respondents still have similar feelings towards the home-grown entertainment media of their host nations?

## NO REAL MEDIA CONNECTION TO HOST OR HOME COUNTRY

While entertainment media allowed respondents to connect to their homeland while simultaneously practising a form of cultural diversity in their choices of entertainment, the same cannot be said with regards to their consumption of Australian or Singaporean media. Although all respondents had lived in Australia and Singapore for a minimum of three months, with the majority having spent a year or more in the host nation, very few admitted to engaging with local entertainment. Australian and Singaporean entertainment was not at all popular with respondents, with only a few stating that they watched some local television and very few, if any, admitting to watching local films or listening to local music. When asked why they did not engage with local entertainment, respondents in Australia cited their lack of knowledge of Australian culture and the difficulty they have with the Australian accent as reasons why domestic productions were not appealing to them. Vietnamese international student Canh commented that he saw differences between television shows in Australia and those in Vietnam:

I just realised a TV show here—feel free to criticise or even make fun of the politicians here—it's different in Vietnam—we are not allowed to make fun of the politicians—totally different.

While Canh did not reveal whether he agrees or disagrees with the way politicians are portrayed and occasionally lampooned in Australia, this is a clear indication of the variance he perceived between Australian and Vietnamese television and perhaps further demonstrates a regional variance in what is considered acceptable or appealing grounds for entertainment and social commentary.

Meanwhile, respondents in Singapore were generally uninterested in Singapore-made films and television shows because they were seen as too culturally and linguistically different. Respondents in Singapore who had migrated from China felt that while their ethnic culture may be represented locally, they did not really identify with the Singapore-produced Mandarin television shows, or with films that featured Chinese-Singaporean culture, since the Mandarin spoken was different to that which they spoke in China and the Chinese-Singaporean culture was influenced by Singapore's multiculturalism

Staying with Singapore, many respondents I spoke to felt the English spoken in Singapore was difficult to understand because, as some expressed, it was ‘not spoken properly’. By ‘properly’ they were referring to Singapore English, also colloquially known as ‘Singlish’, which is a creolised form of English incorporating Malay and Chinese dialect words and syntax. Respondents nonetheless viewed English as the common language of communication and implied too that the lack of made-in-Singapore English-language films proved to be a factor that affected whether or not they watched local productions.

If respondents did watch locally made films, they were most likely to be the popular Chinese-language films. The year that I conducted my fieldwork in Singapore, a few interviewees and survey respondents stated they had watched the Singapore film *Ab Boys to Men* (Neo, 2012) and its sequel *Ab Boys to Men 2* (Neo, 2013). Both these films used a mixture of Singlish and Chinese dialects and were the most popular films in the history of Singapore cinema. Respondents who watched these films did so partly because of their comedic portrayal of national service—a compulsory rite of passage for Singaporean males who are conscripted into defence (e.g. military) for a couple of years. As for music, respondents in both countries did not actively listen to local music. Some respondents in Australia felt that if they listened to the radio, they would not be able to tell Australian music from other English-language music.

In Australia, the most interesting and recurrent response I received during the interviews was respondents’ lack of awareness about the Australian multicultural and multilingual television channel SBS (Special Broadcasting Service). Almost none of the respondents had even heard of SBS, much less watched any of the multicultural and multilingual programs that the station offers. While SBS produces television shows, online content, films, music and news in the various languages that transient migrants speak or are familiar with (e.g. a Malaysian who likes Japanese anime), their preference was almost always for the commercial channels which hosted cooking and talent competitions such as *Masterchef* (Roddam, 2009–present) and *The Voice* (de Mol, 2012–present). Given that they generally did not own television sets, those who did watch local television in Australia tended to do so by means of the Internet. Shows such as *Masterchef*, according to several respondents I spoke to, provided them with ideas for their own meals and took them to exotic locations as contestants were flown overseas as the competition progressed, while talent shows featured American songs which respondents admitted they could identify with since they were already familiar with the music.

Additionally, a few respondents stated that if they did watch Australian television, they preferred to see (white) Australians rather than multi-cultural faces. As John, a 32-year-old postgraduate student from India, clarified:

I'm in Australia I would expect [white] Australian faces here. If I wanted to see Indian faces, I'd go back to India.

John expected to see Caucasians in the media because he understood Australia to be ethnographically white. Hence white faces are what he intends to see, at least in the media. Research in the area of ethnic representation in the Australian media landscape has been critical of the overt 'whiteness' of film, television shows and even advertisements, despite Australia's multicultural make-up (Jakubowicz & Seneviratne, 1996). Non-Caucasian Australian actors and members of activist research groups such as the Asian Australian Studies Research Network (AASRN) have been engaged in commentary on the lack of non-Caucasian roles in the Australian entertainment media landscape (Crompton, 2012; Kwong, 2013). They argue that the whiteness of the media landscape not only hurts non-Caucasian actors but is also unrepresentative of Australia's multicultural and multiethnic population.

In early 2012 the controversy over the lack of non-Caucasian faces in the Australian media reached a crescendo, with Lebanese-Australian actor Firass Dirani and Samoan actor Jay Laga'aia publicly decrying the lack of diversity on Australian television (Kalina, 2012). Furthermore, popular and well-known Australian actors and singers with international profiles are almost exclusively Caucasian. Here Hugh Jackman, Kylie Minogue, Chris and Liam Hemsworth, Paul Hogan and Nicole Kidman come to mind. Perhaps for transient migrant respondents such as John, the preference for seeing white faces in Australian media was due to this global (mis)representation of Australians as almost universally white/Caucasian—an issue which I revisit in the chapter 'Connections and Disconnections: Forming Parallel Societies in Transience'.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

This chapter highlights the significance of co-nationals in transience. Governments should embark on education campaigns at the public level and develop curricula at the school level that incorporate the importance of

co-nationals in transience. Both Australia and Singapore feature the migrant story as a key aspect of their continuing national histories. Incorporating the transient migrant as part of that narrative might help citizens understand the transient migrant's condition and experience while providing transient migrants—particularly those wanting to stay on as permanent residents—a sense of belonging in the host nations.

This chapter reveals that transient migrants highly value English-language proficiency and work towards achieving fluency through their engagement with digital technology. The chapter 'The Globetrotting Migrant: Aspirations for Transnational Mobility' further discusses the significance of the English language in transient migrants' aspirations for global mobility, since English-language proficiency is viewed as a valuable commodity by which to achieve this goal.

In Australia, education institutions might want to provide international students with more access to English-language training. Institutions and organisations which promote and conduct English-language courses might want to expand their curricula in order to target students at various proficiency levels. Facilitating social connections between international students and local students as a component of the curricula would also be attractive as well as meaningful for international students. This would provide international students with everyday social communication skills in English while facilitating the possibility of making friends and acquaintances with locals.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I suggested that social networking sites play an important role in connecting respondents to the home nation in ways which are not necessarily dependant on reciprocal communication. I also pointed out that while some transient migrants looked to the Internet to access entertainment produced in the home nation, many engaged in entertainment media from (North) America as a matter of preference. This was generally because films and television shows from Hollywood and American popular music were what they consumed in the home nation, and similar patterns of media consumption were adopted in the host nation. Replication of everyday life in transience, in other words, is transnationally influenced by the easily accessed English-language American media industry, which in turn allows respondents to feel a sense of connection to the home nation and arguably to the host country. The chapter also revealed that respon-

dents do not have straightforward relationships with the home nation and the social networks they left behind.

Living in transience, however, also provided respondents with the opportunity and the situation to think about their self-perceived identities without interference from familiar environments, individuals and groups which would otherwise reaffirm who they are. Being in transience thus allowed respondents to reaffirm the identities they are familiar with, such as nationality; create new ones based on different variables such as visa status and interests; and/or rediscover identities which would otherwise remain unexplored if not for living outside their nations of birth and/or citizenship. The following chapter thus explores the impacts of transience on the self-perceived identities of transient migrants and presents a picture of transient migrants as complex individuals with multiple rather than singular identities. Being in transience allowed respondents, then, to both rediscover and reinvent their ethnic and national cultural identities.

## NOTES

1. For the purpose of this chapter, exchange students are subsumed under the international students banner.
2. In the case of music, popular English-language songs from artists who are based in America (e.g. Taylor Swift) and the UK (e.g. One Direction) yet whose work is distributed through and managed by the American music industry.
3. One Direction is a UK-based boy band; their music is distributed by Columbia Records, an American recording company.
4. *Slumdog Millionaire* (Boyle, 2008) is a transnational film that had an American, British and Indian and was produced and distributed by the American companies Warner Brothers Pictures and Fox Searchlight Pictures.

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# Identity on My Mind

One of the first questions I asked all respondents as part of my research for this book was: ‘What is your identity?’ I then explained to them that I wanted to know *who* they thought they were. This deceptively simple question however proved to be particularly challenging for respondents whom I spoke to.<sup>1</sup> They repeatedly told me that this was a difficult question to answer and one with which they grappled constantly. To quote researcher Manuel Castells on the topic of identity, ‘for most people in this global Information Age, who they are matters more than what they do’ (Castells, 1996, xxvi). This chapter thus explores the significance of identity to transient migrants. Here I discuss the impacts of transience on the self-perceived identities of transient migrants and present a picture of transient migrants as complex individuals who are continually thinking about who they are. By self-perceived identities I refer to the identities respondents feel that they possess, rather than identities that are already prescribed to them.

While some of the respondents’ self-perceived identities may seem prescribed, such as nationality and ethnicity, this chapter will reveal that such identities are instead sites for self-reflection about who they are and who they are becoming. Furthermore I note that the transient migrants in this book revealed that such prescribed identities are not the sole markers of how they perceive themselves. I explain that transient migrants have multiple identities, some of which are formed in transience as a by-product of their current circumstances while others are connected to the nation

of birth/citizenship.<sup>2</sup> I also highlight how some transient migrants discover their national and ethnic histories while in transience (e.g. wanting to learn more about their national and ethnic heritage). Additionally, this chapter highlights the significance of the role played by entertainment media in these encounters. This chapter also advocates examining the issue of identity from the migration lens, since previous work on the topic focuses almost exclusively on permanent migrants rather than temporary ones.

### A NEED TO LOOK AT IDENTITY AMID MIGRATION TRENDS

In their work on migration and identity, Aihwa Ong (1999), Ien Ang (2001), Stuart Hall (1996) and Rey Chow (1993), for instance, often theorise that identity is located in the spaces between two places: home nation and settler nation. Migration, they argue, creates cultural dissonance as subjects attempt to adopt what Ong calls ‘flexible citizenship’ when they negotiate between the cultures and societies of the countries they originate from and those of the countries in which they settle. Ang reflects on the difficulties she had negotiating her identity as an Indonesian Chinese living in the West, while Hall and Chow discuss the challenges a non-white person has living in countries dominated by white societies and cultures. Hall notes that being an ethnic non-white Other is not only invitation for racist encounters but also leads to discomfort as individuals question their own cultural and ethnic identities. Both Hall and Chow emphatically note the importance of migrants expressing their ethnic cultural identities for reasons such as agency and are highly critical of the ways in which the media in the West portrays the ethnic non-white Other. They too see the power of the media and suggest reclaiming ethnic cultural identities through this medium. This can be done when migrants have a voice over how they are represented for instance through writing and production.

While the work of Ong, Ang, Hall, Chow and others who write about migration and identity still has significance today, their writing tends to focus on the transnational flows of people from the place of birth to that of settlement. Ang, Hall and Chow also write within the context of migration from non-West to West and Global South to Global North. While Ong casts her net further afield to include the Asia-Pacific region in her examination of the circulation of the burgeoning Chinese diaspora (e.g. from Hong Kong to China), a large part of her discussion centres on

the movements of Hong Kong Chinese cosmopolitans to North America, primarily focusing on business migrants. While acknowledging the usefulness of this work in providing meaningful frameworks with which to understand migration and identity, these studies tend to look at issues of permanent migration, citizenship and nation-state in their discussions about diasporic people.

This book, in contrast, examines transient migrants whose migration trajectories were not only temporary but also longer term or ongoing, as in the case of experienced transients with several transnational experiences. Also, unlike the subjects of previous studies on migration and identity, the transient migrants featured in this study were exclusively young people below the age of 30 who had travelled outside the countries of their birth or citizenship for education or work and whose identities, as I suggest in this chapter, are forged by impermanence and transnational mobility.

As I highlight earlier in the chapter ‘Transient Migrants: A Profile of Transnational Adaptability’, we can see that more respondents in Singapore had lived in transience than those in Australia. A possible reason for this could be because, as respondents I spoke in Singapore revealed, many came from families who lived in transience because of their parents’ work. Furthermore, as the chapter ‘The Globetrotting Migrant: Aspirations for Transnational Mobility’ will show, transience will most likely be part of respondents’ futures, since they frequently had aspirations for prolonging their stay in the host nation and/or relocating elsewhere in the foreseeable future. After all, transient migration motivated by education, economic, lifestyle as well as humanitarian reasons is increasingly becoming a trend in the global movement of people and a subject thus deserving of further analysis.

Transient migration is an emerging yet significant field of study, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region (e.g. Fozdar, Spittles, & Hartley, 2014; Robertson, 2013; Gomes & Tan, 2015; Banivanua Mar, 2007) where the transnational circulation of people has been steadily increasing in the past few decades (Castles & Miller, 2009). In Singapore, for instance, the number of unskilled and low-skilled workers entering the country from the 1980s onwards sparked a cottage industry of research highlighting their treatment from gender, race, class and human rights perspectives (e.g. Chin, 1998; Constable, 1997; Ford & Piper, 2007). It is thus unsurprising that at the time of writing there were very few studies on transient migrants in Singapore, Australia or elsewhere other than unskilled/low-skilled workers, much less their identities.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, studies on working

holiday makers in Australia are next to non-existent even though there were 631,935 working holiday makers in 2013–14 alone (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2014b).

Meanwhile the rising number of international students, particularly from Asia, enabled Australia to become a world player in the education export industry. International student numbers peaked in 2009, with 631,935 students enrolled in all sectors (higher education, English language courses, vocational courses, school education and non-award programs). The presence of these high numbers of students, which brought in AUD\$15 billion dollars in 2014 alone, has generated a wealth of research concerning increasing recruitment and improving study techniques and the well-being of international students. Once again, however, there are very few studies examining the identities of international students in Australia. Yet this lack of research on transient migrant identities does not mean that international students, working holiday makers and others living in transience overseas have not thought about who they are from time to time. As this chapter reveals, identity was an important issue for the transient migrants who took part in the research for this book and one they actively thought about.

### IDENTITY: ALWAYS ON MY MIND

In 2015, an American civil rights activist by the name of Rachel Dolezal caused an international sensation when allegations were made concerning her ethnic identity. Dolezal was at the time the President of Spokane chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and resigned after she was accused of masquerading as an African-American. Dolezal was subsequently revealed to be Caucasian. Dolezal explained to the media that she felt ‘transracial’ (McFadden, 2015), and while she may have been born white she identified as African-American. The admission resulted in a flurry of debate about the appropriation of ethnic and racial identities in the USA. Meanwhile, while I was working on this book in Melbourne, the local and international media were saturated with stories of young Muslim men and women leaving their families in Australia and Great Britain to fight with the radical Islamist terrorist group ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, also known as ISIS). Now and again experts on the radicalisation of Muslim youth (Lynch, 2013; Nadir, 2015) explain that radicalism is attractive for young people because they feel disenfranchised in Australian society and are trying to assert their own Islamic identities. Clearly, identity matters.

As mentioned in the introductory paragraph of this chapter, I asked my respondents to tell me about their self-perceived identities. Asking respondents about their different identities provided them with a chance to explore who they think they are outside of the home nation. Self-perceived identities in the home nation might well be different from their self-perceived identities in the host nation. These shifts can be as obvious as identifying themselves according to their visa status and purpose in transience, such as the way the international students and working holiday makers in Australia do, or more subtle, an outcome of self-reflection on the national, social, cultural and ethnic identities respondents grew up with in the nation of birth and/or citizenship. This self-reflection revealed deep critical thinking as to the complexities of their own identities in flux, which respondents are aware were being shaped by their transnational movements. Ravi, an Indian student in Singapore, for instance, saw his identity within this transnational setting:

Probably for me, when I introduce [myself], I say my name and that I'm from India and which part of India, like Delhi, then I moved around quite a lot. I changed 12 schools in my schooling life, so that was one of the things that I bring up. Apart from that, I tell them also the ... latest school [I am in] ... so that's how I introduce myself

While Ravi anchored his identity in his nationality, it is clear from his description that his sense of identity was also defined by his physical movements throughout both India and Singapore, evidenced by the many schools he had attended. At the time of the interview, Ravi was 22 years old and had been living in Singapore for almost five years. This meant that he would have completed his junior college (high school) education in Singapore prior to commencing his current status as an undergraduate.

During my face-to-face interviews in both Australia and Singapore, I was pleasantly surprised to find that the majority of respondents admitted to actively thinking about and articulating their different identities. They also revealed that they realised that living in transience instigated introspective and retrospective reflection on their own identities. As 25-year-old working holiday maker Jean from Czechoslovakia explained:

Yeah I think [my identity is] difficult because ... in Czech I never think about [it] ... but when you are in a foreign country you do it more often of course, so I wouldn't – if I was in Prague I wouldn't say I identify myself as Czech person, but here I would say yes, somehow of course ...

Being overseas, in other words, provides an ideal environment to confront self-perceived identities, which respondents admitted they took for granted or unconsciously accepted when in the home nation. Others, such as 37-year-old Salam from Jordan, who had completed a PhD in Australia and was on a bridging visa, further articulated that being outside the home nation forced him to look at what he once accepted as true from another perspective, particularly in relation to the society and culture of his homeland. Salam clarified:

[Y]eah my point of view have changed because now seeing the evidence you know from far away so I can see another whole point of views and I can judge by myself; while I'm there so maybe I can affected by the media there so I cannot maybe judge some issues, I can't see some of the points that is hidden by the media—but now I'm aware for with everything there, especially with the Arabic area now it's all you know the Arabic ... So yeah so because I'm outside so I can judge them from the whole point of view, so I can see everything—while maybe there they are sometimes they are; they cannot see everything there so because of the media is covering the facts or so they show them what they want so they are mis-led there—some of them are mis-led there because of now—the you know the situation is ... cannot see what is true or what is not unless if you are outside so we can judge.

For Salam, who was also working part-time as a university tutor, being overseas provided him with different perspectives due to the variety of opinions in the media. He stated that being exposed to media outlets which were not tainted by self-regulation was refreshingly educational. While the media in Jordan is more tolerant than that of the rest of the Arab world such as Saudi Arabia (Binsahl, Chang, & Bosua, 2015), there are still restrictions in place. These restrictions include any criticism directed at the royal family and any work deemed to harm the dignity and reputation of the state. Journalists are encouraged to practice self-censorship and those who breach these restrictions face fines, prosecution and incarceration, while media agencies are forced to retract 'offending' reports (Freedom House, 2012).

While respondents such as Salam and Jean attributed being outside the home nation as forcing them to confront not only their own identities but also long-held perceptions which would never have been challenged otherwise, a few others noted that they found thinking about their identi-

ties difficult and confronting. Respondents provided answers that revealed their active contemplation of who they think they are. At the same time, respondents with previous transnational experience revealed that that they found pinning down their identities a challenging activity.

### IDENTITY, NOT EASY TO PIN DOWN

Respondents in this study had complex responses to questions about their self-perceived identities. While some were firm in who they thought they were, others provided more layered answers while at the same time admitting that they were attempting to address their own notions of self-identity. In conversations with respondents in both Australia and Singapore, I found that they possessed mixed and sometimes confused feelings about their identities which were primarily caused by their uprootedness. Similar results have been found in other research on permanent migrants such as Collie, Kindon, Liu, & Podsiadlowski's, 2010 study of the ways in which 60 Assyrian women in New Zealand managed and negotiated their identity dilemmas. Here Collie and her colleagues found that these dilemmas had two broad themes: positive and negative feelings towards both homeland of Iraq and the new home of New Zealand (Collie et al., 2010).

Questions of identity which preoccupied the transient migrants I spoke to could be related to issues of age (Bourn, 2008) since the majority of them were young people in their late teens and early 20s with uncertainties surrounding their identity often on their minds. These questions of identity were perhaps compounded by the fact that they were also transient in countries whose cultures and the societies differed from their own (Jenson, 2011; King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003) as highlighted by respondent Salam earlier on. This chapter adds another dimension to the discussion of identity and transient migration by taking into consideration the responses of respondents with previous histories of transnational mobility.

Respondents with previous experience with transnational transience, that is, who had mostly been living in countries outside of their own, referred to their home nations during the face-to-face interviews primarily as the countries they were born in. For instance, Indonesian Arun, who worked in Singapore, referred to Indonesia as his home nation even though he has been living abroad in different countries. Arun, who was

27 years old when I spoke to him, travelled extensively with his family because of his father's employment situation; hence he had lived in countries such as the USA and Malaysia prior to coming to Singapore. It was in the USA and in Malaysia where he had completed his primary and secondary schooling before coming to Singapore to undertake his junior college (high school) and university education. There were a few respondents, mainly those who had migrated overseas permanently as children, who did not identify with the countries where they had citizenship. Twenty-nine-year-old Angela was born in Korea but was a permanent resident in Singapore after having studied in Japan and also having lived previously in Germany and Hong Kong. At the time of the interview she was on a working holiday visa in Australia. She let me know:

I'm from South Korea, but I used to live in Singapore for five years because my parents ... live in Singapore so I'm a Singaporean resident—I used to live Korea since 18 years old, I used to live in Japan and Germany and Hong Kong and America ... I'm Korean but I prefer to live in Singapore, yeah, thinking like Singapore is my second country.

Angela identified less with her home country of South Korea itself than with the ethnic and cultural identity of being Korean. While Kelly felt at home in her adopted country of Singapore, others interviewed for this project stated clearly that they did not identify with either the country they were born in or the one they migrated to. Instead they, like Kelly, identified more so with the ethnic cultures that were synonymous with their birth nations rather than with the countries themselves. International student in Australia Caroline was a perfect example of this.

Caroline was an ethnic Chinese 20-year-old who was born in China. At around nine years of age she immigrated to New Zealand with her family. Despite having lived there for the past decade, Caroline did not hold New Zealand citizenship and did not feel specifically connected to New Zealand or to its culture. Her only connection to New Zealand lay in the fact that her family resides there. While Caroline strongly identifies with her Chinese cultural roots, she feels alienated whenever she visits China. She explained to me that she neither identifies with nor is connected to China. Instead, Caroline felt more of a connection to other diasporic Chinese who may have been born in China or elsewhere but who live or grew up outside of China:

And in terms of my identity, I think it's very complicated in a way. I know that I'm Chinese, but then I've been living in a foreign—not really a foreign country, but a Western country for such a long time. So it's part of my grow[ing] up stage, where—well there's half and half. And actually I don't know, to be honest, how should I describe who I am, because in terms of my friends, some of the very international students, when they come straight from mainland China, in the same age as me, at the moment. I can fit in, but I couldn't really fit in too well with them. For example, some of the things that they will be interested in, I may not be interested in. And some of the views are very different, to what is sort of a question or towards a living thing. But then another thing is, I don't fit well with the Kiwis or with the European people who live here as well. I can communicate with them, but it's just—there's a difference. So in a way, I think I bond well with the people, who has the same experience as me. For example, a person who came from China or an Asian country, but then have lived outside for a long time. So I quite fit well with those people, in a way ... So I was saying, I bond with the people that sort of have the same experience as me.

Caroline's narrative of how she was grappling with her developing identity was honest and conflicted. She is obviously attempting to make sense of who she is based on her combined experiences as a person born in China, as a New Zealand citizen and as a Chinese New Zealander in Australia—issues which individuals with dual (national) cultures and who feel ethnically different face as a matter of course (Ward, 2006). Here Caroline stated that she belongs nowhere yet everywhere. She pointed out that while she enjoys mixing with other Mainland Chinese and New Zealanders she is aware that there are differences between herself and them. She noted that while she is more comfortable with Chinese rather than New Zealanders, she realises that both groups have little understanding of the blending of cultural identities because they have not lived for long periods outside their home nations. Here she equates nationality directly with (ethnic) cultures. The people she was most comfortable with were those who have had similar transnational experiences as her. For Caroline, grappling with her identity could well be a coping strategy born out of her migration from China to New Zealand and then now (temporarily) to Australia. As Luyckx, Klimstra, Duriez, Schwartz, and Vanhalst (2012) explained in their longitudinal study of 458 college students in the USA:

Processes of identity exploration seem especially to be intertwined with both engagement and disengagement coping strategies over time. Further, engagement coping strategies such as social support seeking and problem solving were found to predict commitment making and identification with commitment, respectively suggested that identity and coping strategies reinforced one another over time in these young adults. (Luyckx et al., 2012)

Identity and coping strategies in young people, in other words, reinforce each other over time. Individuals, however, do not have single identities but multiple ones (Erikson, 1980). None of the respondents in this study, for instance, thought of their identities as singular. A few respondents such as Ravi implied that their identities were first and foremost anchored to nationality, while others tried to steer clear of naming nationality as one of their identities and instead stressed their transience as the defining factor.

### MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

Erik Erickson (1980) ‘believed that identity was a multifaceted, complex, and dynamic construct consisting of both personal and sociocultural dimensions. A strong personal identity is seen as one’s ability to synthesize various identity elements into a whole—those aspects of the self that are consistent over time and place’ (p. 342; Dunkel, 2005). In *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*, Kenneth Gergen (1991) coined the term ‘multiphrenia’, which is understood to be a condition whereby a person doesn’t just have a single identity but rather a mosaic of identities based on the mediated messages present in our environments. Yet Gergen warned that multiphrenia was somewhat problematic for an individual, primarily because it was unique at the time he was writing. Explaining multiphrenia as a growing symptom of modern living, Gergen stated:

This condition is partly an outcome of self-population, but partly a result of the populated self’s efforts to exploit the potentials of the technologies of relationship. In this sense, there is a cyclical spiralling toward a state of multiphrenia. As one’s potentials are expanded by the technologies, so one increasingly employs the technologies for self-expression; yet, as the technologies are further utilized, so do they add to the repertoire of potentials. It would be a mistake to view this multiphrenic condition as a form of illness, for it is often suffused with a sense of expansiveness and

adventure. Someday there may indeed be nothing to distinguish multiph-  
renia from simply ‘normal living’ (p. 79).

While Gergen states that at some stage having multiple identities will be part of everyday living because we exist in a media-saturated environment and in turn use (communication and media) technologies to contribute further to this environment as media producers, he does not take into consideration the effects of geographical, cultural and societal uprootedness that occur because of transnational mobility. Meanwhile other studies on social media and migration focusing specifically on permanent migrants who are minority groups, such as Middle Eastern Muslim migrants in the West (e.g. Hopkins, 2011), have found the notion of multiple identities to be deeply ingrained in transient migrants.

The transient migrants I spoke to and those who I surveyed online stated clearly that they were individuals with multiple self-perceived identities. These responses, as reflected in Table 2, show that respondents in Australia and especially those in Singapore have a variety of identities related to their nationality, current circumstances and/or visa status, and interests. Respondents, in other words, did not see themselves as one-dimensional but as multidimensional individuals whose identities were reflective of a combination of their current transient position as well as identities which they brought with them from the home nation. Likewise, the table also shows that transient migrants in Singapore, more so than those in Australia, had been thinking about their identities in the host nation. This could possibly be because, on average, respondents in Singapore had spent longer periods of time in the city-state than those in Australia. Hence the former would have had more time and opportunity for interaction with locals. Transient migrants who took part in the face-to-face interviews and in the online survey both spent an average of seven years in Singapore, with most having completed their secondary and junior college years there prior to embarking on their university education and/or working life at the time of their involvement in this research.

Table 2 reveals that respondents generally carried with them their identities from home (e.g. national identities) or created identities in transience based on circumstance (e.g. as international students and as workers), interests or hobbies. In many instances faith-based identities were carried over from the home nation (e.g. Catholic Filipinos) or created while in transience through religious conversion. Respondents in both countries also identified as global citizens. While I explore the issue of global citizen

**Table 2.** Multiple identities of transient migrants

<i>Identify as</i>		
Country of birth/citizenship	Australia	Singapore
Family	Australia	Singapore
Student	Australia	Singapore
International student/exchange student	Australia	Singapore
Region	Australia	Singapore
Worker	Australia	Singapore
Traveller	Australia	Singapore
Religion	Australia	Singapore
Freethinker/no religion	Australia	Singapore
Global citizen	Australia	Singapore
Ethnicity	Australia	Singapore
Hobbies/interests	Australia	Singapore
Gender	Australia	Singapore
Causes	Australia	Singapore
Personality	Australia	Singapore
Singaporean		Singapore
Migrant in Singapore		Singapore
Transient (move around a lot)		Singapore
Foreigner		Singapore
Country other than birth nation		Singapore

in more depth in the chapter ‘The Globetrotting Migrant: Aspirations for Transnational Mobility’, I would like to point out that temporary identities located in transience based on circumstance—in particular international student and working holiday maker identities—contribute to transient migrants developing an identity as global citizens. While I discuss identities from home in more detail in the next chapter, emphasising the overwhelming prominence of national identity, I would like to take the opportunity to now talk about the meaning of temporary identities to transient migrants.

## TEMPORARY IDENTITIES

Respondents formed temporary identities based on their circumstance. International students in both countries as well as the working holiday makers in Australia identified with their current circumstance as international students and travellers respectively.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless it was the international students who most solidly identified themselves according to their visa status.

While the international students I spoke to acknowledged that their nationality was significant to them and not easily erased or hidden, it was their distinctive status as international students that created the strongest sense of identity for them while studying in Australia and Singapore. Their identification as international students, in other words, was an additional identity for them. Adil, a male postgraduate student in his late 20s from Pakistan, elaborated further:

For me I preferred to be called as a student, like international student if we talk about it—especially in Australia or like a country there.

In explaining the concept of identity, Stuart Hall (1996) observed that identities can be temporary depending on where an individual is and what they are doing. He acknowledged that individuals have multiple identities and that these identities are continually evolving. He also explained that identities are:

positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always ‘knowing’ (the language of consciousness here betrays us) that they are representations, [and] that representation is always constructed ... across a division, from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate—identical—to the subject processes which are invested in them (p. 6).

Adil’s identifying as an international student is thus not surprising, since being a foreigner studying over a specified period of time is the very reason for his presence in Australia. While Hall argued that such temporary identities serve to label and thus ‘otherise’ individuals, for Adil, being officially labelled an international student allowed him and other international students to be part of an identifiable collective. International students whom I spoke to often identified themselves according to their visa status. Doing so seemed to provide them with a sense of belonging to a created (transient) community (Gomes, 2015c) —themes I discuss in greater detail later in this book. Their status as international students gave them an almost immediate community with which they could identify and feel a sense of belonging to, particularly through cultural similarity and familiarity as well as the common shared experiences of living as foreigners in Australia (Kashima & Pillai, 2011).

In contrast, the working professionals in both Australia and Singapore did not strongly identify themselves according to their occupation or by

their status as working foreigners, with only small numbers (7 per cent in Australia and 17 per cent in Singapore) identifying themselves as such. As Ernie, who I interviewed in Australia, noted:

My occupation no it wouldn't be [my identity] ... I mean, occupation can be changed.

Thirty-eight-year-old Ernie, who was from Hong Kong and working for a company that sends him to different countries around the world on a yearly rotation basis, told me that his job does not define him. Instead, it was his Hong Kong identity that defined who he is. In both the face-to-face interviews and the online surveys, identification with the home nation was the most common identity marker for all respondents. In the face-to-face interviews, 70 per cent or more of respondents claimed that that one of their identities was their national identity. In the online survey, 76 per cent of respondents in Australia and 69 per cent of respondents in Singapore noted that this was the case for them. Respondents revealed that the concept of nationality as an identity marker is not as simple as it sounds. Ernie clarified:

[I am] 100 % Hong Kong ... Your citizenship can be changed too, but if someone asks me where I come from, of course I will always say [I am] Hong Kong Chinese.

Here Ernie emphatically stated that he completely identifies himself as a person from Hong Kong. He further commented that even in the event that his citizenship changed, he would still identify himself according to his place of birth and with the Hong Kong Chinese specifically. He made this distinction despite the fact that Hong Kong is part of China. During our session, Ernie never once mentioned any affiliation to China or to Chinese culture or society. The ambivalent relationship Ernie has towards China is not specific to him but rather representative of the feelings of the Hong Kong people. In late 2014, Hong Kong residents protested the Chinese government's lack of democracy in the colony. This pro-democracy movement, also known as the Umbrella Movement or the Umbrella Revolution, saw protestors occupying intersections of Hong Kong's business district in a peaceful demonstration of defiance against the way in which the Chinese government was administering and managing Hong Kong. Among other things, the Umbrella Movement revealed that while Hong Kong Chinese

and Mainland Chinese share a common ancestry, heritage, ethnicity and culture, they are in some senses completely different people. In their coverage of the protests, *The New York Times* ran a piece acknowledging the differences between Mainland and Hong Kong Chinese, concluding these separate identities were based primarily on a lack of shared national experience (Wong & Wong, 2014). While the Umbrella Movement was largely a political protest, it was also one which highlighted the impact place and experience have had on Chinese diasporic groups which have lived outside China for generations.

In order to gauge the Hong Kong people's affiliation towards China, the Public Opinion Programme (POP) of the University of Hong Kong has, since 1997, been conducting half-yearly surveys on their self-perceived identities. These surveys are conducted by telephone. In June 2014, the POP released its findings based on interviews with 1026 Hong Kong people, reporting that locals identified themselves most strongly as Hong Kongers. In addition, the report stated that the number of interviewees who identified themselves as 'Chinese' and as 'citizen of the People's Republic of China' was at its lowest since the surveys were first conducted. Instead, interviewees preferred to identify themselves as 'Asians', as 'members of the Chinese race' and as 'global citizens' rather than associating themselves in any direct way with China. As Robert Chung, the Director of Hong Kong University's Popular Opinion Program succinctly explained:

All in all, Hong Kong people feel the strongest as 'Hongkongers', then followed by a number of cultural identities (Hong Kong University Popular Opinion Program, 2014).

While the sentiments of those surveyed are understandable since China affects their everyday lives in terms of governance, economy and increasingly culture (e.g. the increase in the use of Mandarin over Cantonese as the official language), what is significant about these recent survey results is the lack of identification Hong Kong people have with China culturally. This is perhaps unsurprising, considering Hong Kong had been a British colony for 160 years prior to 1997. While the British developed Hong Kong's economy, turning it into an Asian financial hub, it also exercised a detached form of governance over the colony. Hong Kong's modernity started to flourish in the 1960s, and the resultant societal shifts saw more and more young people and women employed in order to fuel the

increasingly industrial machinery that was thrusting the colony into an age of consumerism on par with the West. Meanwhile, China was by then well established as a communist country which was rewriting its cultural heritage and traditions by purging them in what became known as the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). The China which the Hong Kong people identify with is the China their ancestors came from rather than the China of the post-1949 communist takeover and its subsequent Cultural Revolution. The Hong Kong Chinese have thus developed their own form of Chinese culture which is based on differing experiences from their counterparts in the ancestral home. Cultural identities based on ethnicity, in other words, are not universally collective.

Although Ernie’s discussion about his affiliation to Hong Kong and lack of connection to China was no doubt telling of the difficult relationship Hong Kong people have with China (Wong & Wong, 2014), what his response alluded to was the idea that identifying with the home nation provides an anchor while in transience—a topic I explore in the next chapter. Intriguingly, being in transience also allowed for respondents to reconnect with and rediscover their ethnic and national cultural identities.<sup>5</sup> I must advise at this juncture, though, that temporary identities based on circumstance (international student/working holiday maker/white-collar worker) have practical implications despite the undeniable importance of national identities expressed by respondents. I explore the prominence of the temporary identity of circumstance in detail in the chapter ‘Connections and Disconnections: Forming Parallel Societies in Transience’ when discussing feelings of community and belonging while in transience.

### RECONNECTION WITH AND REDISCOVERY OF IDENTITIES

In theoretical work on identity (e.g. Hall, 1992, 1996; Giddens, 1991; Castells, 1997; Erickson, 1980), the constant theme is one of evolution; as individuals, our identities evolve by means of adaptation to environmental changes. This postulated evolution of identity(s) is not unfounded, since it is a potential means by which individuals are able to accommodate (changing) environments, a topic I discussed in the chapter ‘Transient Migrants: A Profile of Transnational Adaptability’. While identities are evolving, however, they are also being rediscovered and reconnected with. Respondents who had been in either Australia or Singapore for long periods of time revealed that their sojourn had allowed them to reconnect with and rediscover their own ethnic and national identities and histories.

For some respondents in Australia, the discovery of their Asian identities was facilitated through friendships with other Asians. This was particularly so for Asians who had been in Australia for long periods of time.

Malaysian Lam, who was undertaking an undergraduate degree in Melbourne, for instance, reiterated that he discovered his Asian identity by making friends with other Asians. Nineteen-year-old Lam, who had been in Australia for four years prior to our interview, was enrolled as an international high school student before embarking on his undergraduate study:

When I came to Australia I started when I was in year 10, so when I was 15. My first group of friends was actually with the locals so because the school I went to was predominantly Aussies and Anglo Saxon Aussies as well. There were one or two Asian Aussies but we were all friends in the end. But I mixed with the local students the most so I suppose I put myself out there and I spoke to them and a lot of the times people would say 'I didn't think you were [an] international [student]' because back in that school a lot of the internationals always just kept together and it was always just them, they don't really try and integrate themselves into the community, so when I did that everyone was just a bit surprised that I was international ... [W]hen I went to uni I sort of mixed more with a wider range of people just cause there's more accessibility to talk to different people. So when I went to uni I started hanging out with more Aussies that are Asian but also because that's mainly predominantly the people who are enrolled in my course but I still keep very close contact with a lot of my local Aussie friends. I suppose I do regret a bit that I am not as close with my international friends as such mainly because I'm always with the people local here...so that's why I suppose now most of my friends are local but I have been trying to get to know a few international [students]... as well.

Here Lam emphasised that he was consciously making the effort to get to know more Asian international students, since he already had local friends who were both Asian Australian and white Australian. He recognised that Asian Australians and Asian international students are different and encountered difficulty making friends with the latter since he felt his social circles to be populated more with locals than with Asian international (student) friends. The implication here is that Lam, like many of the respondents who took part in this study, was aware that he was a product of being exposed to different cultures.

Others, such as 20-something Chang, found their time in Singapore educational in the sense that it allowed them to discover their diasporic

and migrant ethnic Chinese identity. For Chang, who was an ethnic Chinese Indonesian, Singapore presented itself as a resource for discovering the history of Chinese migration into Southeast Asia, information he admitted he was not able to get hold of in Indonesia. Being in Singapore has allowed him to understand the reasons why his ancestors left China and their experiences as new settlers.

While Chang looked to the history of Singapore in order to understand his own Chinese diasporic roots, others, such as 21-year-old Indian-Indonesian student Sham, reconnected with their ethnic culture through their entertainment consumption and social networks (friendship groups). An undergraduate in Singapore, Sham did not start enjoying Bollywood productions and Indian music until she came to Singapore. Having been born in Indonesia, she admitted that she and her family were not keen on Indian culture. Her interest in Indian culture changed when she came to Singapore. As she explained:

so there's a huge population of us in Takeda [in Indonesia] ... so everybody watched Bollywood but everybody listened to Indian music but my family was just kind of out of that scene. But then I moved here and I started watching a lot more Bollywood and started listening to a lot more Indian music and it's partly been in front of my friends from India and I think now I can [identify with] my Indian identity a lot more and I guess that comes out when I watch the movies and listen to the music.

Sham avowed that being away from her home nation had allowed her to reconnect with her Indian ethnic identity, perhaps in no small measure because she was a minority in Indonesia. Takeda is located on the island of Java, where the ethnic majority is Javanese and the language spoken is Indonesian. Minority groups in Indonesia, including Indians, can speak the language of their parents and ancestors only in their private and domestic spaces since Indonesian is the national language (Klamer, 2013). Sham admitted that her family was different from other Indian families in Indonesia in that they did not watch Bollywood productions or listen to Indian music, and it was only when she left home that her interest in finding and expressing her Indian identity through such sources came about.

It is unsurprising that those born into settler communities become acquainted with their ethnic cultural roots in large part through the media. For instance, part of the reason why Hong Kong martial arts cinema became popular outside Hong Kong, particularly in the Chinatowns

of the West, was because the films allowed the Hong Kong Chinese diaspora to understand the issues confronting this colony. Hong Kong cinema, in other words, played a key role in representing Hong Kong history.<sup>6</sup> Hong Kong cultural theorist Ackbar Abbas and noted film scholar David Bordwell observe that Hong Kong martial arts cinema is a cultural phenomenon in the colony (Abbas, 1997, pp. 16–62 and Bordwell, 2000, pp. 1–17). They assert that this genre of cinema has a symbiotic relationship with the Hong Kong people. Abbas and Bordwell note that Hong Kong cinema represents the ‘pulse’ of Hong Kong society and references the collective community’s trauma, angst and fear. Since the 1980s, the major issue facing Hong Kong was the 1997 Handover to China.<sup>7</sup> Because Hong Kong martial arts films discuss topical issues directly affecting Hong Kong society, its people (and the Hong Kong diaspora) turn to it for a dramatisation of their situation (Zhang, 1999, p. 16). Veteran martial arts filmmaker Zhang Che explained that the reason why the people of Hong Kong value its cinema so much is because cinema is the most prominent and prolific art form in this colony (Zhang, 1999, pp. 16–24).

Yet the media was not the only way Sham had rediscovered her ethnic culture. The rediscovery of her Indian culture occurred in tandem with her making new friends in Singapore:

I think for myself I identify most with the [Indian] cultural identity because my family migrated to Indonesia three generations ago during the India-Pakistan partition, so I ... [am] ... 60 % Indian [and] 40 % Indonesian. Like my heart lies with Indonesia, but my mannerisms are much more Indian and in other ways ... Since I joined uni I stay at the International Student Hostel ... and my direct interaction has not [been] with Singaporeans ... I find it really difficult ... in the beginning because I didn’t know if I fit in with the Indonesians or the Indians and surprisingly I fit in a lot more with the Indians so maybe like 80 % of my friend group here are Indians, come from Indian, even though in Indonesia that’s not the case at all, most of my friends [there] are Indonesians.

Sham, in other words, was connecting with her Indian ethnic culture through the friends she kept. Her social networks were not made up of Indian Singaporeans who, like her, were descendants from settler Indians, but rather with the Indians from the ancestral home. There was, in other words, a kind of authenticity in the rediscovery of her cultural roots. At the same time, Sham was also critical of Indians. She felt that there were Indians in Singapore who were not good representatives of India:

They're a small group of Indians that give Indians at large a bad name. Indian's from India, but I think I've associated myself with that group and anyone I work with associates me with that group. And so sometimes when I walk into a group project people hold those stereotypes against me.

Her issue with 'Indians that give Indians a bad name' had to do with how she was then perceived by others. These perceptions and 'stereotypes' might include Singaporeans thinking she is, for instance, untrustworthy, argumentative and loud. She gave the impression that because she was embracing her Indian identity in a public manner, she was now concerned as to how the behaviour of 'bad Indians' reflected upon her. Sham, after all, was rediscovering Indian ethnic and cultural identities which were obviously very important to her, given the manner in which she had surrounded herself with Indian friends and Indian media as part of her own personal identity development.

So far the respondents mentioned here had clearly, consciously and successfully made inroads into rediscovering their ethnic identities. Lam connected with his Chinese diasporic heritage by improving his understanding of Chinese-Singaporean settler history, and Sham did likewise through her consumption of the media (Bollywood films and Indian music) and her choice of friends. But what about other identities that do not have clear ties to ethnicity or nationality? Here I would like to refer to an interview I conducted with 22-year-old Nhu, a Vietnamese student studying in Singapore. Since leaving Vietnam, Nhu had developed a strong interest in French language and culture. Nhu was not only actively studying the language but incorporating it in her everyday life in terms of her media consumption and social media use:

And I watch about 30 % French movies, because I like the ... I'm learning French ... yeah for French music I try to listen to it a lot because I'm learning French, I want to be good at it yeah so I guess that's the part of me that's tried to be a French speaker ... or when I want to practice my French I will tweet in French ...

Nhu explained though that her interest in the French language had more to do with a trip to Mauritius, another former French colony, than with Vietnam itself having been colonised and 'influenced' (her term) by the French:

I never thought about learning French until I went to Mauritius and they all speak French there, so the French influence in Vietnam is not a lot.

She also let me know that after she completes her studies in Singapore and successfully gets permanent residence, she planned not to return to Vietnam but rather to live and work in largely French-speaking Brussels.<sup>8</sup> Explaining her rationale for uprooting to Brussels, she stated: ‘I want to stay there because of the welfare system and everything’.

Nhu was the only Vietnamese-born transient migrant I interviewed who was interested in learning French and later living in Europe. While she clearly noted that her interest in French language, media and culture had little to do with French influence in her homeland, her interest in seemingly all things French seemed to constitute both a denial of Vietnam’s French colonial heritage as well as an embracing of the former coloniser. The effects of colonisation did not form part of her own self-perceived cultural identity. She seemed to acknowledge this in a subliminal way: by her interest stemming from a visit to Mauritius, another former French colony. Could studying French be a way of her reclaiming and rediscovering her postcolonial identity, or was she simply interested in the language and culture? In this case, I can only speculate.

Earlier in this chapter I stated that respondents were always thinking about their identities. These identities were reinforced by the social networks respondents belonged to. The significance and benefits of friendship are increasingly being recognised in research that goes beyond the here and now: in a 30-year longitudinal study on friendship and ageing, Carmichael et al. found that the social networks that individuals forged in their 20s—the age range which most of the respondents in my study fell into—were beneficial later in life because these friends had helped individuals figure out their identities earlier in life (Carmichael, Reis, & Duberstein, 2015). Identity and social networks are thus intertwined with not just current but also future well-being.

### IDENTITY REINFORCED BY SOCIAL NETWORKS

Identity, regardless of whether it represents existing identities (e.g. nationality), newly created identities (e.g. circumstance) or both is reinforced by current social networks (Eve 2010, 2002). In their 2000 study of Chinese nationals living temporarily in Singapore, Leong and Ward observed that their respondents would ‘often seek security through solidarity with in-group members’ who they revealed were co-nationals rather than Singaporeans (Leong & Ward, 2000). In this and several other studies, respondents reported surrounding themselves with people who strengthened their particularly dominant identities at the time (Castells, 1997; Gomes, 2015c).

Given respondents in the present study had existing and newly created identities, some identities were necessarily more dominant than others. These dominant identities emerged at different times depending on changes in respondents' situation, such as from international student to foreign skilled worker or the length of stay in the host nation. For the majority of respondents, what followed these changes were changes in social networks. Let's take the example of Ling, a 26-year-old Malaysian who had been working in Singapore for 18 months, and how a change of circumstance led to a corresponding change in her social networks.

Ling, who is ethnic Chinese, grew up in Penang, a state in Malaysia which is Chinese- rather than Malay-dominated (Penang Institute, 2015a, 2015b). In Malaysia, 61.3 per cent of the population practices Islam while 19.8 per cent are Buddhists. Only 9.2 per cent of Malaysians are Christian, with even less (3.1 per cent) in Peninsula Malaysia, where Penang is located (<http://penangmonthly.com/demographics-of-a-diverse-malaysia.php>). Ling explained that she was a practising Buddhist in Malaysia and studied Buddhism in high school. However, after living in Singapore for a little over a year she converted to Christianity and explained that her social network was now firmly Christian. Additionally, because she attended a church with a Mandarin-speaking congregation and which held services in Mandarin, these friends were not only Christian but also came from countries where Mandarin is spoken widely, namely China and Singapore. She admitted that since embracing Christianity she had not made many Malaysian friends, primarily because there were not many Malaysians who attended her church:

So most of my friends right now is from church and then because I'm attending Mandarin church right now so most of my friends is from China but also there's lots of Singaporean and Malaysia is not that much ... So most of them is China, from China and Singapore. So I find it very good ... after I joined this group I feel that I'm very happy ... and also very happy that I now converted to Christian because I can pass everything to my God so ... I feel that I'm more happier than the past maybe half year... Because I just meant to come to Singapore for about one year I mean, before I come but after I attach with this group of people, I mean this Christian organisation I feel that I would like to stay more maybe another two years because I feel that I need to improve, I need to learn. Because in Penang there's no church friends so I scared when I go back I will just go back to my previous life style and then not continue to grow, I mean in this Christian organisation, so maybe because of this I would like to stay for another two more years.

In the extract above, Ling emphasised the importance of her church friends. They helped her not only cope with her transience in Singapore but also reaffirm her identity as a Christian. The significance she placed on her Christian social networks in Singapore was so strong that she felt if she were to return to Penang, where she would not be surrounded by her Christian friends, she would lose her newfound faith.

Likewise, 24-year-old Geetha, who was from India and working in Singapore, explained that her friends changed according to the changes in her circumstance. At the time of her interview Geetha was serving out a three-year bond by working for a Singapore company. Geetha had received a scholarship from the Singapore government to study at a local public-funded university and the bond was a condition of the scholarship. In her description of the different sets of friends she had had since her days as an international student to her current status as a foreigner working in Singapore, she implied that her social networks amended accordingly. Geetha explained that she felt this was because the values that she looks for in friends have changed according to her personal circumstance (e.g. she prefers friends who have the same work ethic as she does now that she is working):

Actually when I was in university I think it was a more diverse [friendship] group, because we used to stay on campus and it was probably a nice mix of Singaporeans, Indians and other exchange students who come. Then after I started working I think it's more of Greeks or Singaporean's friendly and then—because I stay with my friends who are Indians so it's primarily [Indians] ... yeah. I don't really know how I make friends, it really just happens right ... [I]t does help if the person is from the same background as you, but I would say that as far as my working life is concerned when I meet new people ... we tend to sympathise with each other more about the working life in Singapore rather than where we are from, so I think yes probably how similar our work styles are over here plays a part in making friends and definitely yes similar culture and background also helps ...

Geetha here pointed out that similarity in culture and background are vital ingredients for making friends—a fundamental theme among respondents. So much so, in fact, that many respondents in both Australia and Singapore shared their domestic spaces with people who were similar to them, whether from the same country, region, ethnic group, circumstance or a combination of these various categories. For instance, 20-year-old Sulin, who was from Singapore but studying in Australia, shared a flat

with other Singaporean international students. Many international students in Australia and Singapore lived in student hostels or apartment blocks patronised almost exclusively by international students, while working holiday makers in Australia often obtained accommodation primarily catered for them, such as backpacker hostels. Sometimes, whole neighbourhoods become near-exclusive domains of certain transient migrants. In Melbourne, for instance, large parts of the Central Business District (CBD) host apartment blocks catering almost exclusively to international students. The Melbourne CBD is an ideal location for international student accommodation, primarily because the area is home to the main campuses of three major Australian universities as well as a host of state colleges and private education providers.

For many respondents, being surrounded by members of their circumstance prohibited to some degree their mixing with others from circumstances, nationalities and ethnic backgrounds outside their own. French exchange student Jean, who was studying in Australia, observed:

I would say 90 per cent ... [of my friends are exchange students] ... because when we're exchange they do things like events for exchange so you meet other people from other countries but I hardly meet actual Australians, like I mean my Australian friends I would say I met through ... projects but otherwise I mean really like a close knit group. I mean, you go on Facebook and it's like just exchange group –and here is—what we're going to do tonight and you don't really go outside of that bubble.

Twenty-year-old Jean here explained that this social reinforcement based upon similarities extended beyond face-to-face relationships and into the virtual world. As Jean noted, her identity as an exchange student was strengthened through her active social network of friends who comprised a community of fellow exchange students—a phenomenon explored in greater detail in other chapters.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The findings in this chapter indicate that transient migrants are complex individuals with multiple self-perceived identities which reflect experiences that are not solely nation-based but experience-based and aspirational. As the chapter 'The Globetrotting Migrant: Aspirations for Transnational Mobility' will reveal, a desire on the part of transient

migrants for permanent residence does not necessarily result in their settling in the host nation on a long term or permanent basis. Government departments, organs of state and ethnic community organisations tasked with facilitating positive and welcoming experiences between new permanent migrants and citizens with the local populace need to recognise these complexities, since current transient migrants may become new permanent migrants and citizens. An understanding of the multiple self-perceived identities of transient migrants will allow government and non-government agencies and groups to tap into possible common ground for future projects on assimilation and integration.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter introduced us to the impacts of transience on the self-perceived identities of transient migrants. It presents a picture of transient migrants as complex individuals who are aware, self-reflective and actively engaged in their self-perceived identities. Here I explained that transient migrants have multiple self-perceived identities, some of which are formed in transience and dependent on current circumstances while others are connected in some way to the nation of birth/citizenship and pertain more to ethnic national and/or cultural identities. These identities are reinforced by the social networks (friendship groups) respondents are part of, which almost always reflect their identities while in transience, usually in terms of commonalities of nationality, circumstance and/or interests.

The relationship transient migrants have with their self-perceived identities is thus a complex one, especially when these identities are tied to the home nation. In the following chapter I look at the homeland identities, or identities connected primarily to the nation of birth/citizenship. While I discuss national identity here, I also point out that this is only one of several homeland identities transient migrants bring with them.

## NOTES

1. Online survey respondents had only a drop-down list of answers to choose from, whereas face-to-face interview respondents were not limited in this way. Interviewed respondents instead had the opportunity to speak openly and freely about their identities.
2. These identities may be temporary or if coupled with a developing interest such as religion may well turn out to be permanent in the long run. This is

not surprising since the imprint of the established identity is stronger with respondents who recently have become transient (Ayooob, Singh, & Maryam, 2011).

3. Two notable studies on the experiences of international students in the USA and the UK respectively include work by Vanessa Fong (2011) and Youna Kim (2011).
4. The exchange students involved in this study generally identified themselves interchangeably as international students and as exchange students.
5. It is important to recognise that for multicultural and multiethnic countries such as Australia, Singapore, Malaysia and others, national cultural identity and ethnic cultural identity are different. While national cultural identity deals with the culture of the entire nation, ethnic cultural identity is the cultural identity of ethnic groups within that particular nation (e.g. ethnic Malay cultural identity is different from ethnic Indian cultural identity). Ethnic cultural identities also differ from country to country. So the ethnic cultural identity of the Chinese in China will be different from the ethnic cultural identities of the ethnic Chinese in Singapore and in Australia. In addition, the ethnic Chinese cultural identity of Chinese Singaporeans would be different from the ethnic Chinese cultural identity of Chinese Australians due to differing diasporic experiences and influences from the nations where they settled. To complicate the concept of ethnic cultural identity even more, new migrants of the same ethnic group may not find commonality with the established ethnic community in the host nation. For example, the new Chinese migrants in Singapore who come direct from China are unable to integrate, assimilate and acculturate with the established ethnic Chinese-Singaporean community due to cultural differences (Liu, 2014). This is despite the fact that three quarters of Singapore-born citizens are ethnic Chinese. Likewise, Chinese Singaporeans are unable to identify with the new Chinese migrants precisely because they see themselves as culturally different. I have suggested in other work that this goes beyond different national experiences and is also due, ironically, to the contributions of the Singapore government, which often used (Chinese) communism as a key fear factor in creating a sense of nationalism throughout Singapore's postcolonial history (Gomes 2015a, pp. 123–126).
6. While Hong Kong cinema itself plays a fundamental role in Hong Kong society, this chapter specifically examines the popular genre of martial arts cinema.
7. Film Studies scholarship on Hong Kong cinema of the 1980s and 1990s often centred on cinematic reflections of the 1997 British handover of Hong Kong to China (Sarkar, 2001, pp. 159–176; Lo, 2001, pp. 463–85).
8. At the time of interview was awaiting the outcome of her application for permanent residence in Singapore.

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# National Identity in Transience: Significance and Cultural Practices

Identity, as I have described in the previous chapter, was frequently on the minds of the transient migrants who took part in the research for this book. Being in transience provides a space that encourages, enables and possibly even forces transient migrants to contemplate their self-perceived identities. Many respondents had multiple identities-some of which were formed in transience-based on their current circumstance as international students or travellers, while others, such as national identity, followed transient migrants from the home nation.<sup>1</sup> It is national identity and the ability to express it which functioned as a strategy for living in transience. This strategy allowed respondents to not only remind themselves of and keep connected to the home nation but also to navigate everyday life overseas; for instance, by means of friendships with co-nationals also in transience in the host nations. At the same time, the practice of national identity became representative of the tensions transient migrants faced in their home nation, which they transposed while in transience.

## PLACE-BASED IDENTITIES IN TRANSCIENCE

Place, in terms of nation and territory, was important to respondents, particularly when discussing their self-perceived identities. Respondents generally stated or implied that they felt that their identities were almost exclusively linked to place and to the culture of that place, as the following

excerpt with 23-year-old exchange students Adriana and Contessa from Italy and on exchange in Australia revealed. They explained:

Adriana: So I actually identify a lot with the Italian culture and the Italian identity. First of all maybe for my physical characteristics that I'm very like Italian prototype like my colours, my body and stuff like that and because of my personality I come from the south of Italy and there are a lot of stereotypes about people from the south or from the north and I really think that I have some kinds of these prototypes in my personality even now I'm living in the north but I really stick to those characteristics so yeah. I'm travelling a lot and I would like to do a lot of experiences outside of my country. I'm always thinking that I would like to live in Italy for the rest of my life so I'm very close to the Italian culture and to my country.

Contessa: Yeah I agree with many things she says in the sense that I also was born in the south and now I'm living in Milan and what I notice is that people in living north can be more close to European cities whereas people living in the south are more attached to their Italian origins. For us it's very important like our family our country of origin and more values which are closer with the Italian one where the more you go north the more you becoming European cities and so yeah I feel like I'm a lot in touch with my Italian identity and yeah the more I travel and I see how important some of the values and traditions that we have for example Australia is a beautiful country and it's a very new country so I think there's not much tradition, in Australia there is not a practical food, traditional Australian cuisine or I don't know the buildings like in Italy I feel we have a long history and long culture and tradition and I like having such a strong culture.

Both Adriana and Contessa stated very clearly how significant their Italian and regional identities and cultures are to them. Being Italian was incredibly important to both respondents, with Adriana in particular explaining that her Italian identity was visual (the way she looks) and performed (the way she behaves). Contessa further explained that being Italian for her is also about familial roots and maintaining a strong sense of heritage. Both respondents expressed an overwhelming passion for Italy and were unable to separate place from culture and identity.

Carrie, a working holiday maker from the USA, likewise explained how not only her American identity but also her American *Southern* identity were very much part of her even though she has been travelling since she was 18. Carrie, who was 24-years-old at the time of her interview, had

been living in different parts of Australia for a year and had previously travelled to Thailand, Spain, France and Barbados:

I'm from North Carolina, which is in Southern United States, and that's a huge part of how I identify myself, as a Southerner—which is different than an Northerner and a Westerner—and to us it's very special, and we think we have a different culture... I don't get very homesick, but [the South] kind of reminds me in a happy way of [home]. It's spring right now, people are starting to go swim in the creeks and this music makes me think of that, pick-up trucks and rednecks, which are close to where I live, on... But yeah I mean you can go from there to Reese cups, you don't really have Reese cups here, so when I see a Reese cup in a store window, or a Dr Pepper, I catalogue where that store is... I'll be like, oh I know where I can get it. And I'm very bad with staying in touch with home—just the people, I mean I probably email my mother like once every two weeks, but friends, you have Facebook, but really aside from that, I don't do much heavy emailing.

Like Adriana and Contessa, Carrie felt the specific place she came from to be deeply ingrained into who she is. She explained that while she had not been actively staying in touch with friends back home—something almost all of the working holiday makers admitted to—and was not really homesick, she did look fondly upon signifiers of her (Southern) American culture (e.g. 'rednecks' and Reese cups). Moreover, whenever she came across everyday consumable signifiers of home, such as a favourite drink or confectionary, she catalogued the places she found them for future reference. Carrie also emphasised that social media allowed her to keep connected to home, particularly with her friends.

For Adriana, Contessa and Carrie, place held an almost exclusive connection to identity and therefore to culture. This should not be surprising. In their work on place, identity and well-being in rural communities, Winterton and Warburton (2012) found that identifying with place was essential for the well-being of elderly and retired residents living in rural Australia, concluding that 'relationships with place inform personal identity for rural older people' (330). In previous research I conducted with Marsha Berry in the Pilbara region of Western Australia on identity and urban-to-rural mobility, we discovered that our respondents, although internal migrants who were themselves born and bred Australians, were struggling to find a sense of identity in this remote region (Berry & Gomes, 2015). For them, the Pilbara region was almost like a foreign nation, thanks largely to the fact Pilbara is home to some of Australia's key

mining companies and thus host to fly-in and fly-out workers employed in the industry. The culture in the Pilbara is thus one of instability, because of the fluidity with which people come in and out of the region. Australia, of course, is also home to Aboriginal Australians, who in addition to deeply ingrained connections to place have considerable cultural and spiritual connections to the land they and their ancestors have inhabited for generations (Read, 2000, p. 3).

Meanwhile, the cultural and spiritual connections people attach to place have also resulted in all-out warfare, as drastically evidenced by the ongoing Israeli-Palestine conflict in which the battle for land is based upon Jewish claims of a ‘biblical birthright’ to void Palestinian self-determination (Thompson-Reuters Foundation, 2014). Notions of place obviously play a significant, frequently singular role in the construction of individual and group cultural identities and their related religious forms. While Adriana, Contessa and Carrie discussed their place-based identities in terms of region and state, they also made mention of nation. In the online survey national identity and family were the top two identity markers for respondents, while those who took part in the face-to-face interviews most often either identified themselves according to their visa status or their national identity. Clearly, then, national identity was a significant identity marker for respondents.

### NATIONAL IDENTITY

In his work on identity and human networks, Manuel Castells argued that place, which can be read as nation, has a significant impact on an individual’s identity. As Castells eloquently noted:

Territorial identity is a fundamental anchor of belonging that is not even lost in the rapid process of generalized urbanisation we are now experiencing. The village is not left behind; it is transported with its communal ties. And new urban villages are constructed, shrinking the size of the human experience to a dimension that can be managed and defended by people lost in the whirlwind of a destructed world. When people need to expand their community, they refer to their nations, their islands in the global ocean of flows of capital, technology, and communication. Sometimes these nations coincide with the historically constructed nation-state, but not always; and then we abet the process of affirming nations without states, as well as opposing the nation to the state (1997, p. xxiii).

Here he explains that commonality of place allows people to form networks with each other precisely because they find commonality by identifying with this notion of place. If we interpret place to mean nation, then national identity becomes a magnet for people who are co-nationals, either within the geographical confines of the nation or beyond (Castells, 1997). Others, such as Charlotta Hedberg and Kepsu (2008), argued along similar lines and observed that '[w]ithin a particular region, group identity is formed as an historical image of belonging, in reciprocal interaction with the contemporary political and economic context' (99). To borrow Maria Guibernau's description, national identity in this book refers to the 'collective sentiment based on the belief of belonging to the same nation and of sharing most of the attributes that make it distinct from other nation' (Guibernau, 2007, p. 11).

In earlier work I conducted on transient migrants in multiethnic Singapore, I argued that more than any other issue facing the nation post-independence, the rising numbers of skilled and unskilled migrant workers, together with the ease by which skilled migrants were being granted permanent residence and citizenship in Singapore, had galvanised Singaporeans to find commonality with each other (Gomes, 2015a). The presence of foreign nationals (or 'foreign talent') working in white-collar professions and international students studying in local state-funded universities not only created competition for locals in these areas, but also led to Singaporeans becoming more united despite their society's multicultural makeup. Faced with the perceived threat of their Singaporean identity being eroded, Singaporeans put aside past ethnic cultural differences and started questioning the government, particularly on social media, about the damage they felt was being done to their Singaporean cultural identity through the presence of foreign talent (Gomes, 2015a). To Singaporeans, their national cultural identity was demonstrated by their loyalty to the state—they were 'stayers', not 'quitters' who had migrated (Goh, 2002), and their linguistic abilities, by which they were able to communicate either in English or in 'Singlish' (Singapore English) (Gomes, 2015a, pp. 149–17; Alsagoff, 2010).<sup>2</sup> Identifying with the nation, in other words, allows for a certain stability even in the wake of unstable social conditions. Is national identity significant to transient migrants, particularly in light of Castell's discussion of the significance of territorial/national identity? Before I go into greater discussion about this, it is necessary to acknowledge that perceptions of national identity varied widely between transient migrant respondents, depending in no small measure upon their length of stay in the host nation.

## LENGTH OF STAY

Work in the area of permanent migration and length of stay in the adopted country typically finds that national identity grows weaker the longer the period of migration (Rodriguez, Schwartz, & Whitbourne, 2010, p. 325). In other words, national identity is stronger in new emigrants. In Australia, for instance, I found that the shorter the period of time respondents were in transience, the stronger their national identities. Respondents, in other words, who were on shorter-term visas of less than six months (e.g. exchange students) or those who were in the host nation for an average of three months, usually identified strongly with their particular nationality. What I also found, however, was that national identity was dominant with respondents irregardless of how much time they had spent in transience. This could well be because all my respondents were transient or temporary migrants. Interestingly though, I also found that transient migrants in Singapore, more so than those in Australia, identified themselves according to their nationality even though they were, on average, living in transience in the host country longer.

Possible reasons why transient migrants in Singapore more so than those in Australia felt a significant part of their identity to be rooted in national identity could lie in the fact that respondents, whose numbers were largely Asian, felt they needed to differentiate themselves from other Asian (foreign) nationals and dominant local ethnic groups (Chinese, Indian and Malay). Additionally, Singapore is a country with high numbers of foreign nationals living, working and studying in the island-state. As of June 2015, 1.63 million of the 5.54 million people living in Singapore were non-resident foreigners, with significant numbers coming from nations such as China, India, Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia (Channel News Asia, 2015). Having large numbers of transients from the same nation allows them to form significant diasporic communities, with the local service sector growing to accommodate such groups. For instance, local Catholic churches in Singapore now have special Sunday masses conducted in Tagalog to accommodate their Filipino congregations. Meanwhile Far East Plaza, a shopping mall in the heart of the shopping district of Orchard Road, itself a popular Sunday meeting place for the Filipino diaspora, now has numerous shopfronts and businesses catering to the needs of Filipino transients in Singapore, among them remittance services and food outlets.

While I highlighted in the previous chapter that respondents in both the face-to-face interviews and the online surveys became more aware of

their self-perceived identities while in transience, the following section interrogates their notion of national identity even further.

### AWARENESS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

In a recent study of migrant Japanese Americans who visited their ancestral home of Japan, Jane H. Yamashiro noted that Japanese Americans, like Americans in general, feel much more American in countries outside of America (Yamashiro, 2011). In their work on migration and identity, Hedberg and Kepsu (2008) explained quite simply that ‘identity is often stronger at a distance’ (p. 114). If we take this statement in relation to national identity, surely transient migrants who cross national borders would feel an awareness of their national identity when away from the home nation? Respondents who felt that they were more aware of their national identity said this was because once in transience, they became more conscious of having left their home nation. As 28-year-old Jessie, an American working holiday maker who was in Australia, explained:

you probably don’t care about where you’re from until you leave it.

It is impossible to discuss national identity without acknowledging that identity and culture are deeply interconnected. Culture is, after all, itself largely an expression of national identity. While the academic understanding of national identity includes recognition of culture as a signifier of national identity, respondents generally referred to identity and culture interchangeably: to them, identity and culture were synonymous. Rahayu, a 29-year-old Indonesian postgraduate student in Australia, spoke of her awareness of her national identity as an awareness of her Indonesian culture. She saw this represented in Indonesian cinema:

When I am abroad, I become more aware about my own culture ... sometimes when I watch Indonesian movie, I more aware how people lives there and sometimes, I find living there is very exciting compare here in Australia. A very simple example: [In] Indonesia, after 5 pm., people go out with friends, they have dinner together sometimes until midnight, they watch football together in [the] neighbourhood ... I realize now how we bond together with the community.

Rahayu became more aware of her Indonesian identity by watching Indonesian films, which acted as agents of connection to the home nation

and also fostered an awareness of the differences between her home and host nations in terms of community. During her interview, Rahayu let me know that she subscribed to an Indonesian radio station which she listened to online every morning. Doing so allowed her to start her day by connecting to Indonesia and keeping up to date with local music and news— notions of connectivity raised in the previous chapter.

Like Rahayu, other respondents generally stated that their awareness of national (cultural) identity came about because once in transience they began to perceive differences between themselves and other members of their host society. Being different, in other words, made respondents stand out, and they therefore became much more self-aware of their own national identity. Twenty-five-year-old Colombian student Mateo, 26-year-old Indonesian postgraduate student Farah and 31-year-old Filipino worker Oli clarified:

And a lot of different cultures—not just Australian so the less culture I know here is Australian. Some of my friends are Japanese, Chinese, Taiwanese, Brazilians ... (Mateo)

I become more like, more aware about my culture itself. Because I know, being in different, I mean in 2 different countries, made me realise how beautiful my country is. And also how the culture, that it has. And I feel like I like it. And at the same time, I learn more about the other cultures in Australia or in the United States [where I studied previously]. So it's really nice to be like a people, who can experience the other culture. And that, by having that, you become more aware about your own culture. (Farah)

But of course when you are in a different country like in Singapore you will feel, yeah I really feel like it's more Philippino because you will hear people talking different language. (Oli)

For Mateo, being in Australia made him more aware of his national identity, because he was surrounded not only by local Australians but also by international students representing several different nationalities. He thus became conscious of the differences between himself and the society in which he was embedded during this period of transience. Farah, meanwhile, provided a more in-depth explanation for her awareness of her national identity, reading her own national identity in terms of culture. Being in transience not only allowed her to appreciate her own Indonesian

culture but also those of her current host nation and the countries she had previously lived in, primarily through the phenomenon of new cultural experiences.

Other respondents expressed awareness of their national identities in less direct ways. Sri Lankan Arjuna, who was on a bridging visa in Australia, saw various Sri Lankan cultural motifs replicate themselves in transience with perhaps unexpected results:

I think I feel more Sri Lanka[n] in Australia. Because I don't know, let's say for example when I go to a, to Sri Lankan house for example, my ... house, I don't know I feel more Sri Lanka[n] ... when [I] ... go to a temple in Australia because I'm Buddhist. I go to temple, in Sri Lanka, like ... go there like every week, but here I go like say once a month, and then I feel so religious when I go there and I feel like ... Sri Lanka and I just, it's hard to explain but the feelings you generate from when you go to a temple ... very strong I would say.

Thirty-two-year-old Arjuna explained that he connected national identity with religion and thus felt Sri Lankan whenever he visited a Buddhist temple. Buddhism is the most popular religion in Sri Lanka; hence actively practising his faith allowed him to experience a fuller awareness of his national identity. He also reported feeling 'more Sri Lankan in Australia' whenever he entered the house of fellow Sri Lankans who were permanent residents or citizens of Australia. While respondents did not openly state that they decorated the places they lived in with motifs from the home nation, they noticed that others who are permanent residents or citizens typically did so. Indonesian student Farah, for instance, observed:

Like there is one lady I know, she's from my home town actually, and she's been a PR here so once I step [inside her house] 'Wow, I feel like home'—the furniture, the arrangement of the room—not the room, the arrangement's still like Australian, but then the furniture, the sofa, the couch, the embroidery it's all Indonesian, so it feels like home, even she brings some of the—how to say? —the pottery from Indonesia so I feel like wow even though like here become—she become a PR—but then the feeling of belonging to her own country, it still exists so, so yeah so when I speak with her, even though she has been here forever but then I speak like I'm in Indonesia. The way we speak, the way we make a joke, it's just like we're still in Indonesia.

For Farah, entering into her Indonesian friend's house in Australia presented to her a completely Indonesian experience. She was also able to speak to her friend in Indonesian; language, after all, being another potent signifier of national identity. It is not unusual for permanent migrants and recent citizens to decorate their houses in the adopted nation with memorabilia from the home nation, or even to build their houses in certain ways reflective of cultural needs (e.g. in the case of Hong Kong Chinese using *fengshui* when building their homes in Canada) (Ong, 1999). Transient migrant respondents, however, did not surround themselves with items reflective of the home nation. This could be for practical reasons related to their near-constant mobility: international students and working holiday makers in Australia, for example, are regularly changing their addresses. International students may also change the place where they stay whenever they start a new semester after returning from holiday in the home nation, while working holiday makers move around regularly within their state of residence and the country as a whole because that is the nature of their stay. Often they live in backpacker-style hostels, sublet from locals or other transient renters or sleep on couches or in rooms for very short periods of time in exchange for money or payment in kind.

Meanwhile others, particularly transient migrants in Singapore who had been living in the host nation for a number of years, revealed feeling self-conscious about their national identity precisely because they had been away from the home nation for so long. Twenty-year-old undergraduate Shania from Indonesia, who was studying in Singapore, noted:

[S]ince I've stayed in Singapore for quite some time—six and a half years—I see myself more Singaporean-ised as compared to being an Indonesian but being in [my university] I've spent a lot of time with my Indonesian friends in a [musical] production for two years so it's quite ironic that when I'm in Singapore then I feel more Indonesian, yeah.

While Shania had been in Singapore for a long time and considered herself 'Singaporean-ised', she found attachment to her Indonesian roots by means of the Indonesian friends she kept and by her involvement in Indonesian musical theatre in Singapore. For her and a few of the other respondents, the longer they were in Singapore the more keenly they felt their national identities expressed, whether through cultural activities, the friends they kept or, in the case of Shania, through the medium of performance. Shania and Arjuna were not the only ones who consciously fostered their national

identities as a way of coping with life in transience and as avenues for connecting to the home nation and co-nationals. Others did so in a variety of creative ways, with sport being one significant example. Respondents became recreational players and/or spectators of sports popular in their home nation partly in order to more fully express their national identities.

### EXPRESSING NATIONAL IDENTITY IN TRANSIENCE: A CASE STUDY OF SPORT

Respondents were usually interested in sporting activities which were linked to their own national identity (Harris & Parker, 2009), namely sports that were popular in or specific to their home nation. For instance, badminton is the national sport of Indonesia, cricket is held in great reverence in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, table-tennis and basketball are China's national sports, Australian Rules Football (AFL) is an obsession in Australia and soccer is obsessively watched and played throughout Europe, Africa, Asia and South America. Explaining the link between sport and national identity, Karli L. Jaksa (2011) wrote:

Sports are a formidable force for good at the national level, positively contributing to the formation of national identity ... Through the sports medium, underserved nations across the world create for themselves an identity and a voice, enabling them to be heard on the international stage. For many countries, sports are a major component of national identity. Often, these countries are defined as much by their sporting pursuits as they are by their politics, economy, and geography. National sports act as a common thread, woven through society to connect citizens to one another (p. 39).

Sport, in other words, allows citizens to connect not only with the nation but with each other. The same may be true of citizens who live outside the home nation, with sport allowing them to not only connect with the culture of the home nation but also with sojourning co-nationals. Howard, a 25-year-old American working in Singapore, stated that he actively partakes in weekly ice hockey matches arranged by the Singapore Ice Hockey Association. He plays with American and Canadian friends and admitted that this was a way for him to maintain his American identity while in Singapore. Howard explained that hockey is very much part of his life, not only in terms of culture but also his own history, since he has been involved in the sport since he was two years old:

[I] have a small expat [group of friends] mostly American[s] [and] Canadian[s] from playing ice hockey ... I think that American-Canadian friends are just to maintain an identity, a connection back home ... I've been playing ice hockey since age two. I started skating at—I mean I need that in my life, so that's crucial.

Playing ice hockey, as he stated, was 'crucial' for him, to the extent he actively sought out a group to play with even in ever-humid Singapore.

The most popular sport among respondents in Australia was soccer, with male participants in particular not only actively engaging as recreational players but also as enthusiastic supporters. Sport not only allows for engagement with a national pastime overseas through spectatorship, but it also creates opportunities for the building of intercultural social relations. Thirty-two-year-old Briton Oliver, who was previously a working holiday maker but who at the time of our face-to-face interview was waiting for his permanent residence in Australia, and 28-year-old Colombian Castro, who was studying English in Australia, both played soccer recreationally and were also active spectators of the sport. Oliver reported watching soccer in pubs, while Castro preferred to watch matches at home with his flatmates, who were also international students from the soccer-loving nation of Germany. Castro explained that soccer was the national sport of his nation, and his love for the game was heightened at the time of our interview because Columbia was playing qualifying matches for the 2014 FIFA World Cup.<sup>3</sup> Oliver's interest in soccer also informed his choices of media consumption:

The movie I watched last night was like a fly on the wall documentary about the England football team in the 1990 World Cup with some previously unseen footage.

Oliver and Castro were not the only ones who kept connected to the sports of their home country. Twenty-year-old Chinese student Xin in Singapore stated that while she did not play basketball—the sport she played in China—she kept up with it and other sports popular in China as a spectator:

mainly for sports, for sports news ... mainly Chinese sports, as like Sky sports.

For both Oliver and Xin, the media provided a link not only to their national sports but also to their national identities. In other words, the watching of sport provided them with an avenue that reminded them of their national identity. While his interest in watching a documentary about England's World Cup campaign may have been due to the fact England was also qualifying for entry into the FIFA 2014 World Cup at the time of his interview, Oliver also revealed attempts to extend his interest in football laterally:

I follow the Australian sports as well the rugby more so than the AFL. I'm not a big fan of the Aussie rules football but obviously I'm in Melbourne so you can't really get away from it.

While Oliver brought his soccer-loving English identity with him to Australia, perhaps allowing him connect with his English roots, he also adapted his interest in ball sports to accommodate those specific to his host nation. He stated that while not a huge fan of AFL, a sport specific to Australia, he had developed a passing interest in it primarily because he is in Melbourne. Melbourne is considered the home of AFL, with the sport having originated in the city in 1858 (Australian Football League, 2015), the majority of teams being Melbourne-based and with the grand final traditionally held there yearly on the final Saturday in September. Oliver's interest in ball sports thus transcended his English roots and provided him with a cultural bridge that allowed him to create identifiable characteristics that were specific to Australia. He was, in other words, finding aspects of Australian culture which he could strongly identify with. The theme of extending interests beyond the national identity is explored in the next section.

### THE COMPLEXITIES OF 'LETTING GO' OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

Work on permanent migration and identity often concludes that migrants are happier, better-adjusted and more economically successful once they 'let go' of their national identity (e.g. Australian Football League, 2015). However certain transient migrants who took part in the present study, such as 31-year-old working holiday maker Abi, felt more aware of their national identity while back in the home nation and reported that this 'letting go' was ultimately detrimental to well-being:

When I arrive[d] in Australia the first impact was not very good because I say oh my god, this is totally different from my country. But after that, maybe in just one month, it was very curious to go the places, the people and I realised that the strange thing for me strange in Australia is that there is not ... [much I can identify with] ... because it's very new, not a long story so I needed to change something like my food, something like my attitude and maybe a bit of course my language because I can't speak in Italian with other people.

For Abi, not being able to identify with any distinctly Italian variables such as food or language impeded her ability to adjust to her limited time in Australia. A few respondents nevertheless felt that since they were in a foreign country, they needed to let go of, or overly hanging on to, their national identities for the sake of new experiences. While they acknowledged their nationalities, they did not actively seek to express them while abroad. Twenty-five-year-old Indian student Vikrant, who was in Australia, strongly felt that while he had not forgotten his Indian identity, which he practised somewhat through his social networks (friendship groups) and dietary habits, he was conscious that any other displays more than these would be detrimental to him in terms of his new identity as a student and his new experiences in a foreign country:

For me being a student is the most important thing here. Because if I go around telling I'm an Indian ... I won't be able to survive. So, first I want to mingle with the people here, for that I need to leave my ethnic background behind. I shouldn't carry it around everywhere here ... you get to meet people from different backgrounds, different cultures, different ethnicities. So, if you go around presenting yourself as an Indian, end of the day you miss [out and] ... won't get to learn anything. That defeats the whole point of coming to Australia all the way from India.

Meanwhile, 19-year-old Vietnamese international student Giang felt that being in Australia had caused him to lose his national identity, despite having been in the country for only a year. Giang clarified:

When I living here and just like communicate with local people and then international people, it's actually I forgot my culture, could it be my food, oh my God, I like Asian food but when I come here I like sausage rolls, pie, pizza and could it be 24 hours to I just speak with my friends. So maybe when I'm speaking with my mum sometime I forgot the meaning of the

word, the meaning of the Vietnamese means work yeah, could be a grammar and then like my ... like quite different when I live in Vietnam, this could be quite a mix things from ... to Vietnamese.

Giang was evidently somewhat alarmed at this growing predilection for non-Vietnamese food and the fact he was seemingly losing his ability to speak Vietnamese. To him, these represented erasures of his Vietnamese identity: he was, after living in Australia for a year and adopting Australian cultural traits. This hybridisation of home and host country cultural identities is not surprising, as Hedberg and Kepsu (2008) discovered. In their work on returning Finnish migrants from Sweden they observed that returnees were neither Finnish nor Swedish but rather evinced a combination of both identities. Hedberg and Kepsu argued that 'migration is 'a cultural expression' and that identity is transformed through 'the change of ethnic context' (p. 95).

#### REFLECTIONS ON THE COMPLEXITIES OF NATIONAL IDENTITY: ETHNIC AND CLASS DIFFERENCES

Respondents from countries with multiethnic and multicultural make-ups more often than not described themselves along national lines. Singapore and Malaysia, for instance, support multiethnic, multicultural, multilingual and multireligious populations whose common identity marker is national identity. In other words, Singaporean and Malaysian respondents who came for the face-to-face interviews stated that they identified themselves according to their national identity. The most significant exception was among Indonesian respondents who described both their nationalities and ethnicities along hyphenated lines, with Chinese-Indonesians the most prominent group represented. Describing themselves within a compound national identity-ethnicity paradigm was not surprising, since Chinese-Indonesians have historically had a challenging (if not traumatic) existence in Indonesia.

Chinese-Indonesians have systematically had their ethnic identities erased, with President Suharto's New Order regime (1965–1998) forcing them to forgo their Chinese names for Indonesian-sounding names. Furthermore, the regime forbade Mandarin and other Chinese dialects to be spoken and banned the practice of traditional Chinese customs. More recently, the Chinese in Indonesia faced ethnic cleansing by self-perceived 'native' Indonesians when the country was thrown into chaos

after the fall of Suharto in 1998. Chinese-Indonesians fled to countries such as Singapore in order to escape the violence and discrimination during the early months of chaos, when Chinese-Indonesian residences and businesses were set ablaze during extensive rioting. Commentators of the ethnic cleansing blamed suspicion of Chinese-Indonesian loyalties being more closely aligned to China than to Indonesia, as well as a lack of political power, as potential causes of the violence towards Chinese-Indonesians, which arguably was the result of anti-Chinese-Indonesian policies during Suharto's regime (Setiona, 2008).

While national identity stood out more than ethnicity in the construct of identity as reported by transient migrants in this book, it is worthwhile to note that there was also a hierarchy governing social networks, particularly among respondents in Singapore. What's more, this social hierarchy played a part in further refining identity markers; in other words, there were certain social and cultural influences (Watzlawik, 2012) determining the social networks respondents would identify with. In the following exchange about attending home-country specific festivals in Singapore, I interviewed two postgraduate students from Indonesia whose narratives evidenced this social hierarchy. Twenty-nine-year-old Wayan was on scholarship from his government and had to return home to serve out his bond, while Sari, also 29 and a journalist by profession, was continuing her studies in Singapore. Unlike Wayan she was not bonded to any government body or institution.

Sari: Well once, once we invited for some kind of this Garden Festival in Botanic Garden for Indonesian but we didn't come because they're—

Wayan: Too many maids—

Sari: Too many, too many maids because you know—

Me: Too many what sorry?

Wayan: Maids, Indonesian maids working in Singapore.

In the above exchange, I had asked Sari and Wayan if they had attended any Indonesian festivals organised in Singapore. They stated that there are events such as these they did not attend, explaining that such occasions are magnets for foreign domestic workers (FDWs). In essence, the very reason that they did not attend these events was because of the overwhelming presence of FDWs—even though they were fellow Indonesians. Their refusal to go to events where there were large numbers of Indonesian

FDWs could also be interpreted as a situation of identity by association. In other words, they did not want to be seen with Indonesian FDWs in case they were associated with them and erroneously identified as such. One of the key countries which Singapore sources its foreign domestic workers from is Indonesia (Goh, 2014), an ethnographic presence in Singapore since the early 1980s—the decade Singapore started recruiting FDWs from the region to help households with domestic work as more Singaporean women entered the workforce. Indonesian maids, some of whom are college graduates (Nation Employment, 2012), are usually Muslim Indonesian speakers.

Even though most of the Indonesian FDWs are, like Sari and Wayan, of the Islamic faith, this link coupled with a common nationality, culture and language was not enough for them to attend events with a heavy FDW presence. While there are Indonesian FDWs with higher educations, this was still insufficient to put them on an equal footing with Sari and Wayan. After all, both are international students who hold professional occupations when not studying, while FDWs are in Singapore as service providers who live with and work for their employer. Additionally, Sari and Wayan were on visas that afforded them greater rights and opportunities for personal advancement, such as the possibility of applying for permanent residence. FDWs, meanwhile, are on what is known as a Workers Pass, which does not allow opportunities for permanent residence. A further condition of the Workers Pass is that maintaining relations with locals that lead to marriage is forbidden. While not a criminal offence, any marriage between an FDW and a local will lead to her Workers Pass being revoked and a resultant inability to find work in Singapore again (Ministry of Manpower, Singapore, 2015b).

The above excerpt reflects the class distinctions made by respondents based on occupation, circumstance and education. It contrasts sharply with the attitudes of interviewees in Australia. This could be because there are fewer levels of transient migrants reflective of class and education in Australia than in Singapore, which means a less pronounced and obvious hierarchy among transient migrants even though they may be from the same country of origin.

So far I have shown that national identity was an important identity marker for respondents. The next section unpacks why this is so and suggests that national identity provides respondents with a form of stability as they navigate their everyday life in transience.

## ANCHOR IN TRANSIENCE

There is a burgeoning amount of academic and artistic work that discusses and reflects the shifting, emerging, hybridised and sometimes confusing identities that individuals, groups and communities face because of migration (Castells, 2000, p. xxxvi). Often this work centres on first-generation migrants and the children of that generation. In Australia, for instance, the Asian Australian Studies Research Network (AASRN)—a network of researchers and creative arts practitioners—champions research and artistic expression focusing on the liminal spaces occupied by Asian Australians who were either born in Australia or who grew up there. Yet work in the area of transient migrants and the challenges that they face with their own identities has been wanting. Instead, academic literature on transient migrants such as international students and workers tends to revolve around specific themes. In the case of international students these include study, recruitment and practical issues concerning health and well-being, such as accommodation. Meanwhile, class and employment issues underline discussions of workers. In the case of workers it is the welfare and agency of low-skilled or unskilled migrant workers which is repeatedly featured in the literature, whereas studies of middle-class populations tend to focus on issues of transnational mobility (e.g. economic and lifestyle differences between worker and non-worker migrants).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, at the commencement of the face-to-face interviews and at the beginning of the online surveys I asked respondents to tell me about their identities. Even though respondents had various self-perceived identities, all of them included their national identity as one of them. Paying attention to the face-to-face interviews, for some, their national identity was the first thing they mentioned when I asked them to talk about their identities. For most, national identity formed a large percentage of who they considered themselves to be. Clearly national identity held great significance to respondents. As I discovered, however, identity was not an issue of national pride, nationalism or patriotism for respondents. Instead, I suggest that having a strong sense of national identity is beneficial in providing an anchor for stability while in transience. Furthermore, a strong sense of their own national identity allowed respondents to have meaningful cultural encounters, particularly with other transients in the same circumstance as them, and foster aspirations for future transient mobility. By cultural encounters I mean meeting people from different cultures and incorporating them into existing (short-term) social networks.

George Simmel (1978), later supported by Harvey (1990), argued that when society marches towards modernity, individuals hold fast to traditions. He suggests this occurs as a means for individuals to cope with the fast-paced changes inherent in becoming modern. The same perhaps can be said for transient migrants. Transient migrants undergo huge changes when they live overseas. Not only are they separated from their support networks (family and friends) but also from familiar surroundings. While some may enter societies which are their cultural cousins, such as the Asian transient migrants in Singapore, they do not generally integrate or assimilate easily. Instead, as the Asian respondents I spoke with explained, they feel that they have difficulty identifying with Singapore society because it is 'different'.

A place like Singapore may be multiethnic and multicultural, with Chinese, Indian and Malay cultures on display in everyday life, yet the Chinese, Indian and Indonesian/Malaysian respondents who came to Singapore felt such cultural practices were not the ones *they* were familiar with. Because some transient migrants came from arguably more homogeneous societies, where interethnic cultural practices were not too dissimilar, they tended to find Singapore's multicultural diversity challenging. Adopting Simmel's theory, the most obvious tradition here would be national identity, since this is the longest-running identity which transient migrants possess. Even when transient migrants reported feeling a sense of belonging to Singapore, usually because they had spent their teenage and young adult lives in the city-state, they still experienced a strong sense of their own national identity. This might simply be because they are transient and do not have permanent residence or citizenship in the host nation.

The transient migrants in both Australia and Singapore generally reported feeling that these nations would constitute home to them only when they were able to gain permanent residence: regardless of the number of years spent in the host nation, it was legal documentation that determined their sense of belonging to place. Holding citizenship to their home nations, they continued to strongly identify with those nations and with fellow co-nationals.

### HANGING OUT WITH CO-NATIONALS IN TRANSIENCE

Earlier in this chapter I featured Shania from Indonesia, whose social networks comprised fellow Indonesians. As mentioned, this was one means by which she both expressed and maintained her national identity. Hers, however, was not an isolated case, with respondents in this research stating

very clearly that their social networks were dominated by co-nationals who shared their specific circumstances. So an international student from China, for example, would have a friendship group composed largely of other Chinese international students. Such was the case with Raphael, a 20-year-old Indonesian undergraduate studying in Singapore, whose friends were almost exclusively Indonesian. Some of his Indonesian friends in Singapore with whom he attended university were, in fact, from his home town of Medan. He thus strongly connected with fellow Indonesians while in transience, to the extent of socialising with those from the very town in which he'd grown up.

Generally, transient migrants in this study noted that the friends they had in transience were co-nationals—coming from the same national culture, they felt they understood each other. Twenty-seven-year-old Alvin from India, who had previously studied in Scotland and at the time of interview was working part-time in Australia while on a dependent's visa, told me he was most comfortable within Indian communities abroad precisely because of this familiarity:

If I was a member of an Indian community [overseas] I think that will be quite relevant, because we all share somewhat of the same traits.

This affinity towards other Indians in transience existed despite Alvin elsewhere reporting feelings of disconnection towards Indian society and culture in India itself. Alvin felt that his experiences in India were not conventionally Indian:

And I am an Indian but my worries and the ideologies are quite different from a normal Indian that you will see. And my name usually don't say anything and that my origins are in India. You can't find people named Alvin ...

Alvin further clarified that he also feels different from other Indians because he is not Hindu—the major religion in India—but Catholic. In addition, his father is an active and senior member of the Catholic community in India. Yet when he was overseas it was Indians with whom he had the most affinity, primarily because they, like him, were Indian nationals working or studying overseas. Other respondents provided explanations as to why having co-nationals as friends was important while in transience, stating that having similar experiences as foreigners overseas drew them together

and resulted in mutual support. This trend was particularly prevalent among the international students I spoke to.

Sulin, a 20-year-old Singaporean undergraduate in Australia, expressed the importance of having friends from the home nation while in Australia:

[W]hen I'm here, I don't really feel that homesick, because like he said, most of my friends are Singaporean and ... [I] ... stay with the Singaporean. So I'm mostly surrounding by ... [Singaporeans] ... and ... so yeah, I don't feel that out of place or anything.

Having Singaporean friends provided Sulin with a sense of belonging, because her friends not only reminded her of home but also provided a connection to it. Furthermore, the members of her household were also Singaporean international students. Her Singaporean friends and housemates made the challenges inherent in being uprooted from the home nation more bearable, since she was not only immersed in a Singaporean (diasporic) community but surrounded by people sharing her specific experience as a Singaporean student in Australia.

Respondents were thus consciously aware that they made friends with co-nationals in the same circumstance as them because of similar and shared experiences. For instance, some international students in Australia noted that upon arrival in the host nation they actively sought out fellow international students from their home nation (and occasionally elsewhere) to help them adjust to Australia. Turning to fellow international students for advice and help resulted from the belief that these new friends would have gone through the same issues they were facing and hence would be able to advise accordingly. As Rahayu—the postgraduate student from Indonesia featured earlier in this chapter—succinctly explained:

I meet the same people, in the same condition as me, I mean they're international students from Asia or from Africa ... I come to my university ... I find some of wonderful friends from Indonesia, I think they help me a lot, especially to deal with the accommodation and sort of things. Because there is some consideration for me, myself, to think, where should I live? Because we have the same interests, that makes our bonds stronger.

While she expressed a desire to make friends with locals, to this respondent, fellow international students, particularly those from the home nation, provided her with the greatest support in her everyday life in Australia.

She was clearly very fond of her international student Indonesian friends and acknowledged that ultimately they provided the unique kind of support that only other international students are able to give. Likewise, other respondents thought that locals would not be able to provide advice that was specific to international students, primarily because they did not have similar experiences as foreigners. As 19-year-old Zheng from China, who was undertaking an associate degree in Australia, clarified:

Yes same culture, same, because I can share some information with them, we can help each other. Because international students recognise these kind of needs, we can easily get to be friends I think rather than ... [with local] ... student.

It is apparent from the above sentiments expressed by Zheng that not only are there clear benefits from being friends with fellow international students from China but also this friendship takes place organically. Additionally he notes that this is not a one-sided affair where there seems to be a certain code of behaviour where international students are mutually beneficial towards each other precisely because of their shared experience being foreign students.

International student respondents, in other words, generally considered turning to internationals from the home nation a necessary avenue when it came to advice on living as a foreign student in Australia. This situation, which I elaborate upon further in the next chapter, thus allows for the flourishing of parallel transient migrant society(s). Clearly there are benefits in becoming friends with fellow internationals. Like their international student counterparts, the exchange students whom I interviewed for this book also mixed with other exchange students from the home nation, with some extending their social networks to include international students also from the home nation. Unlike the international students, however, exchange students broadened their friendship circles to include friends from farther afield than the home nation. Exchange students likewise generally made friends with other exchange (and for some international) students primarily because of shared experiences and, more importantly, because they attended events organised specifically for them such as exchange student mixers or were in the same courses together (e.g. in business courses where there were high numbers of international students).

While on one level exchange students are international because they are studying in institutions outside their home countries, they differ from international students in that they are in the host nation for a shorter period of time, usually six months. Unlike international students, who receive their degree from the institution they are enrolled in, exchange students are considered non-award students. This means that the institution which they are attached to while on exchange will not be awarding them with any certificate, diploma or degree: they are there merely to complete a few subjects before returning to their home institution. However, what about workers in transience? Do they feel the same way as international students and exchange students?

Generally, the sentiments expressed by the students above, particularly international students, were replicated by workers in both Australia and Singapore. Thirty-six-year-old Briton Jane explained that there were other issues besides similarity of culture and support binding her to her friends in Singapore:

[I know] Singaporeans from work yeah, but I don't socialise unfortunately with Singaporeans ... I feel that as I [am a] migrant you find people who are also looking for what you're looking for. So friends and people to hang out with, but the Singaporeans have their own lives and they're busy already, especially the friends that I have at school, they have families and—actually my friends outside of school and work, they're just starting to have children, and once they have a baby it really means that you don't spend much more time with them. So it tends to be people very similar to myself with a partner, just married or engaged or close to that stage. So people that are very much in my, yeah similar time and space. In terms of friends—similar phase in life.

Jane made two salient observations here: that locals have their own lives, and that she organically makes friends with others who are in a 'similar phase in life'. She further noted that while she was friends with her Singaporean workmates they did not really socialise outside of work, since whereas her colleagues had families to go back home to, she and her partner did not yet have children. Hence, she was closer to friends who were in similar circumstances. Another interesting point which respondents revealed was that being secure in their national identity also allowed them to explore cultural encounters with other transient migrants who were not co-nationals or co-ethnics, as implied by American working holiday maker Carrie earlier in this chapter.

WORKING HOLIDAY MAKERS IN AUSTRALIA ON ‘SEEING  
THE WORLD’, NATIONAL IDENTITY AND ENGAGING  
WITH NEW (NON-AUSTRALIAN) CULTURES

As mentioned previously, international students and workers tend to have friendships with people from their home nations who are in the same circumstance as them, as opposed to having friends from the host nation or elsewhere. While international student and worker respondents in both Australia and Singapore evidenced minimal diversity in terms of their social networks, working holiday makers tended to form friendships with people from other national and cultural backgrounds. Like the international students and the workers, working holiday makers’ social networks were made up almost exclusively of fellow working holiday makers, yet these reflected a far broader range of cultures and nationalities than was the case with other groups of respondents.

Working holiday makers’ singular motivation is to travel, in order to proverbially ‘see the world’, and working holiday makers in Australia were perhaps the most transient among all groups featured in this book. Twenty-eight-year-old Diane from Ireland explained that this was because of a ‘lik(ing for) other cultures and different things’. While they may spend more time in Australia overall than exchange students, who are often abroad only for six months, working holiday makers tend to spend shorter periods in any one place before moving on to their next (frequently interstate) destination. This instability has its drawbacks, with working holiday makers explaining that life as a traveller is frequently lonely since it entails never staying in one place for too long. Twenty-one-year-old Lisa, visiting Australia from Sweden, said:

Well I think as a backpacker, you rarely have friends for a long time if you don’t travel together. But I haven’t had any friends like for a longer period of time than maybe a month. Because they go away—or you go away.

Lisa also explained that she did not really have local friends, since she tended to meet people in hostels or backpacker bars which were not frequented by Australians. Yet this impermanence did not stop working holiday makers from forming significant friendships, as 28-year-old American Jessie noted:

Right now I’d say I mostly have ex-pat friends or friends that are [working holiday makers and] ... are not Australian ... [When] I applied for the visa

[to come to Australia] and I was travelling with another friend from Ireland that I had met in Korea [where I was travelling and teaching English], so I came here and then I also met up with another couple that I had met in Korea and they're from the UK, so those were my first friends in Melbourne. But I think I'm still friends with a lot of Koreans, because I worked at a Japanese kind of restaurant [in Australia] and they're all Koreans. I think it's hard to kind of branch out and make friends here. So at first I tried different groups like [meetup.com](http://meetup.com) that's a good [place to meet people].

Working holiday makers, especially in Australia, tended to associate with each other because they either worked together (e.g. in farming and hospitality) or shared accommodation (e.g. sharehouses or youth/backpacker hostels). While Jessie recognised the significance of having friends while in transience, she also noted that as a transient she both gained and lost friends quickly. Her friendships, regardless of their duration, were founded upon common interests, and like Diane she felt 'drawn to different cultures'. Jessie let me know that she especially liked Melbourne because of its cultural diversity and that the city was attractive to her because of the cultural encounters she was able to have. She also actively sought out cultural encounters by attending Meetup groups. Meetup is a global online tool which allows members to create, look for and join local social groups based around their interests and hobbies. The Melbourne version of the site can be found at <http://www.meetup.com/cities/au/melbourne/> and boasts of hundreds of special interest and hobby groups, such as '20s and 30s New to Melbourne Girls Social Club', 'Melbourne British Expats Group' and 'Single Parents Out and About'. According to the working holiday makers I spoke with, Meetup groups were extremely popular among the working holiday maker community in Australia.

What Jessie and other working holiday makers held on to amidst the fluidity of their transient mobility was their nation-centric place-based identities. In other words, while working holiday makers enjoyed making new friends with others—often fellow backpackers from countries other than their own—their national identities were on their minds. Working holiday maker Mary, from Ireland, told me that identifying as Irish and the cultural tropes associated with Ireland were incredibly important to her:

I identify as Irish and it's my country of origin, I've lived there my entire life ... I was Catholic upbringing, so I identify as Catholic even though I'm non-practising.

For Mary, identifying as Irish while travelling was important because Ireland was where she had spent her entire life. She also noted that even though she was non-practising, she still identified as Catholic because that was how she was raised.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Catholicism is synonymous with Ireland since it is a fundamental part of the culture and history of the Irish people and a majority of Irish identify as Catholic. Mary also let me know that while Ireland will always be home to her and the country she will ultimately return to, she still wanted to travel more:

Northern Ireland will probably always be home; I'll always end up back there. But ... I've still got serious wanderlust so I can see myself going off and living somewhere else for another year. I've enjoyed the experience ... I can see myself definitely going off maybe for another year to Canada or to New Zealand or maybe Canada and America. Yeah, I have the wanderlust.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Among all the self-perceived identities reported by transient migrants, national identity was the most significant to them because it constituted their anchor in transience. Making friends with co-nationals, for instance, provided an immediate sense of belonging and familiarity while overseas. In Singapore, many citizens feel that by holding onto their national identities and cultural practices transient migrants are threatening the social and cultural fabric of the city-state. The government must thus develop strategies to educate Singaporeans who feel angry, suspicious or fearful towards transient migrants regarding the necessary role national identity plays in transience. A way to do this is to show the positive contributions made by such migrants to enhance and benefit Singaporean society as a whole.

In Australia the international education industry is a significant foreign currency earner. Plans to expand beyond the traditional Asian markets into Latin America and the Middle East should be explored, while still actively recruiting from China, India and Southeast Asia. In such an environment, institutions will need to put in place measures to train and support their staff in intercultural competencies in order to cope with the new students. One international student is not identical to the next, and institutions cannot automatically assume that international students from Latin America or the Middle East have the same requirements as those from, say, China or India. Institutions need to support staff to negotiate through classrooms—real or virtual—which in scenarios like the above would become

increasingly multicultural. They also need to encourage and support staff in creating courses that allow for this diversity to shine through. Here, using real-world examples from the regions and countries the students come from would enhance the learning experience.

## CONCLUSION

Being in transience provides a space that encourages, enables and occasionally forces transient migrants to contemplate the identities they brought from the home nation. Intrinsically connected to the nation of birth/citizenship, transient migrants hold national identity as a prominent and obvious identity marker, the significance of which increases in transience. This is because national identity is a strategy that allows transient migrants to navigate their everyday life in transience. National identity, in other words, provides an anchor in transience. While national identity can be problematic in the sense that respondents bring with them certain negative aspects associated with their place-based identity (e.g. ethnic and class tensions), there are positives as well. Performing the cultural practices associated with national identity and having social networks comprised of co-nationals, for instance, allows respondents not only a sense of belonging and an increased ability to cope with being away from family, friends and the familiarity of the home nation, but also for some form of indirect connectedness to the homeland.

The following chapter explores in greater detail the interrelated concepts of connections and disconnections. It narrates how respondents are both connected to and disconnected from the host nation's society and culture. The chapter also interrogates how connections to the home nation are really connections made with other co-nationals in transience; yet at the same time, respondents express a sense of disconnectedness with their friends from the home nation. So while respondents may proudly and confidently embrace their national cultures while overseas, they also feel a sense of distance with the friends they left behind.

## NOTES

1. In the online survey, national identity and family were the top two identity markers for respondents, while those who took part in the face-to-face interviews most often either identified themselves according to their visa status or their national identity.

2. The terms ‘quitters’ and ‘stayers’ were first used by then-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong as a strategy to prevent further ‘brain drain’ in Singapore and to instil a sense of nationalism and national pride in Singaporeans who did not migrate overseas. Quitters, of course, were those who left Singapore to take up permanent residence and citizenship overseas, while stayers remained in the island-state.
3. FIFA is the acronym for Fédération Internationale de Football Association, the global governing body of football/soccer.
4. Identifying with a religion yet not practicing was not an uncommon trait amongst respondents and due to issues such as individuals picking and choosing elements of Catholicism (e.g. not adhering to Catholic doctrine concerning abortion and birth control) while combining with elements from other religions (Inglis, 2007).

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# Connections and Disconnections: Forming Parallel Societies in Transience

One of my daily rituals is to read the newsfeed on my Facebook page. Without fail, there will be a handful of comments or links reflecting the anger Singaporeans feel towards foreigners living in Singapore. One of the issues which Singaporeans take offence to is the perceived inability of the foreign migrants (permanent and temporary) to integrate, assimilate and acculturate into Singaporean society. Likewise, whenever I write opinion pieces on international students in Australia, the comments I receive often highlight the opinion that international students don't speak English and seem only to mix with other international students. Clearly some members of the host nations' societies take issue with foreigners' apparent inability to blend in. So why do foreigners, or in this case transient migrants, seem disconnected from their host nations and choose only to socialise with fellow transient migrants? In answering these questions this chapter will examine the social spaces transient migrants in Australia and in Singapore occupy and put forward the argument that they live in parallel societies which are exclusively made up of fellow transient migrants.

These parallel societies allow respondents to create a sense of belonging *in* the host nation yet not *to* the host nation. This is due to disconnections with local society and culture and, as first mentioned in the chapter 'Replicating Everyday Home Life in Transience: Connecting to the Home Nation through Social Media and Entertainment Media', with their home country societies as well. Here they create spaces for themselves in the host nation from their perspective and so experience what the

host nation has to offer on *their* terms. By investigating the communities they inhabit through their social networks and their social media use, the current chapter presents an indirect yet creative way of understanding how transient migrants negotiate everyday life in Australia (with an emphasis on Melbourne) and in Singapore. In doing so, it continues to highlight the ways in which transient migrants make use of social networks and social media in order to feel a sense of belonging in a foreign country. It also encourages us to rethink the ways in which transient migrants engage with host nations, since while transient migrant societies are grounded and nourished in the host nations, membership and experience are exclusively transnational and impermanent.

### NEW COMMUNITIES, NEW SOCIETIES

In my second week of conducting fieldwork in Singapore in 2014, someone asked me what I did over the weekend. I replied that I spent a good part of my Sunday walking along the national shopping strip of Orchard Road but found it incredibly crowded. The person I was talking to replied: ‘It is because Singapore has too many foreigners!’ The comment was not surprising, since Singaporeans have long been critical of the rising number of transient migrants and new permanent residents working and studying in Singapore. This unhappiness stems from Singaporeans feeling threatened by the presence of such migrants, since they fear foreigners ‘overpopulating’ the country and hence denying the citizenry employment and educational opportunities as well as destroying the social and cultural fabric of the nation. In Australia, meanwhile, certain sectors of the community have publicly demonstrated against migration to Australia, targeting skilled transient migrant workers, asylum seekers and Muslims whom they largely see as interchangeable. Like the Singaporeans who complain about too many ‘foreigners’ in their country, Australians who take an anti-migration stance fear Australian culture is becoming overly ‘Islamified’ and that Australians will lose jobs to foreign workers. Obviously transient migrants—regardless of their class status, background or period of stay—face considerable amounts of hostility in both Singapore and Australia.

As a researcher, one of the key realisations which I took away from the past few years talking to and surveying the many respondents who took time to get involved in this research was that they develop strategies for living in transience organically. One of the primary strategies is the formulation of parallel societies while in transience. Specifically, these

societies arise through the formation of relationships respondents develop incredibly easily with fellow transient migrants and which are based on similar identities and common experiences.

A recurring theme among the transient migrants in this book was the prominence and interconnectivity of the various identities they inhabited while in transience. Most times permanent identities revolve around fairly concrete notions such as nationality, while temporary identities may be newly formed and related to current circumstances. Permanent identities may also be newly formed, such as those pertaining to religious affiliation. During the face-to-face interviews and in the online surveys, respondents implied that they were either self-aware of these identities or otherwise performed them by means of their social networks and, to a lesser extent, their media and social media use. So while international students (including exchange students) and foreign workers in both nations may not have openly indicated that they identify themselves specifically in those terms, they nonetheless practised these identities within their overseas social networks.

The present chapter thus examines the phenomenon of parallel societies within host nations and explores the reasons why such societies occur. The formation of these parallel communities is based around key variables such as circumstance, nationality, region and interests. International students, for example, form their own communities, as do white-collar workers and working holiday makers whose basic foundations are social-network-based. Community, as Graham Day (2006) explained, is ‘a fundamental aspect of society, perhaps its very core’ (p. 2). For Day, community allows for the flourishing of ‘those things which people have in common, which bind them together, and give them a sense of belonging with one another’ (p. 2). Referring to the earlier work of John Urry, Gerard Delanty (2003) went a step further in his definition of society and community, arguing such constructs are neither static nor territorial but rather dynamic and ever-changing, primarily because of human mobility. In his book *Community: Key Ideas*, he explained:

An assumption current in much of contemporary sociological theory is that ‘society’ is a creation of modernity; more specifically it is an expression of the geopolitical contours of the nation-state. By equating society with a territorial entity, for example the nation-state, theorists such as John Urry (2000) not too surprisingly come to the conclusion that society is now obsolete and sociology needs to replace it with new categories. For Urry, the alternative

to society is mobilities and to which new kinds of community as possible. Community is thus seen as more amenable to mobility than is society and has a resonance in the global society in which we live. This argument is interesting for many reasons, not least in rehabilitating community as a category appropriate to the global age (p. 150).

Delanty and Urry are correct in their observations of the impact of human movements on our understanding of the notions of society and the changing dynamics of the concept of community. Transient migration due to the global movements of people for work and study is part of everyday life. Arjun Appadurai (1996) correctly noted that global cultural flows and the circulation of people, finances, technologies, media and ideas have created new collectives and thus new identities. Yet these new collectives are also unique in the sense that they become what Benedict Anderson called *imagined communities*, which exist outside geographical and national boundaries. While Anderson specifically looked at how communities maintain their national and cultural identities outside their homelands, his template allows us to build upon his theory of the imagined community in order to unpack the complex identities which are evolving for international migrants as part of the globalisation process. Manuel Castells (1997, p. 8), meanwhile, postulated that identities are ‘evolved’, which further suggests that identity formation is an ongoing process (Giddens, 1991, pp. 1–8).

Global flows such as mass movements of people ‘can disrupt a sense of belonging to community, but create new forms of connectivity and can allow for new kinds of spatial configurations’ (Nadarajah, Mulligan, Singh, & Chamberlain, 2015, p. 17). Thus global movements of people, while disruptive, are also creative in the sense that they *allow individuals more freedom to form new communities according to their needs*. Nadarajah et al. (2015, 16) further explained that global movements of people have ‘actually increased the desire for community precisely because people are obliged to make a more conscious effort to find community in the midst of such complexity’. Referring to the work of Gerard Delanty (2003: 130), Nadarajah et al. also concluded that ‘very few people are now born into communities that have a fixed and well defined identity. This means that a sense of belonging to community needs to be wilfully constructed’.

Meanwhile, in their study of female postgraduate international students in Australia, Kenway and Bullen (2003) suggested that respondents saw themselves as ‘the Other’ during their sojourn within Australian society

and that this was precisely the reason why they felt a sense of connectedness and belonging with other female (non-white) international students. Yet while this awareness of being ‘the Other’ meant that respondents created exclusive collectives which served as protection against external negative forces (e.g. racism), they generally came at the expense of interpersonal relationships with others outside the familiar tropes of gender, race and shared circumstance. Respondents in my study were likewise drawn to and made friends with other transients based on similarities of circumstance, nationality, region and interests, with the transient experience itself the dominant underpinning factor. Moreover, finding others who were similar to them meant strengthening their permanent, temporary, existing or newly formed identities.

### CONNECTIONS: DRAWN TO ONE ANOTHER

#### *Like (in a Way) Attracts Like: The Irregular Intersections of Circumstance and Nationality*

At this point it may be necessary to explain that even though respondents were living in foreign countries, it was not their country of birth or ethnicity that determined their social networks but rather circumstance (so working holiday makers were primarily friends with other working holiday makers, regardless of ethnicity). While transient migrants made friends largely with co-nationals in the first instance and then to a lesser degree from their geographical region of birth and less so from elsewhere, these friends are primarily in the same circumstance as them. For instance ethnic Chinese international students might make friends with other ethnic Chinese international students from China, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia; however, they would not do the same with ethnic Chinese who are not international students. Ethnicity in other words does not facilitate organic forms of social relations while in transience.

Likewise, working holiday makers were unlikely to form friendships with people from their home nation, or from the same ethnicities as them, who were not fellow working holiday makers. So an Italian working holiday maker would not typically form friendships with fellow Italian international or exchange students. On some level this could be because the working holiday maker is in Australia for a limited period of time (one to two years) and seldom in a single city or state for longer sojourns like international students. None of the working holiday maker or exchange

student respondents admitted to having friends from the other group, despite the shorter time period of time they typically spent in Australia (exchange students are in Australia for no longer than six months).

In other words, the transient migrants who took part in this study did not form a common collective community but instead *individual* communities based upon their specific transient identity. They displayed little interest in fostering friendships or social networks with other transient migrants outside of their own circumstance, even those from the country of origin or who were ethnically similar. Here they may identify themselves according to their circumstance—for instance, as international students, as working holiday makers or travellers and as workers as the respondents from Australia almost always do—and/or have friends who are in the same circumstance as them which is common across all respondents in both countries. In addition, these circumstance-based communities consist of members whose friends most commonly come from their home nations, followed by those from their region. Thus, Asian international students, for instance, would have social networks comprised exclusively of other international students from their home countries and from the wider Asian region. It is noteworthy that more transient migrants (international students and white-collar workers) from Singapore than from Australia had friendship networks made up almost exclusively of people from their circumstance and from their home nation, with very few admitting that their social networks were more diversified. Additionally, respondents in Singapore nearly universally described their identities as nationality-based, with barely any of them describing their identities in terms related to their circumstance.

In Australia, more respondents identified themselves according to their circumstance than was the case in Singapore. Let's take international students in Australia as an example. While the students I spoke to acknowledged that their nationality was significant to them and not easily hidden or erased, it was their distinctive identity as international students that created the strongest sense of identity for them while studying in Australia. Their identification as international students, in other words, comprised an additional identity for them. Akbar, who was in his late 20s and a post-graduate student from Pakistan, elaborated:

For me I preferred to be called as a student, like international student if we talk about it—especially in Australia or like a country there.

His identifying as an international student was not surprising since it was the very reason for his presence in Australia. Likewise, being officially labelled as such allows international students to be part of an identifiable collective. International students often identify themselves according to their visa status, which provides a sense of belonging through a created (transient) community. Their status as foreign students provides them with an almost immediate community which they can identify with and feel a sense of belonging to, because of the common shared experiences of living as foreigners in Australia (Gomes, 2015c; Kenway & Bullen, 2003). Nevertheless, there are other reasons why transient migrants within the same circumstance gravitate towards each other.

### *Common Meeting Places*

Respondents often made friends with others who were of the same circumstance as them, primarily because of opportunity. Most of the time respondents formed friendships with those from their previous or current courses, institutional clubs or societies, neighbourhoods and/or workplaces.<sup>1</sup> Some international students in Australia made friends with people who had attended the same English classes or bridging courses as them prior to entering their current institution. Many international student and working respondents in Singapore stated that while they made a number of local friends during their time in the Singapore school system, they have since drifted apart from them. Respondents stated that they grew apart from their Singaporean school friends because of different experiences post high school. For instance, while certain respondents went directly to university, their Singaporean male friends entered national service—a topic I discuss later in this chapter—at the age of 18 as conscripts for two years prior to commencing the next chapter of their lives. Some respondents also added that those they actively kept in touch with from their school days were fellow international students from their home nations. Nationality, as mentioned in the preceding chapter, thus plays a significant and important role. In addition, nationality was much more significant in terms of social networks among respondents in Singapore than it was with those in Australia.

International student respondents explained that they typically made friends with other international students they met through the courses they were undertaking. Several noted that their courses were significantly populated by other international students. Some international students

further explained that they usually sat next to fellow international students at lectures and tutorials and hence got to make friends this way. Students explained that only Asian international students tended to take the front seats during lectures and tutorials, so this became an incidental way of getting to know other international students. Exchange students, meanwhile, tended to socialise with other exchange students, either because they took specific subjects together or attended events organised by their institutions specifically for exchange students. Some universities in Australia, for instance, offer subjects that serve to provide an introduction to Australia. These subjects, which are almost always offered through the humanities and social science faculties, aim to provide a wide-ranging historical, cultural, economic and social overview of Australia.

Often, international students and former international students working in the host nations joined either university-based or non-university-based clubs and societies. In Australia, international students tended to join home-country-specific clubs, such as the Malaysian Student Society, which were based in their institutions. These country-specific clubs boast high membership numbers, with those from other than the nation in question joining in order to learn a new culture and take part in the country- and culture-specific events these clubs organise. For instance, a non-French national would be able to join the French Club. In Singapore, all university students are encouraged to partake in clubs and societies known as co-curricular activities (CCAs). While there are country-specific clubs and societies similar to those in Australia, the international students interviewed explained that the CCAs they took part in revolved around hobbies and interests such as soccer. Still, some explained that the sporting clubs that they belonged to were dominated by people from their home nation. Twenty-year-old Xin, who was from China and studying in Singapore, explained that the basketball club she belonged to as part of her CCA was almost exclusively made up of other Chinese international students. While students were more likely than worker respondents to be part of a club, there were a few white-collar workers in Singapore who mentioned that they were part of sporting clubs or groups. Twenty-five-year-old American Howard, who was working in Singapore, for instance, made friends with fellow North Americans through the sport of ice hockey, which is the national sport of Canada (National Sports of Canada Act [S.C. 1994, c. 16]).

Because of opportunity and circumstance another popular place for making friends lies in where they live. Respondents often lived in neighbourhoods and housing areas where other transients resided. In

Australia, international students most often live within walking distance of their institution: In Melbourne, for instance, a number of universities and residential colleges are located within the city area, with several in the Central Business District (CBD) itself. Hence Melbourne City constitutes not only a business and finance district but also a residential area. Common alternatives for international students in both Australia and Singapore might be to live in dormitories and residential halls and colleges. International students in Singapore explained that because their Singaporean classmates had families to go back home to, they usually did not live in campus accommodation, while increasing numbers of local students in Australia are also living with their families if they live in urban areas. Often, local students who live in on-campus accommodation are those who come from country or rural areas or who are interstate students. Meanwhile, the foreign white-collar workers in Singapore who took part in the current study tended to live with other white-collar workers from their home nation, with a few renting rooms from locals.<sup>2</sup> Those who did rent rooms from Singaporeans stated that it was no more than a financial arrangement and that they and their landlords did not socialise. Due to the lack of affordable housing in land-scarce Singapore, the transient migrants I interviewed were largely unable to afford rental accommodation other than shared apartments or rooms in apartments with Singaporeans. Those who were able to come with their families often rented a whole apartment in a condominium complex.<sup>3</sup> Otherwise, almost all foreign talent I spoke with in Singapore shared accommodation with other foreign talent, usually from the home nation. Meanwhile, working holiday makers in Australia usually lived in the most transient-friendly of accommodation—backpacker hostels. The majority of the people they met were thus fellow working holiday makers and non-working backpackers from not only the home nation but from all over. They were perhaps the group who met the most number of diverse people.

Respondents also made friends with other transient migrants outside the campus and domestic environments, with those who shared similar hobbies (e.g. photography), participated in the same sporting groups (e.g. soccer and cricket), were from their workplace or volunteer group, were members of the same religious denominations or were friends of friends. Yet it is worth noting that even outside the campus and domestic environments, transient migrants in both Australia and Singapore gravitated towards other transient migrants. In Australia, for instance, a number of the international students I interviewed were involved in volunteer work

with the same organisation. One possible reason for this might have been that this particular organisation's volunteer program was there to help new international students settle when they arrive. What is telling about this is that while the international students gave up their free time to help other international students, they revealed that there were no locals involved in the program. Hence the only friendships they formed were with fellow international students. Nationality, more so in Singapore than in Australia, thus had a vital role to play in the social networks of transient migrants regardless of whether they were students or foreign talent workers. Even in the workplace the foreign talent workers made friends with others from the home nation. As 31-year-old Filipino Oli, working in retail at the time of interview, explained:

Okay my Filipino friends I met them at work, okay. Some are my ex-colleagues and some are my previous colleagues and then the rest are my housemates and my housemates' common friends also, yeah.

Here Oli revealed the process of making friends with fellow Filipinos to be organic: simply put, she met Filipinos at various places in both her professional life and her private life. While Singapore is teeming with people from different ethnicities and nationalities, Oli was able to navigate them in order to locate other Filipinos with whom she then became friends. While it may safely be assumed that she did not become friends with every Filipino she met in Singapore, it was nonetheless clear that she found them quite easily and in a variety of places. In addition, she extended her Filipino friendship networks through her existing Filipino friends.

### *Common Experiences*

During the course of researching potential reasons as to how and why respondents made friends with others, it became clear that they generally formed social networks with people who shared their own circumstance. They explained that only others who were in the same circumstance would understand what they were going through. These circumstances included differing reasons for being in the host nation, the period of time in the host nation which was itself determined by the type of visa held, future plans and current financial circumstances. Exchange students and working holiday makers in Australia generally go back to their home nations immediately upon expiration of their visa, or in the case of working holiday makers

undertake further travel. International students and foreign workers in both Australia and Singapore, on the other hand, frequently expressed a desire to spend more time in the host nation. A fair percentage of international students in Australia, for instance, would like to work, engage in further study or gain permanent residence in Australia, while most international students in Singapore would like to do the same in the host nation. But international students on scholarships studying in public-funded universities have little choice about working in Singapore, since they are bonded to work in a Singapore-based company as a condition of their funding. Working holiday makers, meanwhile, living sometimes hand to mouth and working casually in different manual jobs in order to pay for food, accommodation and travel around Australia, are completely different to international students, workers or those on other temporary visas (e.g. bridging and partner visas). Twenty-five-year-old Tiffany from the UK, who had been in Australia as a working holiday maker, explained:

And, again it's just money and it's hard with the current conditions that everyone's in at the moment it's absolutely ridiculous to do anything, like to cross anything off your bucket list at all. It's like while I'm here I've only got until August, and right now I've got no savings, I'm living week to week from the money that I earn, and to be honest, I have no idea how I'm going to come up with the money to get my plane ticket back. But I'd love to, while I've been here I would have loved to have done the bungee jumping thing, and a rally car driving experience, and diving with sharks and stuff like that, that's something I've wanted to do, and I did intend to do while I was here but it's just—this place is ridiculously expensive, it's so expensive. I'm paying three times as much as I would in my own country for a pint of beer and it's like, it's crazy for everything...

Tiffany represented the voice of working holiday makers in Australia, to whom money was a real concern in their everyday life in Australia. They were not like typical tourists who enter Australia with money to spend but rather supported their travel by working casual and/or seasonal jobs. Meanwhile, international students in Australia, while generally not on scholarships funded by the governments of the host or home nations, were otherwise supported in large measure by their families. While their financial situations were not as desperate as those of the working holiday makers, a significant number of international students who took part in this research worked casually to support themselves and gain additional spending money. International students in higher

education further contribute to the Australian economy through casual and seasonal employment, as noted in the introduction of this book. While there were a few international students who did casual or part-time work in Singapore, the numbers were insignificant compared to those in Australia. Nevertheless there was one trend which appeared to be common across all respondents in both countries, namely a tendency to gravitate towards others within their respective circumstances.

Transient migrants thus identified and bonded together as communities within their separate circumstances precisely because of their status as foreigners living in a foreign nation. Most often they made friends with others in their circumstance, whom they met in obvious ways such as through their courses, workplaces, living areas and interest groups such as church groups. Such communities were not only exclusively face-to-face but also took place online, a topic I pursue further in the next chapter. As mentioned, respondents felt that only others in similar situations would be able to understand the issues they were going through while living overseas, such as the emotional factors of being away from home and the practical issues connected with living overseas (e.g. finding suitable accommodation in terms of affordability, safety and nearness to campus and work). While respondents also connected to their friends still residing in the home nation and kept in contact with them in various ways, having other transient migrants from their circumstance as friends allowed respondents to fill the huge gap that had been left because of their separation not only from their homeland but also, more significantly, from their family and friends (Gomes & Alzougool, 2013; Gomes, Berry, Alzougool, & Chang, 2014; Gomes & Tan, 2015; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Kashima & Pillai, 2011; Kudo & Simkin, 2003; Robertson, 2013; Ying, 2002).

### *Online Communities: Practical Considerations*

While they balanced various social media platforms, sometimes in different languages, for many respondents the primary online community was Facebook. Within Facebook itself there were groups joined by respondents which were reflective of their interests and concerns. These included entertainment and celebrity groups, art and craft groups, religious groups and study or institutional groups. International students from both countries were very likely to belong to study groups on Facebook, explaining that when they have group projects the easiest way to communicate with other members is to form a Facebook group page. Institutional group

pages were also popular with international students. These not only allowed members to receive information about their specific courses or programs within the larger institutional community but also to contact current students even prior to coming to the institution in order to get to know people. International students, particularly those in Singapore, used this avenue to find out more about their institution and to make new friends before they started their studies: information-seeking, in other words, was very important to them.

The non-Facebook online communities joined by respondents tended to be entertainment-related, such as online forums and chatrooms relating to particular celebrities. Respondents added that they did not generally make friends with people from such online communities; unless they were already somehow known to them, for instance, by being friends of friends on Facebook. Female respondents in particular explained that they did not like to make friends with people online because they found it a 'dangerous' thing to do. Very few respondents of either gender, in fact, admitted to joining dating websites. Those who did so mentioned that they joined these sites in order to meet future romantic partners. Most respondents shied away from stating whether they were members of any online community or habitually made friends online. Although I provided them with examples I was hesitant to press the issue, since some respondents may have felt uncomfortable answering this question. While more respondents in the online surveys said that they did not make friends with people online, there were differences in responses. Here more respondents in Australia (36 per cent) than in Singapore (28 per cent) were likely to make friends with people online.

In her work on young people and communication technology, danah boyd concluded that young people are 'digital natives' whose online savviness allows them to navigate the communication and information worlds extremely effectively (boyd, 2014). Meanwhile, researchers specialising in the online information-seeking behaviour of Australians point out that when seeking information on important issues (e.g. sexual health or matters relevant to migration) individuals are more inclined to seek advice from those they are familiar with and whom they trust (Chang, Alzougool, Berry, Gomes, & Reeders, 2012a, 2012b, Chang et al., 2012c, Fan, Smith, Lederman, & Chang, 2010, Gold et al., 2011, Pearce et al. 2011).

Respondents I spoke with generally reiterated that they preferred face-to-face communication and that they only made friends with people they meet for the first time in this way. The most interesting of the online

communities respondents belonged to were those dedicated to transient living, such as websites on short-term accommodation and Facebook pages featuring diasporic groups in different cities and states.

One of the most popular accommodation sites respondents used at the time of the interviews was Couchsurfing (<https://www.couchsurfing.com/>). Couchsurfing was extremely attractive with respondents, particularly those in Australia and most often with working holiday makers, because it allowed members to visit other members' homes for short-term free accommodation. The premise is that members allow other members who are visiting their countries, cities or towns to sleep on their couches. Unlike other accommodation sites such as Airbnb, which allows members to advertise their properties, bedrooms and beds for a rental fee cheaper than hotel stays, Couchsurfing is not only free but advertises itself as a site that allows for global networking of travellers. As the Couchsurfing 'About Us' page states:

**You have friends all over the world, you just haven't met them yet**

Couchsurfing is a service that connects members to a global community of travellers. Use Couchsurfing to find a place to stay or share your home and hometown with travellers. Couchsurfers organize regular events in 120,000 cities around the world. There's always something to do and new friends to meet.

Members of such online communities create a globalised imagined community whose basis for existence is transience. Such sites provide opportunities to create a sense of belonging by meeting practical and social needs. This they do by providing options for places to stay with people willing to open their homes in a perceived spirit of friendship and intercultural exchange. At their best, such stays can establish positive transnational and intercultural social relations between host and visitor, as exemplified in Couchsurfing's stated purpose:

We envision a world where everyone can explore and create meaningful connections with the people and places they encounter. Building meaningful connections across cultures enables us to respond to diversity with curiosity, appreciation, and respect. The appreciation of diversity spreads tolerance and creates a global community (Couchsurfing International Inc., 2015).

Because of transience, intercultural networks become very much part of the ethos of the connections for people who use sites such as Couchsurfing.

Sites like these, while not without economic motivations, nevertheless sell the idea of transience as romanticised, desirable and a ‘lifetime opportunity’ for being part of a positive global village while still experiencing a sense of homeliness through global networking. Sites such as these in some ways promote disconnections from the home nation, culture and society while encouraging new yet ‘foreign’ connections to be made on the part of both traveller and host. While Couchsurfing encourages intercultural exchanges and the creation of global social networks, respondents also relied on more country-specific communities to provide them with practical yet home-based perspectives on transience. Almost often, these country-based sites are Facebook groups which catered to the specific national diaspora in a particular host nation, for example, ‘Indians and Australia’ and ‘Colombians in Sydney Australia’.

Usage of country-specific group pages was not particularly common among the respondents I spoke to in Singapore, with respondents in Australia much more likely to be members of such pages. Facebook group pages such as ‘Italians in Melbourne’ and ‘Colombians in Melbourne’, for instance, proved popular with respondents I spoke to in that city. Group pages like these exist to service the overseas diaspora in different countries and cities. Respondents who were members of these groups, or who visited group pages whose access was not restricted, tended to look through the pages prior to coming to the city or country they were entering, consulting such group pages in order to find out more about the regions they were visiting. Twenty-three-year-old Andrina, an Italian student on exchange in Australia, explained the practicality of her visits to the ‘Italians in Melbourne’ Facebook group:

Yeah before coming here ... I thought that maybe they could have suggested me something about ... [Australia] ... but then I didn’t carry [on communicating with] them.

For Andrina, the ‘Italians in Melbourne’ group page allowed her to get basic and practical information, even though she could have checked other online sources for this: what the Facebook group page provided, in addition to information, was a sense of community. So rather than searching through other online information sources, she preferred asking members of the group about the information she was seeking. Once she had the requisite information, she decided not to be part of the group any longer. The group on the whole had served its purpose for her. In Andrina’s case,

the online community is not about feeling a sense of belonging but to make use of it in terms of information-seeking. Once her needs were met, she left the group and moved on. In a metaphorical sense Andrina was transient within this transient group.

Others, such as 28-year-old Colombian international student Castro, visited the ‘Colombians in Melbourne’ page in order to find out about Colombian-related events and activities in Melbourne. Pages such as these allow diasporic groups not only to learn more about the cities and countries they are visiting (albeit from their own cultural and societal perspective) but also to stay connected to the home nation through the diasporic network. These groups are usually made up of members who are not long-term migrants to the host nation such as permanent residents or citizens.

While transient migrants effectively make connections with other transient migrants both organically and intentionally, are there areas or groups from which they are disconnected while in transience? The following section describes and unpacks the disconnections transient migrants experience by highlighting sociocultural differences which affect their ability to connect with the host country and the people inhabiting it.

## DISCONNECTIONS WITH THE HOST NATION’S SOCIETY AND CULTURE

### *‘Not My Country’*

Generally, respondents in both nations admitted that while they enjoyed living in their host nations, they were for the most part unaffected by local issues. Respondents further explained that they did not take an interest in what went on in their host nation unless the issue affected them in some way. Seow Peng, a 23-year-old student from Singapore studying in Melbourne, for instance, explained that he only took an interest in Australia when the issues reflected his own concerns, such as Australian government policies on immigration. Seow Peng noted that he would like to apply for permanent residence in Australia. In her 20s, Chinese student Lihua in Singapore, meanwhile, said that she took an interest in the city-state only for generic things such as the weather. As 20-year-old Sulin from Singapore, who was studying in Australia, told me: ‘This is not my country’.

Respondents further stated that they were not interested in the politics of their host nations or influenced by the concerns of their citizens.

For instance, during the time I was conducting some of my interviews Australia was experiencing the lead-up to its federal elections. A leadership challenge resulting in dramatic changes in the then-Labor government dominated the media landscape in Australia. Yet respondents were either uninterested or unaware this was even going on. In their work on international students in Australia, Weiss and Ford (2011) attempted to come to terms with this lack of political engagement on the part of international students, some of whom came from countries where the citizenry is politically active, such as Indonesia. While Ford explained that students from countries such as Singapore were more politically subdued because they experienced an education system which discouraged political activism and encouraged obedience to the government, a related issue which remained unexplored was these students' disconnection from Australian society at large. As Sulin stated, Australia isn't 'her country', hence there was little interest in getting involved with the politics of the host nation.

This disinterest in topics of importance to the host nation manifested itself in respondents' avowed lack of enthusiasm for watching local news programs or reading local newspapers. As mentioned elsewhere in this book, respondents generally did not possess radio or television sets, instead downloading or streaming their news and entertainment from mobile devices (e.g. smartphones, tablets and laptops) or computers. They were thus able to control what (and when) they wanted to watch and listen to instead of the broadcast material available on television and on radio. In previous studies we have conducted on the online information-seeking behaviour of international students in Australia, my colleagues and I learnt that our respondents did not visit Australian news sites (Chang et al., 2012a), favouring instead international sites such as CNN or the BBC. Furthermore, respondents in that study together with respondents I spoke to in Australia and Singapore as part of my research for this book overwhelmingly supplemented their news consumption with news items and links posted by their friends on social media. In other words, social media sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Tencent QQ, Sina Weibo and KakaoTalk) became outlets for both the consumption and spread of current news.

Additionally, respondents in Australia were embedded in a society which strongly advocates causes such as gay rights, animal rights and human rights. At universities in particular, groups advocating a variety of causes are to be found peppered throughout each campus; respondents did not seem to be influenced by or engaged with any of them. They generally stated that they did not use social media to spread awareness of any

causes either. Their responses contradicted trends in social media regarding causes, with platforms such as Facebook and Twitter considered excellent mediums to get messages out to large groups of people. Kony 2012 (Russell, 2012), a campaign designed to highlight the atrocities committed by Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army's in Uganda, and The Ice Bucket Challenge, a dare which went viral and was used to raise awareness of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) throughout 2014, are instances of the global power of social media when it comes to aiding causes. Other possible reasons for respondents' lack of interest in causes at the heart of Australian society perhaps have to do with issues such as religion. A case in point would be the rights of the LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, intersex and queer) community. This may be because a large number of respondents who took part in this project are from conservative nations and cultures where religious beliefs and traditional values are part of everyday life.

A large number of respondents in both Australia and Singapore came from Asia, where faiths such as Christianity and Islam dominate. Indonesia, for instance, has the largest number of Muslims in a single country, while the ethnic Malays of Malaysia and Singapore are exclusively Muslim. Islamic culture and ethnicity, in other words, are interconnected. Meanwhile, Christianity in its various forms (e.g. Catholicism, Protestantism and Methodism) is hugely popular, with Catholic churches and Pentecostal megachurches, for example, boasting large congregations. In Islam, homosexuality is strictly forbidden and is considered equivalent to having sexual relations with animals. Christianity also frowns on the act, with the Catholic Church—perhaps the loudest advocate against homosexuality—condemning homosexual relations. The Church sees nothing wrong with being homosexual unless individuals engage in sexual intercourse. This is because in the eyes of the Church sex is only permitted within marriage, and same-sex marriage is strictly forbidden in the Church. Hence intercourse between same-sex couples is considered a cardinal sin.

*Australia: Barriers, Perceptions of Whiteness  
and Diasporic Disconnections*

Looking at the role played by Asian diasporas in bridging the gap between Australian and Asian cultures Ang, Tambiah, and Mar (2015) noted that while 8 per cent of Australia's population was born in Asia, 'Australia does not make enough use of the networks and linguistic and cultural resources

inherent in its Asian diaspora population' (p. 10). They argued that 'Asian Australians bring with them linguistic skills, social networks and cultural knowledge, which can enhance links between Australia and Asia' and that 'their role and contribution is insufficiently recognised' (p. 10). The question, however, is whether Asians reciprocate such sentiments. To study this question further, let us take the example of Asian transient migrants.

In Australia, respondents generally stated that while they would like to be friends with Australians, they felt that there were barriers to this taking place. These barriers were connected to cultural differences and language, together with a perceived lack of cultural interest on the part of local students which sometimes, a few respondents felt, bordered on racism. A few international student respondents felt that their difficulty in speaking English 'properly' was one of the most significant reasons for their lack of interaction with local students, feeling that their lack of English skills had resulted in them not being able to develop any meaningful relationships with Australians. In addition, they pointed out that while Australians were often friends with Asian Australians, they were not interested in knowing Asian international students, predominantly because they had next to nothing in common with them. So according to respondents, the very reasons international students were interested in each other are also the precise reasons why local students were *not* interested in them.

Yet a few respondents in this study admitted that they were the ones who needed to adapt and change in order to get to know locals. For instance, respondents who did have local (white) friends stated that they were proactive in getting to know Australians. They also verbalised that circumstance (e.g. living in dormitories) allowed for greater opportunities to interact with locals. Besides, while researchers often point out that language is the main barrier to formation of intercultural relationships with members of the host nation (Gudykunst, Gao, Sudweeks, Ting-Toomey, & Nishida, 1991; Kudo & Simkin, 2003; Yamazaki, Taira, Shun-ya, & Yokoyama, 1997), respondents in this study expressed a strong desire to improve their English-speaking skills so that they would be able to make friends with locals.

#### *Perception that Australians Are White*

Only a few respondents said that half or more of their friends were Australian. Those who did count Australians as friends noted that they had to actively get to know locals while at the same time developing and

maintaining relationships with other international students. Generally respondents said that they either had very few Australian friends or none whatsoever. When I asked some respondents whom they considered Australian, the answer most gave was ‘Caucasian’ or ‘white’. The respondents’ conception of the Australian local population being white was not surprising since the dominant discourse in Australia is based upon the country being a former British colony (Hage, 1998; Stratton, 1999) and its local entertainment and news media is strongly dominated by white faces (Jakubowicz & Seneviratne, 1996).

The understanding of notions like ‘Caucasian’ and ‘white’ may be different in Asia, where the terms are not restricted only to those with blonde hair, blue eyes and/or pale skin. In Singapore, for instance, the often-used terms *angmoh* and *gweilo* are used to describe anyone who Singaporeans classify as Caucasian or white, which is generally anyone who does not look clearly Asian or African.<sup>4</sup> A person who is deemed Hispanic in the Americas, for instance, might be considered Caucasian/white in Singapore since they do not look specifically Asian or African. This (mis) understanding is part of everyday life in Singapore to such an extent that it is frequently reflected in the media. In the popular Singaporean television comedy show *The Noose* (Anand, 2007–present), the fictional character Barbarella (Michelle Chong) often refers to her ‘American *amgmoh* boyfriend Eduardo’ who is implied to be Eduardo Saverin, the Brazilian-born co-founder of Facebook who renounced his US citizenship and has resided in Singapore since 2009. Saverin, in other words, would be widely accepted as Caucasian/white by Singaporeans.

Interpreting Australia as being dominated by Caucasian/white people is an attraction for international students enrolling in courses there. A ‘white’ Australia rather than a multicultural Australia becomes a desirable destination for students who interpret studying in a Western (white) nation as adding to their social capital. Whiteness becomes a signifier of cultural and social power so much so that ‘whiteness by association’ is a sought-after commodity. The Chinese, for example, view studying overseas in the West, and in particular the USA, as highly desirable (Yang, 2016). One female Chinese undergraduate informed me that she would have not come to Australia if it was ‘filled with Asians’, adding that she saw nothing advantageous about Australia otherwise. At the same time she also had no experience of intra-ethnic othering (Abelmann, 2009, p. 162) since her social circles in Australia were almost exclusively made up of other (Chinese) international students.

*Inability to Connect with Asian Australians*

When I queried respondents about what they thought of Asian Australians—Asians who were either born or raised in Australia—as a whole and whether they had friends in this group, the answers were varied. The term ‘Asian Australian’ itself provoked diverse reactions, whereby certain respondents understood members of this group to be loosely grouped Australian-Born-Chinese (ABCs), while others thought it referred only to Asian-born permanent residents. Those who said that they were friends with Asian-born permanent residents noted these were recent migrants whom they considered more culturally similar to themselves since they too were ‘more Asian than Australian’. Respondents explained they generally did not have Asian-Australian friends, since they perceived the latter as only wanting to be friends with white Australians and not with them. They also commented that they did not have much in common with Asian Australians because they felt that this group was ‘more Australian’. They also felt that Asian Australians had more in common with white Australians than they did with Asian international students. John, a 32-year-old PhD student from India studying in Melbourne, expressed such sentiments in relation to Indian Australians. John generally felt that Indian Australians who had grown up in Australia were out of touch of India and that culturally they were more Australian than Indian:

I found that people of Indian origin who have been outside India for one generation or so, have lost their touch with India to such an extent that, for me seeing from this perspective, there’s not much of a difference between a person who is not a native Indian at all and a person who is settled out of India except for one generation or so. Even, for example, people settle in Australia for more than one generation, they can speak my language, understand me, facial expressions are similar and all, but for me they’re as good as local Australians.

For John, the Indian diaspora in Australia was removed from him to the extent where he found it hard to identify with, least of all have interpersonal relationships with its members. So as this case demonstrates, while Asian transient migrants may be ethnically (and in some ways culturally) similar to Asian Australians, both groups have evolved differently due to varied communal experiences based on time and place. These disconnections that transient migrants experience towards those who are ethnically similar to them but who grew up in Australia were echoed in a study

I conducted with colleagues on international students, their social networks and information-seeking behaviour. For this study we launched an online survey across Australia which attracted 6699 respondents. Out of this number, only 62 or 0.94 per cent of respondents stated that their social networks were dominated by Australians who were ethnically similar to them (Gomes et al., 2015). What we can read here is that transient migrants are unable to identify with locals who are ethnically similar to them because they do not share similar experiences. The concerns of locals such as Asian Australians would be Australia-specific, with issues of belonging within the rubric of citizenship and nationhood dominating their discourse. Transient migrants, though, have very different concerns since they are temporary.

## SINGAPORE

### *Length of Stay Does not Matter: Local Attitudes, Parallel Lives and National Differences*

Research on migration, albeit that which focuses on permanent migrants specifically, often alludes to the notion that the longer an individual is in a foreign environment, the easier it is for them to feel a sense of belonging (Chun, Balls-Organista, & Marin, 2003). Interestingly, however, this was not really the case with respondents in Singapore: during my fieldwork a few more respondents in Singapore than in Australia reported having local friends. In part this could arguably be because the transient migrants interviewed and surveyed online had been living in Singapore as either students, workers or both since their early teenage years. They would thus have had more time to become acclimatised to the culture and society and thus able to make more local friends in the host nation. I say arguably because I am not willing to totally commit to this point: while there were a few respondents who unequivocally stated that they had local friends and a sense of belonging in Singapore (to the point where they were interested in applying for permanent residence), an overwhelming majority of respondents also revealed that the longer they were in Singapore, the less local friends they had—an issue I address in the following pages.

Despite having lived in the country as students and/or workers for an average of seven years, respondents in Singapore felt for a variety of reasons that they were unable to connect with Singaporeans. A number of respondents cited their lack of Singaporean friends as being due to what

they felt were negative Singaporean attitudes towards them, even in spite of the regional, ethnic and cultural commonalities between Asian transient migrants and Singaporeans. As George, an Indonesian in his mid-20s who had completed his university education in Singapore and was at the time of our interview working for a local company, explained:

I tried to be part of Singapore. So like I tried to have as many Singaporean friends [as possible]. And then some time ago because I live near the community club so sometimes I just hang out—go there and then talk to local people there. And I tried to understand the culture in ... Chinese celebration[s]—we don't have in Indonesia [n]or do we celebrate Chinese New Year ... Singapore is, sorry to say, is a bit exclusive. For me I feel like that or I don't know it's just the local people on my area and at the time I used to live in ... So yeah I try to be [friends] ... every day so usually I try to say hi to my neighbour because I live in HDB [Housing Development Board flat] [where] there are a lot of local people.

George, who is ethnic Chinese, clearly stated here that although he felt as if he has attempted to get to understand and know Singaporeans on an interpersonal level, he believes this to be a difficult undertaking. He theorised that this is because Singaporeans are, in his view, 'a bit exclusive'. In other words, he felt that Singaporeans on the whole are not keen to get to know foreigners and include them into their social networks. This was despite him living in a country where ethnic Chinese dominate the ethnographic landscape.

Conventional wisdom might dictate that Asian transient migrants would have an easier time feeling a sense of belonging in Singapore because the host nation is also an Asian nation. Moreover Singapore contains a collection of different cultures, ethnicities and languages which are 'cultural cousins' to those of the transient migrants themselves. Yet many respondents, such as Chinese student Fen, who was in her 20s, saw cultural differences rather than similarities:

I think Singapore[ans] are all very friendly, but I think it's very difficult to make very close friends with them. I have only two or three very close friends. I want to make my friendship with Singaporeans better, but I think it's a bit hard ... I think part of the reason is the cultural background and language.

George and Fen, who had been living in Singapore for three years and 18 months respectively, highlighted the fact that length of stay does not

necessarily lead to integration with the local populace. This lack of integration can be traced to the parallel lives transient migrants and locals lead, despite the apparent commonalities inherent in studying in the same class or working in the same office. The issue is further exacerbated by the lack of commonality in the national experience (e.g. Singaporean men serve a compulsory national service where they are conscripted into the military, enforcement and civil defence services).

Literature on transient migrant integration, particularly in the area of international students, observes that the longer subjects stay in a host country the better integrated they are and the more local friends they have (e.g. Holdsworth, 2009; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008). As mentioned, however, this does not seem to be the case in Singapore. A significant number of respondents in both the interviews and the online survey stated that they had more friends from their home nation than they did from Singapore. Even respondents who had friends from Singapore reported that the number of such friendships became exponentially less the longer they were in Singapore. Respondents who had been in Singapore since secondary school (middle school) and junior college (high school) explained that they had more Singaporean friends then, but once they reached university and then working life their number of Singaporean friends decreased substantially.

Reflecting on this, respondents explained that while in school they had been surrounded by Singaporeans and thus had more consistent contact with them because they were all in the same classes together. In secondary school and in junior college, students are often in the same class throughout the year and sometimes almost throughout their secondary and junior college careers.<sup>5</sup> This constant and consistent contact with local students allows them to form firm friendships, at least throughout the duration of their middle school and high school years. In addition, they would then have similar experiences as students. Yet some respondents explained that once they reached university, other post-secondary/higher education institutions such as the polytechnics or the workforce they began drifting apart from their Singaporean friends. Length of stay in the host nation, in other words, does not necessarily lead to integration into the host nation.

Differing national experiences also lead to many respondents growing apart from their male Singaporean friends. Male international students enter into a higher education institution almost immediately, whereas male Singaporean citizens and permanent residents must complete two years of national service in the military, enforcement services (e.g. police)

or civil defence before commencing university. For Singaporean males, national service is a rite of passage which promotes bonding and cohesiveness by means of shared similar experiences, which for all intents and purposes is the rationale for conscription. The stated aim of basic military training (BMT) which takes place during the first three months of national service is to break and mould recruits. Doing so creates lasting bonds between comrades as well as a heightened sense of nationalism. Male international students do not partake in this shared experience and hence cannot truly identify with Singaporean men post-national service. Some respondents in this study noted that they felt that the Singaporean men they met at university, more so than at work, spent considerable amounts of time talking about their national service experience.

Yet there were other reasons besides the lack of shared (national) experience which contributed to disconnections between respondents and Singaporeans. Respondents noted that while at university they did not have much interaction, much less social relations, with Singaporeans they met at lectures and tutorials. This was because they shared classes with different people. The Singaporeans who were in the same classes as them usually used their free time to study while some respondents admitted they took this time to do other things such as bond with friends—usually university friends who were co-nationals. Student and worker respondents generally noted that when the day was over they went home to their families. International students, meanwhile, have no families to go back home to and ended up again organically bonding with each other instead. Chinese student Fen clarified:

Because [we're foreign students] we're all living [together] ... So we can eat together ... I can go to her room, to talk to her anytime. But for Singaporean[s], commonly they go to school for class and go back after class. Commonly, I have no time to talk, to study with them, for a long time. We can only come out about twice a month, something like that.

Fen pointed out that because her Singaporean classmates went straight home after classes, there was little or no time to socialise or study with them. She explained that it was easier to get along with and socialise with other transient migrants since they lived together in university dormitories.

Working respondents drew similar conclusions, noting that whereas Singaporean colleagues went back home to their families they ended up spending more time with each other, particularly with colleagues considered

foreign talent and those from their home nations. Nari, a worker from South Korea who studied at a local university during her undergraduate years, reported feeling more comfortable with her Korean friends and said that as a result she had a lack of local friends. She explained this lack of Singaporean friends was partly due to the fact that the female friends whom she knew from work had family obligations. This distinct lack of Singaporean friends occurred even though she had been in Singapore for almost five years at the time of the interview:

[E]ven though I have been living in Singapore I don't have many Singaporean friends. [I have friends at work] ... However, they are all married, so they cannot go out—I mean, they ... of course they can go out, but still they have some difficulties ... Because they have to take [care] of ... children ... they have to play their own role as a mother, as a wife, and so on ... So it's quite different ... I feel much [more] comfortable, better with Korean ... friends.

Nari's social circles being devoid of Singaporean friends could well be caused by difficulties identifying with local Singaporeans and their culture, despite the presence of certain aforementioned ethnic similarities.

### SAME BUT NOT REALLY: INABILITY TO IDENTIFY WITH ETHNIC CULTURES IN SINGAPORE

Singapore is a unique international hub particularly for the Asian respondents.<sup>6</sup> Paradoxically, while the majority of Asian respondents were able to identify with Singapore because it is an Asian nation with a diverse (Chinese-Malay-Indian-Eurasian) population, this multiculturalism also presented itself in some ways as problematic and unsettling.<sup>7</sup> Those who came from Asian backgrounds explained that while they found Singaporean culture familiar on one level, they also had significant difficulty connecting to it. They explained further that Singaporean culture was 'different' to what they were used to in their homeland. The ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia and in Mainland China, for instance, both fall into this category of having an inability to identify with the ethnic Chinese Singaporeans and Chinese-Singaporean culture.

A few Malaysian Chinese respondents vocalised that they were unable to identify with Chinese Singaporeans whom they considered 'different', even though they are ethnically similar. This is so even though Malaysia

supports a multicultural nation with a makeup similar to that of neighbouring Singapore, and both nations have a shared history of British colonial rule. Chinese Indonesians, who made up a significant number of respondents in this project, too felt disengaged from local Chinese even though both these diasporic Chinese groups (Singapore and Indonesia) share comparable migrant heritages as descendants of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Southern Chinese migrants (Owen, 2005).

Chinese respondents likewise revealed that they felt that Singapore-born ethnic Chinese were both similar yet different from them—sentiments which accord with conclusions drawn by researchers years earlier (e.g. Leong & Ward, 2000). Chinese respondents admitted that they felt foreign in Singapore, even though the island-state features a strong Chinese-Singaporean demographic and Mandarin is one of the four official languages, frequently used in the media and among Chinese Singaporeans in general.<sup>8</sup> As Ailing, an undergraduate from China, noted:

I think Singapore is still a foreign country for me even right after I arrived here actually I miss my country. Yeah, I live the past twenty-eight years in China and I don't think China is a great country but since I arrived here I see my country it is really great. Yeah, because of [Singapore's] experience and her achievements and [Singapore] becomes the number two economic country within only thirty years, yeah. And as I have more international friends here so sometimes I practise English more with them because they don't know any Mandarin so sometimes I think this is a foreign country yeah, I don't think it is kind of home to me, yes.

Coming from China, Ailing found living in Singapore challenging because she perceived more differences than similarities, even though Chinese Singaporeans make up the vast majority of the local populace. She also pointed out that language was an issue, which is noteworthy in light of the fact Singapore has spared no effort in training (Chinese) Singaporeans to speak Mandarin. All Chinese Singaporeans learn Mandarin as a compulsory second language in school, from primary to junior college. In addition, Singapore's Speak Mandarin Campaign—a national campaign to encourage and increase usage of Mandarin over Chinese dialects in the domestic and public spaces—has been in existence since 1979.

Perhaps the regional Chinese diaspora and the Mainland Chinese are unable to totally identify with the Chinese Singaporeans as a result of globalisation and varied communal and national histories. The diasporic

Chinese in Southeast Asia are largely descendants of nineteenth- and twentieth-century migrants whose societies adapted to the national cultures and histories of their homelands. Chinese Indonesians, for instance, speak Bahasa Indonesia as their first language and do not carry Chinese family names as a result of anti-Chinese legislation during Sukarno's New Order regime (1965–1998). Also, China is not the same ancestral land which was home to earlier Chinese migrants, having changed political systems from imperial to communist and experiencing a cultural rebirth as a result of The Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) (Fu, 2003, pp. 71–89). A case in point is the Hong Kong Chinese, who see themselves as completely different from Mainland Chinese despite being ethnically similar (Wong & Wong, 2014). For Chinese Singaporeans, their Chinese identity is to a large extent, dictated by the government (Gomes, 2015, pp. 105–106).

In their excellent analysis of Singapore's (Chinese) cultural identity, Hong and Huang (2008) painted a daringly honest picture of a nation whose government has never been shy of expressing admiration for the hard-working Chinese migrants of colonial Singapore and the nationalist diasporic Chinese. They (unsurprisingly) asserted that Singapore's history—known as The Singapore Story—is 'scripted', arguing that the past is distilled to highlight only specific heroes in the story of Singapore. Besides Lee Kuan Yew, who is considered to be Singapore's founding father, and his political party, the People's Action Party (PAP)—whose exploits contributed to freeing Singapore from the clutches of communism and racial unrest and then led the nation to enjoy the fruits of capitalism in a nation blessed by racial harmony—the other hero of The Singapore Story is the superhero of the overseas (diasporic) Chinese community, Sun Yat-sen. What Hong and Huang strongly implied was that The Singapore Story, while uncomplicated in its choice of national heroes, is ultimately a contrived one that underpins and supports the national values of the state with a strongly ethnic Chinese hue. The choice of non-Singaporean Sun Yat-sen as an elevated hero in Singapore supports the strong diasporic Confucian Chinese value system, which Singapore has adopted and adapted for itself. This value system has become the very means by which the government controls Singaporean society and dictates national allegiance to both the state and ruling party. Here the value system of the diasporic Chinese is highlighted as the ideal and necessary framework for the past, present and future economic successes of Singapore, as well as a platform for creating stability.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The findings in this chapter show that transient migrants are not integrating, even on a superficial level, with the local populace. This is in spite of the presence of seemingly significant ethnic-cultural similarities within communities in both Australia and Singapore. Instead, transient migrants form complex and self-serving parallel societies made up of other transient migrants. Yet despite their visibility, transient migrants seldom feature in broader discussions on multiculturalism in either nation, despite each supporting multicultural populations with comprehensive policies that govern multiculturalism and community groups who advocate for multicultural harmony. With increasing numbers of transient migrants entering into these countries as consumers and service providers in varying capacities, including them as part of any discussion on multiculturalism is necessary and vital for the benefit of both the citizenry as well as migrant visitors. Here too governments in Australia and Singapore, together with ethnic community organisations and institutions directly connected with transient migrants, must realise that ethnic-cultural similarities are insufficient in and of themselves for creating avenues for integration or assimilation. Ethnic culture and heritage, in other words, do not present an effective bridge between transient migrants and their chosen host societies.

Australia's trade and economic interests are very much rooted in Asia, with the government investing time and energy in undertaking projects such as the New Colombo Plan in order to better understand their Asian neighbours. Transient migrants from Asia provide Australia with a direct opportunity for increasing this understanding. For instance, Asian international students occupy every city and region supporting post-secondary, diploma and tertiary education institutions.

This chapter also reveals that transient migrants, particularly international students, have very few—if any—local friends. In light of this, how then should institutions attempt to influence their social interactions? Institution-based social programs can play an important role. Institutions obviously can't force locals and international students to intermingle but they can help bring them together, especially during orientation weeks. Institutions often have excellent orientation programs for new international students. These specialised programs, however, typically take place prior to the institution-wide orientation day, preventing the opportunity to socialise with local students and increasing the likelihood that international students will only make friends with other international students.

By the time new local students hit campus, international students will likely have established the friends they will be spending time with throughout the year.

Institutions thus need to create inclusive orientation programs that foster interaction between local and international students. One way to do this would be to actively include interstate and country students among the international student orientation program. International students would thus meet Australians who are in some ways just as alien as they are. This would also offer Australian students who are new to the state or area a guided introduction as well as the chance of making some new international friends.

## CONCLUSION

In earlier essays based on preliminary data drawn from the research undertaken for this book, I suggested that the international students I had interviewed in Australia and Singapore formed parallel societies based on their identities (Gomes, 2015c; Gomes & Tan, 2015). These identities were based either on nationality, as evidenced by international students I interviewed in Singapore, or on their temporary status, as was the case among many of the international students I interviewed in Australia. While there were some forms of connection to the host nations—some respondents reported having a few local friends and a significant percentage expressed a wish to stay on in the host nation, either through work, further study or permanent residency—the respondents featured in these earlier publications generally stated they felt more comfortable being around people who were similar to them. In addition, they felt that locals did not really understand the issues that they went through, had trouble themselves identifying with international students or were too busy with their own lives to form close relationships with international students. When considering the answers of all respondents across both countries, however, similar issues were raised, and the assertion that transient migrants inhabit parallel societies based on their identities—be they temporary or permanent—incorporating modest connections to the host nation in terms of friendships and future plans applies equally in the case of both.

As explained in more detail earlier in this chapter, a number of working holiday makers in Australia informed me that they had travelled to the country to meet Australians but ended up meeting mainly other travellers instead. Likewise, the international students interviewed in both Australia and Singapore noted that they thought they might meet and befriend

locals but typically ended up meeting and making friends with other international students from their home nation (this was particularly the case in Singapore) and with other international students, especially those from the wider Asian region.

The next chapter continues this discussion of the ways in which transient migrants create strategies to cope with being away from their home nation and their families by examining one particular religion, Christianity, as a culture of transnational mobility. Many respondents in both Australia and Singapore revealed that Christianity featured prominently during their life in transience. The following chapter thus describes how a significant number of respondents not only identified themselves as Christian but also had social networks comprised almost entirely of transient migrant Christians. Together with my co-author Jonathan Tan, we suggest that transient migrants turn to Christianity as a means of coping with everyday life in transience by facilitating dual levels of belonging. The Christian groups they join undoubtedly allow them to create a sense of community while being away from the home nation, yet this sense of community is fostered with other transient migrants rather than with locals. These transient migrant congregations thus constitute faith-based parallel societies in their chosen host nations, and their resultant complexities will be discussed.

## NOTES

1. More international students in Australia worked than those in Singapore. About a third of the international students whom I spoke to worked part-time. None of the exchange students was doing part-time work. This is perhaps because they are in Australia for a shorter period of time than international students.
2. Those who rented rooms from Singaporeans admitted that they did not have an interpersonal relationship with the families they lived with. There was, in other words, no real engagement or interaction between renters and landlords (and their family).
3. The respondents most likely to be with their families were North Americans, Europeans, Australians and New Zealanders. Those transient migrants from developing nations in Asia such as the Philippines who were married and/or had children admitted almost without exception that their families were back in the home nation. The reason for this discrepancy could be related to income levels in Singapore: Singapore practices a differentiated wage system, whereby white-collar workers doing the same job yet coming from different countries are paid according to the wages in their respective

countries. Hence, an art teacher from the UK would be paid more than a Singaporean art teacher. An art teacher from India, meanwhile, would be paid less than both, even if all three belonged to the same institution, simply because India is not as developed an economy as the UK or Singapore. See Lim and Chew (1998) for more information on Singapore's wage differentiation policy.

4. The terms are derived from Mandarin and Cantonese respectively and often used in other places which support a Chinese diaspora such as Malaysia, Taiwan and Hong Kong. The terms though are not limited in use to ethnic Chinese but, as in Singapore, part of everyday usage by several different ethnicities.
5. There are variations, of course. Students enter secondary school in one of the following streams: Special, Express, Normal and Technical. If we look at just the Express and Normal streams, Express students take 4 years to complete their secondary education which ends with them taking the General Cambridge of Education (GCE) 'O' level exams. Normal stream students take 5 years to do so after undertaking an additional national exam called N-levels. While in secondary school students in the Express stream are further streamed into subject areas such as pure science and combined science. Combined science includes humanities subjects such as geography, English literature and history.
6. By Asian international students I mean those with Asian heritage, irregardless of their country of origin.
7. Eurasians make up less than 1 per cent of the Singaporean population. They have a mixed-race ancestry and developed a unique culture of their own which married both East and West traditions. This East-West hybridity stems from a European (Portuguese, Dutch and British) and Asian (Malay, Chinese and Indian) ancestry. For more information, please see the Eurasian Association website (<http://www.eurasians.org.sg/>). Eurasians in Malaysia are historically and culturally similar to those in Singapore.
8. The four official languages of Singapore are English, Mandarin, Tamil and Malay. However English is the language of choice for government and education.

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# Christianity: A Culture of Transnational Mobility

*with Jonathan Tan*

I have suggested throughout this book that respondents create social networks (friendship groups) with people who were in the same circumstance as them. So international students were friends with international students, exchange students become friends with other exchange students, foreign white-collar workers formed friendships with fellow non-local white collar professionals and working holiday makers became friendly with fellow backpackers. These social networks were determined primarily because of the specific common experience of being transient. Moreover, while nationality seemed to play a role in further determining the social networks of respondents, it was not a factor in making them become friends with other transients who were not in the same circumstance as them. For instance, in Australia working holidaymakers did not typically become friends with international students, while in Singapore international students would not be friends with foreign talent workers. This could be because of different experiences and intentions within the circumstance they were in, even though they were all transient migrants. The experiences of working holidaymakers were primarily focused around travel, with casual work used to support this, while international students' primary motive was study, with not all of them supporting themselves through casual work. Moreover, each group would meet future friends in specific places where those sharing their circumstance were likely to be found, such as in the workplace, accommodation and academic institutions. Even exchange students did not typically become friends with

international students, although both groups were students and likely to meet in the institutions they attended, albeit with students on exchange predominantly being overseas for a shorter period of time. Common motivations within their specific circumstance may well have determined why they did not include each other into their friendship networks. While both groups valued their overseas study experience, exchange students were much more likely than international students to be motivated by the foreign experience itself. International students, in the meantime, were motivated by their program of study and discipline (e.g. Bachelor of Commerce). It is these friendship networks that allow transient migrants to form communities which are centred around their circumstance. Yet this raises the question, do transient migrants become involved in other communities outside their particular circumstance?

While some respondents reported being involved in activities outside their study and working lives, such as sporting clubs and volunteer work, the most significant groups respondents belonged to were those pertaining to religion. Although there were a number of Muslim respondents, very few revealed whether they made friends with people from the mosque they attended or from the wider Muslim community connected to their place of worship. Those who did were men but their numbers were not significant. The Muslim women involved in this study noted that their faith was very important to them, especially during the time of Muslim festivities such as Ramadan and Eid. Moreover, Muslim women who attended face-to-face interviews all arrived wearing the hijab, a clear sign of the significance their faith held for them. Despite this, however, none of them stated that they were part of any Muslim community while in the host nation. There were a handful of Hindu respondents who stated that their faith was important to them, but they likewise admitted that they were not active members of any Hindu Temple or community within the host nation itself. Christianity was the religion that emerged as that most significant to respondents in terms of the social networks they formed. Further, the churches they joined provided them with a strong sense of community while in transience.

What stood out in a number of interviews with respondents who were either working professionals or university-level international students in both Australia and Singapore was the active role played by Christianity in their self-perceived identities and their social networks. Interestingly, almost a third of respondents in both the face-to-face interviews and the online surveys in Australia and Singapore stated that they were Christian.

Respondents identified themselves as Catholic or simply as ‘Christian’ and came into Christianity either as practising faithful or as converts while in transience throughout Australia and Singapore. Moreover, the majority of Christian respondents stated that they were active participants in their respective churches and formed strong friendships with fellow worshippers they met in their congregations. This chapter thus acknowledges the significant role played by Christianity in the lives of the transient migrants interviewed in this project. In doing so, it also highlights the particular significance of Christianity in Singapore—an Asian nation where Asian religions such as Buddhism and Taoism are on the decline in favour of Christianity. This chapter further suggests that Christianity functions as a culture of transnational mobility that allows for connections to the homeland to be maintained and a sense of community within the host nation to be created.

In other words, transient migrants who identified themselves as Christian turned to Christianity as a way of coping with everyday life in transience. On one level, the Christian groups they joined allowed them to create a sense of community while being away from their home nation. This sense of community, though, was formed with other transient migrants rather than with locals. On another level, these transient migrant congregations created parallel societies both in Australia and in Singapore: while Christianity is the most established religion in Australia, it is also the fastest-growing religion in Singapore.

Christians who come to Australia and Singapore bring with them the rituals and traditions of Christianity as practised in the home nation and replicate them in transience. These rituals and traditions serve as reminders of home while at the same time help to create unique congregations that are nationally based. In other words, congregations openly use signifiers of nationality such as language in order to duplicate significant aspects of their home nation life in transience and engender a sense of community while overseas. This chapter highlights, for instance, the Indonesian Christians and the Filipino Catholics who are part of congregations that are based exclusively on nationality. In Singapore, Christian churches hold services and masses in Bahasa Indonesia and Tagalog in order to service the growing numbers of Filipino Catholics and Indonesian Christians respectively.

This chapter, which I co-authored with religious studies expert Jonathan Tan, also features a particular emphasis on international students, since they not only comprise the largest group of transient migrants in Australia but also the largest group interviewed for this study. It was thus

unsurprising to find that Christian churches have clergy administering to the needs of their international (student) flock. Melbourne, to take one example, is home to several significant churches catering to international students, including the Cross Culture Church. Situated in the heart of the city, the Cross Culture Church, which belongs to the Churches of Christ denomination, has services in English and Mandarin and one of its pastors is dedicated to ministering specifically to international students. This church, which has the capacity to hold 700 people, hosts packed Sunday services in both languages. Even the serviced apartment complex Arrow on Swanston, which almost exclusively caters to international students during semester sessions, has church facilities in its basement and likewise holds regular Sunday services. Both the Cross Culture Church and Arrow on Swanston are close to what is known as the ‘university precinct’ of Melbourne (City of Melbourne, 2009), being located within walking or tram distance from a number of state universities such as the University of Melbourne, RMIT University and Victoria University as well as several private education providers such as Shillington College and the Centre for Adult Education. Tertiary institutions in Australia are also host to Christian fellowship groups catering specifically to international students, such as Overseas Christian Fellowship and Cantonese Christian Fellowship, which provide spiritual as well as social networks for members. This sense of community was also to be found among individuals who converted to Christianity in the host nation.

Unlike those who carry their Christianity from the home nation with them, converts in transience use Christianity as a new self-identifying marker that allows them, along with other transients, to become part of a non-nationally based community. Like longer-term Christians, more recent converts are attracted to identifiers they grew up with or became accustomed to in their home nation, in particular language. Hence while Christianity itself may be new to converts, the Christian communities themselves are immediately appealing because they feature familiar identity markers such as similarities in ethnicity (e.g. significant numbers of the Chinese diaspora are brought together by language), nationality (e.g. Indonesian Christians and Filipinos) and current circumstance (e.g. being an international student in Australia).

These Christian communities thus provided respondents who identified as Christian with solid social networks of friends who gave support and companionship while overseas. Christianity, in other words, arms transient migrants with the tools they need to navigate everyday life in transience

and thus cope with the traumas inherent in voluntary uprootedness, such as loneliness and homesickness. These support systems are facilitated by host nations that are open to Christian faiths.

As a global and transnational religion, Christianity is in a pre-eminent position to ride the waves of transnational mobility and migration. From its inception Christianity has been a religion that thrives on the mobility of enthusiastic migrants professing their newfound faith in Jesus. The New Testament bears witness to the migration of Jewish and Gentile Christians across the Mediterranean world in the early years of the nascent Christian movement (see e.g. Acts 8:1 on the scattering of Greek-speaking Christians following the martyrdom of Stephen, or Acts 18:1–3 on Prisca and Aquila fleeing Rome for Corinth, where they established a thriving house church [Tan, 2014, p. 172]).

Elsewhere in the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline epistles one comes face to face with the apostle Paul, itinerant missionary and migrant *par excellence*, who along trade and migrant routes in the Mediterranean basin established house churches among the upwardly mobile ‘gentiles’, that is, non-Jews in the thriving cities of the Greco-Roman world, including Corinth, Thessalonica, Ephesus and Rome. While it is undeniable that the apostle Paul was often pilloried for diluting the ‘Jewishness’ of the teachings of Jesus, in truth he both recognised and utilised the mobilities inherent in the greater Roman Empire to establish transnational yet local churches that transcended ethnic identity to be defined by their acceptance of Jesus and his teachings. For better or worse, the nascent ‘Jesus Movement’ broke away from its historical Jewish ethnocentricity to embrace the mobility and transnational identity of a universal faith that thrived on mobility, allowing it to eventually reach the ends of the world. Likewise, in the First Epistle of Peter, we see the apostle Peter claiming a migrant identity (1 Peter 2:11) and inviting his readers to do the same. For Peter, migration and mobility are not incidental but rather inherent dimensions of being Christian.

Beyond the witness of the New Testament, early Christian missionaries travelled across the known world preaching the Christian Gospel, as exemplified by accounts of Saint Thomas travelling to India and establishing thriving centres of Christianity along the Malabar Coast and Assyrian missionaries travelling along the ancient Silk Road to propagate Christianity in Tang-era China (Tan, 2014, pp. 11–13). The author of the second-century *Epistle to Diognetus* spoke of early Christians who held the view

that ‘any foreign country is a motherland, and any motherland is a foreign country’ (Tan, 2014, p. 172).

### PRACTISING CHRISTIANITY IN TRANSIENCE

Respondents who came from countries where other non-Christian religions were dominant or who were recent converts to Christianity revealed that practising their faith was incredibly important to them. All the Indonesian Christians I spoke to, for instance, joined Indonesian Christian congregations in Singapore. These congregations, moreover, were serviced by pastors from Indonesia with services conducted in Bahasa Indonesia. Orchard Road Presbyterian, located in the heart of Singapore’s Central Business District, is one such church. For 31-year-old Indonesian IT professional Charlie the practising of faith extended to his choice in online downloads, and he openly stated that he subscribed to a number of Christian YouTube channels featuring pastors and preachers. Others, such as 28-year-old Masters student Jerome, used messaging apps such as Line and WhatsApp together with Facebook to maintain regular contact with his church friends and discuss church-related activities:

I also chat in [a] WhatsApp group talking about ... [an] ... event with my church buddies. I also chat in Line group, talking about our May’s bible camp matters. I used Indonesian language as all of them are Indonesian.

Meanwhile, a few Indonesian Christian respondents noted that it was easier for them to practice their faith in Singapore than in Indonesia, where Islam is the dominant religion. They found Singapore a place that permitted them to practice their faith openly since Christianity, as we will discuss later in this chapter, is a growing religion in the city-state. Sally, a 20-year-old Indonesian Christian undergraduate student, explained that she felt that being in Singapore allowed her to actively practice her Christianity even more openly than she did in Indonesia. For Sally, being able to practice her Christian faith more freely than she was able to back home provided her with a sense of community in Singapore, particularly since she attended a Christian church whose attendees were primarily fellow Indonesians. Her sense of community in Singapore was enabled, in other words, by her being part of a group that not only shared the same faith but the same nationality. The sense of

community engendered among transient migrants in Singapore by means of Christianity is an issue we likewise explore in depth later in this chapter.

Additionally, those who said that their religious identity was important to them embraced their faith wholeheartedly, as 21-year-old Vietnamese Anh, who was studying in Singapore, passionately explained:

I am a Christian ... [and I] ... know that God is real ... [it] is not a decision ... with [those who] belong to our social group it's just that God is real and his desire is to save everyone and when I come here then I hear about a Gospel, but before that, before I really find out who he is I already can have this feeling because yeah, because you know I think I will live here knowing that God fought in our heart, that this hole that need[s] to be filled by him and his desire to—his desire to come to him, but at that time when I didn't hear about God I do not know who that person is and what his desire is for and then he ... I can come to realise that it is he who I keep questing for, who I keep feeling the yeah, feeling the desire to like to yeah to turn [to] our [God] ... yeah so that's how I felt to ... this ... I think it is because in Singapore people talk about religion openly, yeah so I have the chance to hear about a Gospel.

While on one level the concept of the Christian God was extremely important to Anh, she also pointed out that this was facilitated by her ability to learn about the religion further in Singapore. Like Sally, she alluded to the notion that Christianity is openly discussed and practised in Singapore.

### A WAY OF DEALING WITH LONELINESS AND HOMESICKNESS

In Singapore, transient migrants are part of the ethnographic landscape, with social encounters involving transients taking place on a quotidian scale. Still, literature in this area has largely been limited to unskilled labourers, particularly the foreign domestic workers with a focus on their lack of rights in the Singaporean state and the tensions they encounter as live-in maids with employers (e.g. Ford and Piper, 1–21). Research on skilled foreign talent, namely white-collar professionals and international students in Singapore, is still in its infancy, with research in the area generally concerned with economic and policy issues (e.g. Rahman and Tong, 80–98). Work on transient migrants such as international students in the

USA and Australia, meanwhile, often focuses on the issues these students face while in transience, with loneliness and homesickness often attributed as being the primary conditions of their unhappiness in the host nations (e.g. Hendrickson, Rosen and Aune 2011, pp. 281–295; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland and Ramia 2008, pp. 148–180, Gomes, 2015c).

Transient migrants in Singapore were not unique in this regard, with respondents almost universally noting that they experienced loneliness and felt homesick at least some of the time. Respondents also noted that they actively struck up friendships with people in order to help cope with the traumas of their voluntary uprootedness, with Christianity being a key feature of this quest. Of the 202 participants interviewed in both Australia and Singapore, a quarter reported alleviating these conditions by making friends with people from their respective churches. While a few participants were already practising Christians prior to coming to Singapore, such as the Filipino Catholics and the Indonesian Christians, others found Christianity while living in transience. James, a 19-year-old French international student in Australia, Essie, a 34-year-old international student from Korea studying in Australia, Prudence, a 23-year-old former international student from China who was on a bridging visa while awaiting the processing of her Australian permanent residency application, and Ling, who we first met in the chapter ‘Identity on My Mind’, a 26-year-old Malaysian Chinese working in the hotel industry, for instance, were several such persons.

James, who had previously lived in Australia as a high school exchange student, expressed the significance of Christianity to him:

I’m a Christian so I go to church quite often and I see my friends at church ... Church friends, I think it’s real friendship...

For James, his identity as a Christian helped in navigating his social networks. The notion of Church thus comprised more than just a building or a set of rules for the faithful, instead providing him with a community he clearly felt comfortable with. For others, such as Prudence, Church provided a link to locals:

[B]efore, I know some Australian friends in church, that’s all and ... when I studied in English school, I still have ... some friends from the school.

Church was, for Essie, one of the first places where she had the opportunity to meet and make friends with Australians. So despite differences in language skills, nationality and ethnicity, Church became a bridge for Essie

to build up her social network with locals and therefore perhaps develop some sense of belonging to the host nation. Essie however later admitted that most of her current friends were fellow international students, around 80 per cent of whom came from her home nation of Korea. In the case of recent Christian convert Prudence, Church provided her with most of her friends. She pointed out moreover that these friends were similar to her in terms of being either from Asia or from China itself:

Probably 50 per cent of my friends come from the same background as mine, which is Asian or Chinese. But my largest [group of friends are my] fellowship groups ... at the church ... I just became a Christian last year and, which is a big change ... [in] ... my life.

Prudence's conversion to Christianity had become a large part of her identity, to the extent where almost all her friends were fellow Christians. In talking about them she employed the term 'fellowship', which is often used within certain Christian denominations (e.g. Presbyterian) to describe groups of people meeting for worship or other related activities such as bible sharing. Unlike Essie, Prudence was part of a Christian community whose members were similar to her in terms of ethnicity, nationality and region. Being around people similar to her in certain significant aspects such as place (region and country) and religious belief was sufficient not only to help navigate her everyday life in transience but also led her to actively take steps to stay in Australia as a permanent resident. This was in spite of the fact she did not openly state throughout the interview that she had any (Asian) Australian friends. What about respondents in Singapore?

The findings highlighted in this chapter echo similar insights by North American sociologists studying transnational Asian migrant networks and Christianity in North America. For example, Judith Nagata's ground-breaking transnational 20-year study on Chinese Christians in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Canada on the implications of Christianity for superseding ethnic identity concluded that subethnic Chinese identity is often subordinated to a broader Christian transnational religious identity (Nagata, 2005). Likewise, Kenneth Guest's important ethnographic study of undocumented Fuzhounese migrants in the Chinatown of New York City highlighted, among other things, the deep involvement of migrant Fuzhounese Christian congregations in nurturing transnational social networks of these undocumented migrants, who found themselves marginalised and disenfranchised within broader US society by virtue of their irregular immigration status, as well as by their lacking both the English-

language and economic skills to escape their frequently menial jobs (Guest, 2003, pp. 201–206, see also Guest, 2005, pp. 159–161). In Guest's words:

For the majority of the Fuzhounese, their transnationalism is much more nascent, grassroots, and fragile; an ocean-borne transnationalism of the working poor, not the jet-set transnationalism of the elite ... As workers, many of them undocumented, they are disciplined by economy and state alike ... Through these [transnational] networks, they seek to transcend regulated national boundaries and construct broader notions of citizenship and participation. They utilize their emerging transnational religious networks to articulate an alternative existence and identity in the face of the homogenizing influences of global capitalism and the U.S. labour market. Their participation in the life of their home communities—encouraged, facilitated, and rewarded through these religious networks—assists in creating and enhancing a transnational identity which may in fact serve as an alternative to immigrant incorporation in the host country (Guest, 2005, pp. 160–161).

Foreign talent transient migrants, and in this case transients from Asia, have an added dimension where they see Christianity as providing a platform for networks which transcend national similarity. Instead, they adapt to social networks which provide them with some measure of similarity even though they also contain elements of newness. Therefore, while Christianity was a different experience for her, becoming part of a Christian community in Singapore was not a totally fresh adventure for Ling: while Christianity represented a brand new ideology and identity for Ling, the Christian group she joined was made up of Mandarin-speaking ethnic diasporic Chinese and thus provided a marker of familiarity. She was, after all, a Mandarin-speaking ethnic diasporic Chinese, and this particular identity provided her with the ability and confidence to navigate through the newness of her Christian faith. In other words, she found a community that was new on one level (religion) yet familiar on another (diasporic Mandarin-speaking ethnic Chinese). Transience, then, fosters the creation of communities that create fellowship and support while containing elements of familiarity for members.

### FINDING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN TRANSIENCE

Continuing the discussions raised in the previous chapter on transient migration due to the global movements of people for work and study as part of everyday life, this chapter asserts that transient migrants in Australia and Singapore create a sense of community while being away

from the home nation. In Singapore, Ling's devotion to the Christian faith, for instance, also revealed her involvement in a community quite different to those she had been used to in Malaysia. Ling, after all, grew up in Malay-Muslim-dominated Malaysia in an ethnic Chinese Hokkien-speaking family of practising Buddhists. Like many Malaysian Chinese, Ling was multilingual and thus able to converse not only in English and Bahasa Malaysia but also in different Chinese languages and dialects such as Mandarin and Hokkien. She seemed to be aware of how different the Christian community was for her and expressed the fear that if she ever went back to Malaysia she would lose her newfound faith because she had no Christian friends back in the home nation. Moreover, almost all her friends in Singapore were fellow Mandarin-speaking Christian transients from countries other than Malaysia. While Ling's Christian church friends came from countries other than Malaysia, the same cannot be said about other Christians in Singapore who were part of church groups exclusively catering to people from their home nation.

During my fieldwork in Singapore, I spoke with two Indonesian professionals—29-year-old Alice and 27-year-old Jim—on the grounds of the church they attended. They explained that the particular church they had joined held special Indonesian services on Sundays which were conducted by an Indonesian pastor and that they also attended a bible studies group which catered exclusively to Indonesians. These services and group meetings moreover were held in Bahasa Indonesia, the national language spoken throughout the Indonesia archipelago. For members of this Indonesian Christian community, church thus served to provide reminders of home in addition to helping them cope with the negativities associated with transience such as loneliness, which as mentioned earlier was a common theme among respondents. As Jim explained:

Because my parents are away, not in Singapore, so I need a social support—my friends and I don't want to be—probably a sense of belonging, like you know I come from this church and that is my identity, because to me it's pretty important to know who I am, where I'm from and things like that, so ... I would say yeah ... [this church gives me a foundation for my Indonesian identity] ... because it kind of reminds me of things back home, you do have—firstly because the service are in Indonesia, so it is similar to what I had back then and sometimes we do have food fair and things like that where we—there people sell Indonesian food, so that again is a ... reminder.

Jim thus revealed that Christianity was incredibly important to him on multiple levels. Besides reminding him of home, the practice of Christian worship and fellowship allowed him to feel a sense of belonging to a community while at the same time allowing him to express his Indonesian identity. This was due to his belief that activities undertaken with his church community in Singapore were a replication of those he conducted with his church community in Indonesia. Jim's response thus evokes a different complexion to the practice of Christianity for Indonesians living in transience in Singapore. Unlike Sally, the Indonesian Christian who earlier situated the practice of Christian worship and fellowship in Singapore as an element of freedom that differed from her experiences in Indonesia, for others like Jim the religious experience was translocal. Here we borrow Greiner and Sakdapolrak's definition of translocal as being a 'phenomena involving mobility, migration, circulation, and spatial interconnectedness not necessarily limited to national boundaries' (2013, p. 373). This translocal experience for Jim comprised the transposition of everyday life from Indonesia to Singapore through the practice of Christianity in terms of community activities. This translocal experience similarly took place for respondents from the Philippines.

All Filipino respondents stated that they were practising Catholics who attended Sunday masses and often weekday masses as well. Furthermore they stated that they met other Filipino friends at such masses, which were often conducted in Tagalog. Shirley, a 25-year-old Filipina working in Singapore, clarified:<sup>1</sup>

For me I go with my community of friends and get a bit and then we go to church with the priest there is Filipino and all the person there is also Filipino. My Auntie is invited me to Filipino meals with some outside parties maybe parties or then sometimes she invited me to go to the ... because all the Filipino have been played volleyball, basketball so yeah, then go to Filipino restaurant.

Like Jim, Shirley's translocal experience was not confined to Catholic-related activities such as worship and bible study but also applied to social activities popularly practised in the Philippines. The nationally based church community, in other words, provides nationality-based social networks while recreating certain practices from the home nation that are clearly important to transient migrants as ways of both connecting to the home nation and coping with the trauma of uprootedness.

My findings mirror similar trends among immigrant Asian Christian communities in the USA. For example, as far back as 1990 Won Moo Hurh and Kwang Chung Kim observed that ‘among the majority of Korean immigrants [to the United States], the religious need (meaning), the social need (community) and the psychological need (comfort) for attending Korean church are inseparable from each other’ (Hurh & Kim, 1990, p. 31). In a similar vein, Pyong Gap Min’s 2003 ethnographic study of Korean churches in New York City revealed the trend of many Korean immigrants joining Korean churches because of the important role that these churches play in promoting Korean culture and identity in the diaspora and fostering social networks among Korean Christian immigrants:

The major reason Korean immigrants prefer a Korean church is their need for a communal bond. Due to their uprooting experiences, all immigrants seek a communal bond by establishing ethnic organizations ... Because of their cultural homogeneity, Korean immigrants try to confine their social interactions largely to fellow Koreans, and stick to Korean language, customs, and values (Min, 2003, p. 131).

Borrowing an insight from Peggy Levitt, who originally made this observation in the context of recent Catholic immigrants to the USA, one could surmise that the close identification of culture, ethnicity, nation, identity and Christian faith among Asian transient migrants in Singapore emerges when these migrants assert their cultural, ethnic, transnational and religious identities simultaneously by their participation in religious and community activities in their immigrant Christian congregations. To paraphrase Levitt, these Asian transient migrants would be hard-pressed to distinguish what is ‘national’ or ‘ethnic’ about themselves from what is ‘religious’, and therefore, when they ‘act out these identities, either privately and informally or collectively and institutionally, they express important parts of who they are and pass these formulations along to their children’ (Levitt, 2005, p. 397).

### A CHRISTIAN PARALLEL SOCIETY

The previous chapter argued that transient migrants form parallel multicultural societies made up of other transient migrants from their respective circumstances (e.g. international students with other international students) who primarily came from the home nation in the first instance,

followed by the current region and then elsewhere. Such respondents created dynamic communities of support made up of other international students whose social networks themselves consisted almost exclusively of fellow international students, skilled workers and working holiday workers respectively. As also noted earlier, members of these parallel multicultural transient migrant societies seldom mixed with locals. Asian respondents, for instance, did not generally mix with Asian Australians or with Singaporeans even though approximately 12 per cent (Colebatch, 2012) of Australians claim Asian ancestry and Singapore itself is an Asian country. Therefore, even though respondents in Australia and Singapore had common ethnic and cultural connections with Asian Australians and Singaporeans, they were not part of the transient migrants' social networks. This is mainly because respondents felt that Asian Australians were more Australian than Asian and hence different from them and that Singaporeans were also 'different' even though many of the respondents in Singapore shared similar ethnic and cultural heritages with locals.

In Australia, respondents who self-identified as Christian likewise created their own societies within the parallel transient migrant societies they were already members of. They accomplished this through fellowship groups, the Christian churches they were affiliated with and the institutions in which they studied. All international students involved in this project, whether they took part in the face-to-face interviews in Melbourne or the nationally released online survey, stated that their friends were almost exclusively international students. Moreover, international student Christians may experience difficulty forming connections with Australians through Christianity because of the lack of actively practising Christians in the country, as we explain. Additionally, as Essie admitted earlier, while she made friends with Australians in the church she joined when she first came as an English-language student, these friends were fast replaced by other international students she met in her English-language course and from her university course thereafter. For her, the familiarity of nationality, ethnicity and language together with the cultural similarity of other Asian international students—she stated that besides Koreans, her other friends were Chinese international students—created stronger friendship bonds. Perhaps if the friends she initially made in the church were other international students, she might have had stronger interpersonal relationships with them, as was reported by respondents from Singapore.

It is clear that Christian respondents turned to religion in order to help them cope with their transient life in Australia and Singapore, even though some only converted in the host nation. For respondents in Australia—a country whose national identity and dominant culture are arguably based on Christian Anglo-Celtic traditions—adopting Christianity might well be a strategy that international students (and other transient migrants) use to adapt to Australian culture without being part of that culture. It is through Christianity, in other words, that they find a connection to Australia. In Singapore, while respondents generally mixed with Christian friends from the home nation, embracing Christianity allowed transient migrants to blend in with the cultural practices of an increasing number of Singaporeans. While some transient migrants may not have had large circles of Singaporean friends, practising Christianity, especially in terms of community activities such as attending church and associated meetings (e.g. bible studies), allowed them to replicate one aspect of everyday Singaporean culture. This is because Christianity is a significant religion in Singapore and, as Vietnamese international student Anh earlier observed, is openly and routinely discussed: ‘[In] Singapore people talk about religion openly’.

## CHRISTIANITY IN HOST NATIONS

### *Australia*

Christianity traces its origins in Australia to the arrival of Anglican colonial missionaries, beginning with Richard Johnston (1753–1827), the chaplain on board the First Fleet who celebrated the first Christian service in Australia on 3 February 1788. Early Anglican missionaries under the aegis of the Church Missionary Society, for example Samuel Marsden (1764–1838), transplanted an evangelical form of Anglicanism to early-nineteenth-century Australia with financial support from colonial authorities and mission societies (Jupp, 2009). The arrival of large number of Irish convicts from 1791 onwards challenged this early Anglican hegemony. For a time, the colonial administration forbade the entry of Catholic chaplains out of fear of instigating rebellion. With the relaxation of the prohibition on Catholic clergy after 1820, Catholic priests were allowed in to minister to the growing number of Irish Catholics (O’Farrell, 1987). The arrival of the first Methodist clergy in Sydney in 1815, a Scottish Presbyterian minister in 1824 and a Baptist missionary in 1834 added to the incipient

but growing diversity of Christian churches in Australia beyond colonial Anglicanism (Jupp, 2009). They were followed by Congregationalists from the British Isles, Lutherans from Germany and Scandinavia and Orthodox Greeks and Russians. The dissolution of the White Australia Policy in the post–World War II period paved the way for further diversity of Christianity with the arrival of African and Asiatic Christians.

Notwithstanding the increased arrival of migrants professing the Christian faith, Christianity in Australia has undergone a slow but steady decline in post–World War II Australia, a trend that has affected different denominations to varying degrees. The increasing separation of religion on the one hand, and politics and statecraft on the other, followed by the rise of secularisation that accompanied upward socioeconomic mobility slowly transformed the Australian social landscape in the decades after World War II, resulting in the slow erosion of Christianity’s influence and impact on the Australian populace at large (Thompson, 2002, pp. 137–138). Moreover, the increased arrival of transnational migrants following the abandonment of the White Australia Policy and growing globalisation brought about the growth of other religious communities led to an increasingly multifaith Australia (Bouma, 1997, 2002, 2003). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the 2011 Australian Census revealed that Christianity suffered a decline from 63.9 per cent of the Australian population in 2006 to 61.1 per cent in 2011 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012a). This decline affected Australian Christianity across the board, with Catholics looking at a 0.7 per cent decline in real terms, Eastern Orthodox experiencing a decline of 9.1 per cent, Anglicans dropping 19 per cent, Presbyterian looking at a decline of 19.6 per cent and the Uniting Church a jaw-dropping 27 per cent (Australian Census Statistics, 2012). Correspondingly, the category of ‘no religion’ rose from 18.7 per cent of the population in 2006 to 22.3 per cent in 2011. The Australian Bureau of Statistics further noted:

The most common non-Christian religions in 2011 were Buddhism (accounting for 2.5 per cent of the population), Islam (2.2 per cent) and Hinduism (1.3 per cent). Hinduism had experienced the fastest growth since 2006, increasing from 148,130 to 275,534, followed by Islam from 340,394 to 476,291 and Buddhism from 418,749 to 528,977 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012a)

More significantly, the 2011 Census data revealed that among the 25–34 age range, a group colloquially known as the ‘millennials’:

In the 25–34 range, Christianity performs even poorer than in broader ranges. An absolute reduction of 241,676 among this age range does not bode well for the future of the religion in Australia. In contrast, religions fuelled by immigration are showing significant increases, including Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam... Together with Christianity and other religions, this leaves a net absolute reduction among this age range of 84,811. It should be noted that this net reduction is despite the population increasing by 246,687 in the 25–34 age range. This pattern of absolute reduction of Christian following in Australia is a trend that cannot be sustained if the religion is to avoid a slow, lingering death. Contraction among this age range is outpacing natural population growth and the generational effect may accelerate contraction further in future, as older followers die off and young parents choose not to associate their children with their Christian religion (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012b).

It is not surprising that some of the respondents found community through Christian churches in Australia, for reasons previously discussed. Christian churches in Australia—other than those attended widely by international students or with international student ministries—are not typically well attended by Australians. By Australians, I refer to those who were born in Australia or who migrated to Australia decades previously. Catholic and Orthodox Churches in Australia, for instance, tend to be dominated by long-term migrants from countries such as Italy and Greece respectively, since these were the faiths they brought with them when they migrated. The data from the 2011 Census appears to confirm that the increase of international students participating in church activities is overwhelmed by massive decline in Australian participation.

### *Singapore*

In Singapore, meanwhile, Christianity constitutes the most rapidly growing religious ideology. According to the 2000 Singapore population census Christianity was the fastest-growing religion, primarily due to increased conversions on the part of ethnic Chinese (Department of Statistics, Singapore, 2001, 33–40). Catholicism accounts for one-third of all Christians in Singapore, with the rest belonging to other denominations such as Presbyterianism (Department of Statistics, Singapore, 2001, 33–34). Moreover, Christianity in Singapore is also exclusively connected with the Eurasian ethnic group, with most Eurasians identifying themselves as Catholic.<sup>3</sup>

While Islam, Buddhism/Taoism and Hinduism are Asian-centric religions that are well rooted in Asia and have successfully circulated throughout Southeast Asia for centuries, Christianity is a relatively new faith to be making a profound impact on the Asian region as a whole. The first waves of Christianity marked the arrival of European and American colonial powers in Asia as far back as the fifteenth century. Catholicism, for example, was spread by Spanish and Portuguese colonists in Southeast Asia, particularly the Philippines and Malacca. Other incarnations of Christianity such as Methodism and Protestantism found their way to the colonies, mainly through European conquerors in different parts of Southeast Asia. Comprising a transnational (and transitional) place of trade, the British crown colony of Singapore became a valuable location for proselytising by Christian missionaries, who set up churches for the newly baptised and educational institutions known as ‘mission schools’ for orphaned or abandoned children. Today such mission schools have become somewhat exclusive and often cater to the English-educated and middle class rather than the indigent and orphaned as in times past.

Christianity is, as mentioned, a growing religion in Singapore, with not only new converts but also expanding denominations taking root in the nation-state. Some very well-known and popular churches are home-grown, and their expanding overseas ministries have given rise to the term ‘megachurches’. Two such examples are the New Creation Church (founded 1984) and City Harvest Church (founded 1989), both of which boast five-figure membership numbers. Often offshoots of the Baptist, Evangelical and Charismatic branches of Christianity, these new Christian megachurches minister to huge congregations, have very healthy finances and frequently number well-known Singaporeans among their adherents. City Harvest Church, for example, counts Mandarin pop singer Sun Ho (Ho Yeow Sun) as one of its followers. Sun, incidentally, is also one of the co-founders of the church and the wife of its principal founder, Pastor Kong Hee. At the time of writing, City Harvest Church and its executive which includes Pastor Kong were embroiled in financial scandal concerning the fraudulent use of church funds amounting to SGD\$50 million to support Sun’s musical career in the US. While attendance at the church has declined particularly after the Singapore courts convicted the church leaders of misusing church funds, the faithful still worship in City Harvest by the thousands (Cheong, 2016).

It is thus far from an exaggeration to say that Christianity is openly practised and performed in Singapore. When I worked for the government

service, a number of my colleagues were practising Christians who brought their religion into the workplace. One small unit in the government department I worked in, for example, made Christianity part of their daily discourse by peppering their conversations with biblical references, playing Christian music on the radio at all times and displaying posters in the room dedicated to Jesus Christ and passages from the bible. Today, such displays of Christianity have reached new heights of performativity with the advent of social networking sites. Besides allowing users to display their allegiance to their faith through status updates, Facebook, for example, has numerous groups with healthy memberships dedicated to different facets, issues and denominations of Christianity in Singapore. A Facebook search for the words 'Singapore' and 'Catholics' revealed the existence of 21 groups, while 'Singapore' and 'Christians' displayed no less than 86 groups. Meanwhile, a Google search of the terms 'Singapore' and 'Catholics' yielded no less than 907,000 hits, while 'Singapore' and 'Christians' displayed over 68 million. For Christian respondents, practising their faith by actively becoming part of Christian communities, even though their specific congregations may not have included significant numbers of Singaporeans, was still an effective method of reproducing Singaporean culture. The process of constructing a sense of community in transience thus incorporated creating a way of life that paralleled the society of the host nation.

Part of the reason why Christianity is growing in importance among Singaporeans is due to its strong links with family and nation. Christianity generally stresses the importance of family, filial piety and obedience within an ordered hierarchical framework—values familiar to the ethnic Singaporean Chinese majority. In Singapore, the family is a basic tenet of the society's nationalist culture and agenda while serving effectively as microcosm for the nation. Moreover, the Singapore government has successfully managed to infuse the Chinese Confucian value of filial piety into the culture of Singapore through the 'Asian Values' label. Asian Values was a political ideology first introduced in the 1990s in Southeast Asia and East to differentiate Asian cultural and societal values from that of the West. It was a term often used by Lee Kuan Yew (Prime Minister of Singapore, 1959–1990) and Mahathir bin Mohammad (Prime Minister of Malaysia, 1981–2003) to promote a pan-Asian identity which emphasised community and hierarchy over the individual. Hence loyalty to family in terms of structure and hierarchy becomes anecdotally interpreted as allegiance to the government and state and vice versa.

Beyond the social, cultural and political reasons for Christianity's growth and popularity, one must not forget that Christianity's ability to act as a bridge or commonality between diverse communities is also inherent in the universalism that is present at the birth of the Christian movement at an event known as Pentecost. Specifically, the Acts of the Apostles (2:9–11) presents a grand vision of the Christian movement embracing all cultures, ethnicities and languages of the world in a universal community without any requirement that these be abandoned for a singular normative culture or identity. This vision of the in-gathering of new believers took place at Pentecost, where those present in Jerusalem heard the gospel proclaimed to them in their own languages. This suggests that cultural, ethnic, national and linguistic particularities need not be abandoned when one embraces the Christian faith, as borne out by the fact that those present were not asked to give up their particular ethnicity, culture, national identity or language to hear the Gospel in Hebrew or Aramaic, the languages of the early Christian Movement.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Churches and Christian groups create spaces for intercultural competency to take place. While churches may conduct masses and services separate to those attended by local parishioners, they are in an ideal position to educate transient migrants and locals about each other. This would be in keeping with Christianity's goal of creating a single (global) community with the common purpose of worship and, in the case of Singapore, perhaps reduce the speculative fear many Singaporeans have towards transient migrants.

While this chapter looked specifically at Christianity, it also highlights the significance of religion in the lives of Asian transient migrants. Institutions in Australia, for instance, need to acknowledge and use this to help both international students and local students of similar faiths meet and support each other. Multifaith chaplaincies in institutions could foster programs for international students to facilitate social contact with each other and with local students of similar faiths. The best times for such programs to take place would be during orientation and in the first year of study at the institution, since these are the times students need the most amount of support as they grapple with both a new environment and a new phase in their lives. These programs should not proselytise but rather aim to tap into existing avenues of similarities which may provide bridges for international and local students alike.

The findings in this chapter also reveal that government, media and public discussions on transient migration—and perhaps on migration in general—overemphasise Islam while simultaneously omitting the burgeoning presence of Christianity. Could an awareness of Christianity as a formidable presence among transient migrants allay the real or imagined fears governments and citizenries have of Islam? Will acknowledgement of religious diversity result in more balanced and informed discussions in public and private spaces, thereby creating less dissonance and fearmongering? Could we be seeing a resurgence or reinterpretation of Christianity through the practices and activities of transient migrants and what impact do they have on religiosity as practised in the countries they pass through or eventually settle?

## CONCLUSION

Transient migration for work or study is part of everyday life, yet in spite of its voluntary nature it still constitutes a form of uprootedness. In order to cope with the traumas associated with transience such as loneliness and homesickness, transient migrants employ creative methods in order to create a sense of community while overseas. As a universal religion that spread throughout the world in large measure because of transnational migration of peoples, Christianity has historically played an important role in helping migrants make sense of themselves and their lived diasporic experiences in strange and unfamiliar settings. At the same time, one could argue that just because transient migrants in Australia and Singapore embrace Christianity and make Christianity a part of their identity in both these nations, it does not necessarily signal their assimilation into broader Australian and Singaporean society or acceptance by their fellow Australian or Singaporean Christians. In Australia the issue is compounded by the dwindling number of practising Australian Christians, while respondents in both countries were largely unable to identify with, much less integrate with, Asian Australians and Singaporeans in general.

Moreover, for many if not the majority of these transient migrants who embrace their Christian faith and make it a part of their diasporic identity in Australia and Singapore, their Christian identity becomes an important and defining aspect of who they are, enabling them to communicate with Australian and Singaporean Christians while affording them the opportunity to carve out a niche where they can define their own identity apart from their fellow Australian and Singaporean Christians. This has profound implications for these Asian transient migrants, leading to heterogenised,

hybridised and conflicting constructions of faith-based identities that simultaneously connect yet distance them from other Australian and Singaporean Christians. It is important to further note that when Asian transient migrants embrace a Christian faith identity, often more fervently than they would in their homelands, this goes beyond mere nostalgic longing for home to encompass new opportunities for them to shape their own transnational, hybridised and often contested multiplicity of identities in Australia and Singapore. In Singapore, as this book has alluded to, transient migrants are at best tolerated or at worst vilified by locals, who express varying degrees of xenophobia against them.

In other words, Christianity affords a symbolic framework for Asian transient migrants to construct their diasporic social-cultural identity in Singapore. In turn, Asian transient migrants' embracing of Christianity also adds to the increasing pluralism in Australian and Singaporean Christianity beyond a normative expression to diversity and pluralism. In the longer term, such diversity and pluralism within Christianity in Singapore in particular also serves to challenge Singaporean Christians on the extent to which they are willing and able to transcend their xenophobic prejudices and welcome these Asian transient migrants as fellow Christians. The following chapter examines another culture of transnational mobility, which takes the form of aspirations for further transnational mobility.

## NOTES

1. Since the 1990s, an increasing number of Catholic churches have at least one weekend mass in Tagalog to cater to the increasing Filipino community. While more and more Filipinos are working in Singapore in professional or white-collar positions, they are not the first such workers in the Republic: Singapore has seen large numbers of Filipinos workers arriving since the early 1980s, though almost all at the time were employed as foreign domestic workers.
2. Eurasians are the offspring of mixed-race unions between Europeans and Asians. Usually the Europeans were colonists such as the Southern Europeans (Portuguese and Spanish) and Anglo-Celtics and Anglo-Saxons (English, Germans and Dutch). The offspring of such unions became known as Eurasians and formed their own community with their own specific cultural identities. Within the Eurasian ethnic class structure, Eurasians who could trace their lineage to Anglo Europeans were considered on the upper levels of the class and ethnic hierarchy as they were fairer while Eurasians of Portuguese descent were on the other end of this spectrum

because of the colour of their skin. Often, Anglo Europeans were wealthier and educated while Portuguese Eurasians whose ancestry can be traced further back in Malayan colonial history are almost exclusively connected to fishing villages in Malacca. Whatever the lineage, Eurasian identity is firmly based on race and religion. While Eurasians adopted the various Christian religions of the European colonists, it is Catholicism that has become culturally synonymous with Eurasian identity, in particular among those descended from Southern Europeans.

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# The Globetrotting Migrant: Aspirations for Transnational Mobility

In April 2015 the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's investigative journalism and current affairs program *Four Corners* aired an episode about international education in Australia, in which international students were portrayed as using their education as a pathway to gain permanent residency in Australia. The ensuing comments on the *Four Corners* Facebook page reiterated the belief of (Australian) viewers that the primary goal of international students is permanent residence.<sup>1</sup> To some extent, the perception of international students as intentional permanent residents has been supported by research and scholarship. In 2010, for instance, a J. Walter Thompson (JWT) Education survey of 1600 international students in Australia revealed that over one-fifth (22 per cent) intended to eventually apply for permanent residency (Harrison, 2010). More recently, Shanthi Robertson (2013) argued that international students are not merely in Australia to study but rather to invest their time and energy in securing permanent residence. This trend exists in spite of a widely publicised government crackdown on 'fly-by-night' institutions who in the mid-to-late 2000s preyed upon international students with fraudulent promises of permanent residency upon graduation (Lane, 2014) and the ensuing tightening of migration laws concerning international student permanent migration and subsequent restrictions on international student visa applications (Trounson, 2010).

Meanwhile in Singapore over one quarter (1.63 million) of its current population of 5.54 million are temporary migrants who work, study and

live in the island-state. In addition, over 13 per cent (0.53 million) of its total permanent resident population of 3.9 million people were not born in Singapore but rather became holders of permanent residence (Channel News Asia, 2016). This is in part due to the comparative ease with which white-collar skilled temporary migrant workers could convert their status to that of permanent migrants, particularly prior to the 2011 Singapore General Elections.<sup>2</sup> Despite considerable anti-new-migrant sentiments in Singapore which have taken the form of xenophobic online commentary (Gomes, 2014) and the formation of anti-migration groups (e.g. [Transitioning.org](http://Transitioning.org), whose ethos is anti-immigration and which supports Singaporeans who are perceived to have lost jobs to transient worker migrants), the Singapore government has although arguably and somewhat cautiously continued to push for an increase in the number of new migrants. In 2013 the government's Population White Paper revealed plans to increase permanent resident intake in order to raise the resident population to 6.9 million by 2030 as way of sustaining the country's economic growth. Research into recent migration in Singapore is still in its infancy, with work in the area rightly concerned with integration and its related policies (e.g. Liu, 2014; Low, 2002; Rahman & Kiong, 2013; Yang, 2016).

While I do not dispute the validity of research in the area of migration in terms of permanent residence and the subsequent exploration of government policies on integration, I question whether permanent residency is the sole goal of the middle-class temporary migrant and if settling permanently in the host nation is the intention. There are several studies which point out that while middle-class transient migrants such as international students may have the intention of migrating to the host nation prior to their arrival, this is not always the case once they commence their courses. Here, studies have shown that while students have the intention of staying in the host nation for economic and professional reasons, they are conflicted due to personal and societal considerations which are 'push factors' for them to return to the home nation (e.g. Fong, 2011; Hazen & Alberts, 2006). A 2013 study by Yoonhee Kang on South Korean child migrants who were international students at high school level in Singapore showed that these children saw themselves as global subjects. Kang explained that '[t]he children's recognition of globalisation ... was always linked to their imagined future careers' (p. 333) which involved transnational mobility. In other words her teenage subjects saw themselves as globetrotters rather than limited to one particular place.

My research for this book revealed that 21 per cent of respondents in the face-to-face interviews and 75 per cent of online respondents desired permanent residence in Australia. Meanwhile in Singapore 55 per cent of respondents in the face-to-face interviews and 76 per cent of online respondents expressed a similar desire. Thus we can see that with the sole exception of respondents in the face-to-face interviews in Australia, significant numbers of transient migrants would like to eventually obtain permanent residence in their host nation.<sup>3</sup> While these numbers appear high, only half or less than half of the total respondents in the interviews and online surveys in both countries combined actually want to stay in the host nations: Table 3 below reveals that respondents would generally either like to either go back to their home nations (countries of birth and/or current citizenship) or go elsewhere in the long term.<sup>4</sup> In other words, while respondents may have expressed a desire for permanent residence this does not mean that they will stay in the host nations for the rest of their lives. Also worth highlighting is the fact that no less than 25 per cent of respondents stated they would like to live in countries other than their home and current host nations permanently in the future.

So while respondents generally stated the intention to return to the home nation at some stage, they are more likely to do so after they have either stayed longer in the host nations because of work and/or because they have gained permanent residence, or go elsewhere for work or study. Respondents, particularly those in Singapore, noted that they would most likely return to their home nation to retire, even though they may by then have gained permanent residence in the host nation. The home nation, in other words, looms heavily in respondents' conception of their future. While information on first-generation citizens and permanent residents leaving Singapore for their original homelands or elsewhere is not available, there is

**Table 3.** Country to permanently settle in eventually

	<i>% Australia face-to-face interviewees (100)</i>	<i>% Australia online survey (144)</i>	<i>% Singapore face-to-face interviewees (101)</i>	<i>% Singapore online survey (85)</i>
Stay in host nation	18	53	14	32
Return to home nation	21	29	41	42
Go elsewhere	32	17	25	26

data on permanent residents leaving Australia.<sup>5</sup> Data from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection in Australia reveals that half of all new permanent residents leave Australia within five years of receiving their permanent visa.<sup>6</sup> Often, those who leave state that they are returning to their home nations because they are lonely and miss their families.

While in the not-too-distant past transient migrants such as international students and skilled workers<sup>7</sup> often either went back to the home nation (Soon, 2012) or stayed indefinitely in the host country (Hazen & Alberts, 2006; Robertson, 2013), the respondents who took part in the research for this book frequently revealed they had other plans.<sup>8</sup> While a large number of respondents were from Asian countries, they were not really interested in returning directly home. This trend was interesting in light of the fact that family is such an important part of Asian cultures and that in ethnic Chinese societies around the world Confucian values such as filial piety feature prominently, frequently with the expectation of children taking care of their parents in old age or infirmity (Butcher, 2003).

Instead respondents—particularly the international students and non-working holiday maker workers—revealed that they had aspirations for transnational mobility with ambitions to live and work in the big cities of Europe, North America and Asia—places which many had never been to—with the possibility of returning to the home nation in the future.<sup>9</sup> In other words they see themselves as transnationally mobile subjects with strong aspirations for future global mobility. Besides improvements in communication technology, in particular social media, such mobility is encouraged and informed by their experiences in the host nation, their self-perceived identity as ‘global citizens’ and their ability to adapt to life in transience.

### ASPIRING FOR TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY

Conventional understandings of migration often view the phenomenon as a permanent one-way journey between home country and adopted nation. Earlier works, such as historian Oscar Handlin’s study of the challenges faced by the American migrant in the 1800s and 1900s *The Uprooted* (1951) provided, on the one hand, an image of migrants as pioneering individuals who left their ancestral homes to create new and better lives for themselves and their families. Yet on the other hand works such as this also presented an honest picture of people who felt culturally and socially isolated as they navigated unfamiliar physical environments (e.g. from the

village to the city). In the time following the publication of Handling's tome, government, public and media actions and interpretations of migration have been brushed with political, humanitarian, racial, economic and nationalist hues as migrants became diverse actors in the global circulation of people. Academia, in the meantime, has responded to the growing need to document, map, analyse and theorise the migrant experience. Such work is not only digested by the scholarly community but also serves to arguably affect governance and public opinion, as in the cases of border control and multiculturalism.

Current theoretical understandings of migration use a transnational framework whereby migrants are interpreted as having multiple connections associated with the host and home countries. Research in this area has been inextricably and unsurprisingly linked with Migration and Diaspora Studies (e.g. Fox, 2005; Ong, 1999; Ong & Nonini, 1997) and increasingly with Cultural and Communication Studies (e.g. Appadurai, 1996; Sassen, 2001, 2007; Hall, 1992). Researchers have acknowledged that migrants—both permanent and temporary—while necessarily embedded in their adopted or host country, also have strong connections to the home nation. These connections are aided by communication technology (e.g. Hjorth & Arnold, 2012) and media consumption (e.g. Gomes & Alzougool, 2013; Abbas, 1997, pp. 16–62; Bordwell, 2000, pp. 1–17). Of late, a number of pioneering studies on the sociocultural experience have also emerged. Such studies, while mostly featuring international students (e.g. Fong, 2011; Gomes, Berry, Alzougool, & Chang, 2014; Kim, 2011; Martin & Rizvi, 2014) with a handful looking at white-collar professionals (Liu, 2014; Rahman & Kiong, 2013), are helpful in allowing us to understand how transient migrants create a sense of place in transience and the difficulties they experience due to cultural differences between themselves and locals in the host nation. Although the phenomenon of the budget traveller who works on a casual basis is growing, research on working holiday makers and backpackers is sporadic and often limited to tourism studies which highlight, for instance, their interactions or lack thereof with the places (but not the people) they visit (Enoch & Grossman, 2010; Huxley, 2004; Ong & du Cross, 2012; Wearing, Cynn, Ponting, & McDonald, 2002).

This host-home nexus, though, is becoming increasingly challenged by others who work in the areas of Tourism Studies, Cultural Geography and Mobilities Studies. Mobilities Studies pioneers such as John Urry and Mimi Sheller, the founders of a highly regarded journal called *Mobilities*,

have observed that flows in human movements are not static but always shifting and vibrant as they involve multiple journeys for economic (work) and lifestyle (family and leisure) reasons. Most importantly, migration within this context is not between home and adopted country nor is it permanent, with studies sometimes telling us that even upon return to the home nation, individuals thereafter plan for further transnational mobility in a new country (Ley & Kobayashi, 2005). Recent research on transient migrants such as international students also tells us that there is significant social capital in geographical mobility. In her study of Chinese female international students in Melbourne, Fran Martin (2014) pointed out that these students desire transnational mobility above all. Through in-depth interviews with 15 higher education students, Martin argued that transnational mobility allowed her respondents to shed the gendered tropes of their mother's generation. In other words, what we are seeing today is the changing face of young Chinese women who use mobility as way of reshaping traditional ideas of Chinese womanhood which once saw women primarily as wives and mothers. Transnational mobility is thus not only a statement of empowerment but an opportunity for (middle-class) individuals to feel as if they are creating cultural shifts in their home countries.

### UNLIMITED TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY

Respondents certainly saw mobility as part of their future. During the face-to-face interviews the working holiday makers in Australia, for instance, unanimously expressed a desire to travel within Australia and overseas. This is not surprising due to the nature of their current circumstance as budget travellers. For them, prolonging their transient mobility in the short term was their immediate goal while for most of them their future beyond travel was not something they had much contemplated. For the most part working holiday maker respondents intended to return home, with many stating that they would like to either complete or undertake further tertiary education. Of the 18 working holiday makers I spoke to, only two stated the intention to stay on in Australia as permanent residents. Meanwhile, exchange students would all return to the countries where they were completing their degrees in the short term since this was a condition of their visa. Their long-term destinations were varied, with an equal number of those I spoke to stating that they would either return to the home nation or live elsewhere.

In contrast to the working holiday makers and exchange students, the respondents who *had* contemplated their long-term futures tended to be the international students and the non-backpacker workers. While the working holiday makers, the international and exchange students and the working professionals were not too far apart from each other in terms of age (since most respondents were under the age of 30 at the time I conducted my research in 2013 and 2014) there were several factors which differentiated the international students and professional workers from the exchange students and working holiday makers. These had to do with the length of time spent in transience in a single place and the purpose of such transience. International students and working professionals typically stayed no less than six months to a few years in the same city in order to complete their course of study and work contract respectively. In addition, their reasons for being in transience were directly associated with their future: international students were working towards attaining qualifications for future employment, while working professionals were working overseas in order to further their career prospects. Additionally, those in Australia on bridging visas were awaiting the outcome of their permanent residency applications. These respondents were previously studying or working in Australia either as professionals or as working holiday makers.

While the majority of respondents stated that they identified with their country of origin or citizenship, only a small number of respondents in both the interviews and online surveys stated they would like to go back to the home country upon completion of their studies or employment contrast. The rest of the respondents provided a series of responses that revealed their sense of unlimited global mobility. They expressed their desire to go to any part of the world and in any series of combinations, for example, stay in Australia/Singapore for a period of time before going overseas or returning to the home country.

Respondents' answers thus were not specific or patterned (e.g. 'I will return to my home country' or 'I want to stay in Australia/Singapore') but instead open and full of unending opportunity for transnational mobility and transient economic migration. An example of this can be seen in the following response from 20-year-old Singaporean undergraduate Sulin, who was interviewed in Australia:

I want to go back to Singapore and work, but it's mostly just experience, because I want to do my MBA in UK ... And then maybe, I had big notions of working in Germany or Korea ... I think in the end [I want to settle

in] the long run at Singapore. Because I want my kids to experience the Singapore education. But like, before that—before I have kids and stuff, I think I want to live, in either Germany or Korea ... If I did get permanent residence [in these countries], it will just be because, it will make the paperwork and stuff easier. It wouldn't be because of any long-term plans and stuff.

Meanwhile ethnic Indian, Indonesian-born but Malaysian citizen Kala, who was in her 20s, told me that she disliked being back in Malaysia. This could be because Kala, who was an international student, had been living and studying in a range of countries prior to Singapore and thus felt there was little connecting her to Malaysia. When I asked her where she envisaged herself after finishing her studies in Singapore, she expressed a desire to go to the UK—a place which she has never been but thinks very well of. So rather than go back to the familiar, whether it be Malaysia, Singapore or any of the other places she had lived in, she preferred to go elsewhere. Going to Europe or America though was something which respondents saw as their future regardless of where they were originally from. Kala explained further:

But my dream place to settle would [be] the UK for some reason. I think it's because I like the ... the history and architecture of that place, yeah so therefore I think that's the perfect place.

While migration is 'a young person's game' (Wilkerson, 2014) and public perceptions of transient migrants in Australia and Singapore (Gomes, 2014, 2015a, 2015d) often see them as wanting to gain permanent residence as the purposeful effect of their sojourn, from the above response we can read Kala's interpretation of migrant mobility as something quite different. Even though she would like permanent residence somewhere, she interpreted migrant mobility as temporary or transient. She also felt that migrant mobility was relatively easy to achieve while at the same time expressing a strong desire to eventually return home. A number of respondents expressed their wish to work overseas before returning to the homeland, while others highlighted a preference to work in Australia and Singapore before returning home. 'Home', as I have mentioned elsewhere in this book, was understood by respondents in this context as their place of birth and/or citizenship and became the default place of eventual residence for many of the respondents who were part of this research project.

Regardless of length of stay, most respondents in Australia explained that their host country was not really home to them for a variety of reasons, which included being in an unfamiliar country without their family and friends, having no permanent work and the lack of a permanent residence. Such reasons uphold recent work on the challenges transient migrants face in their everyday host nation experience that go beyond their study and work capabilities (e.g. Kashima & Loh, 2006; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008; Gomes et al., 2014; Yang, 2016; Hong, 2014; Robertson, 2014; Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014).

The situation in Singapore was slightly different, with a greater number of respondents expressing the feeling that their host nation was home to them. A few even went so far as to state that they considered themselves ‘Singaporean’. The reason for this variation could well be related to length of stay: for many respondents in Singapore the average time spent in transience was around seven years. In addition, many such respondents spent their formative years in Singapore since the island-state is host to international students at primary, secondary, junior college and tertiary levels of education. Additionally, many of the working professionals who responded to this study were themselves once students in the Singaporean education system who found jobs after graduation. Unlike respondents in Australia, future employability was not a pressing issue for respondents in Singapore. As mentioned in the introduction of this book, Singapore has a scheme whereby international students on government scholarships to public universities must serve out a three-year bond by working for a Singapore-based company. The purpose of this bond is to help address labour shortfalls. In comparison to respondents in Australia, those in Singapore generally felt more positive about their chances of future employability in the host nation.

The transient migrants I spoke to for this study admitted that when they thought of home their minds were on their family, whom they were in regular communication with through phone, Skype and email, as well as social networking and social media sites. To most of the respondents, family, more so than friends, was a signifier of what they considered to be ‘home’—an issue also explored in detail in earlier chapters. While most respondents who took part in this study were from Asia, they said they did not feel confined by the cultural constraints of practising filial duties in their home countries (e.g. looking after parents or getting involved in the family business) even though this prospect was ever-present in their minds.

Despite their strong feelings about home (and host) nations, for the most part, respondents preferred one of three options: staying in the host nation, going elsewhere or a combination of both. They conceded that what determined their decision of place included finding paid work, doing further study, romantic relationships, travel or combinations thereof. Interestingly, more respondents in Singapore than in Australia indicated they wanted to gain permanent residence. Respondents in Australia remained somewhat impassive about their chances of gaining permanent residence, as they revealed that they knew how difficult this was. In comparison, gaining permanent residence in Singapore was much easier, despite the government announcing a tightening of permanent resident intake in 2014 (Tan, 2015).

Gaining permanent residence for both the residents in Australia and in Singapore was not necessarily equated with a desire for staying in these countries for the rest of their lives. Instead, respondents generally noted that despite successfully gaining permanent residence, they saw themselves working and living elsewhere other than the host or even home nation. While many stated that they might eventually go back to their home nations to retire, they saw themselves as transnationally mobile subjects with continuing aspirations for global mobility. For instance, there were respondents in both Australia and Singapore who revealed that the basis of their intention to gain permanent residence and thereafter citizenship in Australia was in order to travel and work overseas. In other words, they wanted to use Australia and Singapore respectively as springboards for going elsewhere. They felt that the Australian and Singaporean passports offered them the best potential means for transnational mobility since these documents would allow them better international access than their current passports: both nations' passports, in fact, have been listed within the top ten in the world for travel accessibility such as visa exemption (McLaughlin, 2015). Generally respondents in both countries pointed out how flexible their options were and that going home directly after their studies or work was not a preference for them.

While they had strong connections to their homeland, international student and non-working holiday maker respondents saw their future in transnational mobility and having the freedom and opportunity to travel and work wherever they chose. The destinations they aspired to reach were almost overwhelmingly the financial hubs of Europe, North America and Asia. They wanted to be transient rather than rooted for as long as possible. This longing to extend their transience through aspirational transnational mobility was perhaps an indicator that respondents in this

research saw themselves as future economic-lifestyle migrants who want to work and travel in countries other their own, and for many of them this included Australia. Interestingly, the respondents whom I spoke to did not mention political, ethnic, racial, religious, cultural, class or gender issues as determining their aspirations for transnational mobility. What are the possible reasons respondents had for extending their transience through their aspirations for transnational mobility?

### REASONS FOR EXTENDING TRANSIENCE THROUGH ASPIRATIONS FOR TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY

In his essay entitled ‘What is Cosmopolitanism’, Jeffrey Waldron (2000) suggested that an individual does not need to live overseas in order to be cosmopolitan. Instead, he argued that cosmopolitanism comes to individuals because of globalisation, which results in a transnational movement of goods, people, money and ideas circulating into and around nations. The respondents whom I spoke to and surveyed considered living overseas a precondition for being upwardly mobile. In other words, being transient made them feel like they are superior to both locals and people from the home nation. In his work on Chinese students in Singapore, meanwhile, Peidong Yang (2016) clearly states that the Chinese regard living, studying and eventually working overseas as desirable, hence Chinese parents are willing and even eager to send their early teenaged children to Singapore to study. Moreover, Yang states that while the Chinese see the USA as the eventual and desired destination for themselves and their children, cosmopolitan cities such as Singapore provide them with the opportunity to achieving their dream, if not of America, then of living overseas. The Chinese dream, he insinuates, is living outside China.

Living and eventually migrating overseas from Asia to the USA is, of course, not limited to the Chinese. The Filipino dream, like the dream of the Chinese and other nationalities from the global south, for instance, is to migrate to the USA (Jeffrey, 2012). Migration to the USA started after the Americans acquired the Philippines as a result of the Spanish-American War in 1898. Today, Filipinos are the fourth largest migrant group in the USA behind Mexico, China and India (McNamara & Batalova, 2015) with most new migrants being professional workers such as nurses. A 2005 Filipino film called *La Visa Loca*, about a taxi driver with dreams of migrating to the USA for a better life, for instance, captured the Filipino desire for the American Green Card (Asis, 2006). Meanwhile a somewhat tongue-in-cheek comment in a magazine for Filipinos living in New York

regarding Kabang, an injured dog from the Philippines who, through crowd-funding, went to California for treatment in 2012, revealed the longing Filipinos have for the American lifestyle:

Kabang seemingly has beaten many Filipinos in their dream of having a White Christmas [in America] (Espiritu, 2012).

While the USA is the dream destination, Filipinos are open to migration elsewhere such as the Middle East, Asia, Europe, Africa and Oceania, with one in five Filipino adults expressing a desire for migration. Sometimes Filipinos start off their migration journey as transient migrants working in various industries such as domestic service and healthcare (e.g. as nurses and radiographers) in these regions. The theme of transnational mobility, whether long-term, short-term, permanent or temporary is dominant in the aspirations of respondents. As Skrbiš, Woodward and Bean (2013) so succinctly put it:

Mobility is the stuff that dreams are made of. The word mobility evokes powerful images that downplay the value of stationary life and spatially bounded routines while simultaneously providing a promise of a different life—life dissociated from the insularity of the local and parochial. For young, middle-class people in developed countries, mobility is a given not a privilege.

In their study of over 7000 Queensland students who were 13 to 14 years of age, Skrbiš et al. found that these young people saw (transnational) mobility as an essential part of fulfilling their self-perceived cosmopolitan and globalised identities. While Skrbiš and his colleagues were not wrong in their assessment of the middle class and its desire for transnational or global mobility, I would however extend such aspirations beyond developed nations. While participants in Skrbiš et al.'s project saw transnational mobility as a means of fulfilling their globalised and cosmopolitan (future) identities, respondents in my project felt that they already possessed such identities, explaining that because they were already living, working and studying overseas they were, as they put it, 'global citizens'.

Next I take the opportunity to explore the different ways in which respondents saw themselves as global citizens. Respondents considered themselves not only well-travelled in the sense of having lived in different places but also in their media consumption as well as the make-up of their social networks.

## SELF-PERCEIVED IDENTITY AS GLOBAL CITIZEN

In his discussion about identity, Manuel Castells wrote in 1997 that more people identify with a particular locality and territory than as ‘citizens of the world’ or global citizens (p. xxiii). He further explained that identity connected to place ‘is a fundamental anchor of belonging that is not even lost in the rapid process of generalized urbanisation we are now experiencing’ and that ‘the village is not left behind; it is transported with its communal ties’ (xxiii). While I do not dispute that place-based identities such as nationality are significant, particularly with transient migrants, I question if this notion of place-based identity applies equally in the case of transnationally mobile subjects.

As I mentioned in previous chapters, respondents explained that being transient allowed them to appreciate their own country more while at the same time providing them with a lens that allowed them to view their home nation from a different perspective. While they appreciated their home nations, they envisioned their futures as involving living and working elsewhere. They saw themselves as aspirational transnational mobile subjects and showed a desire to live and work in the big cities of Europe, America and Asia or in their chosen host nations. Living and working overseas in cities and countries considered progressive, modern and/or cosmopolitan was, in their eyes, a means of establishing self-perceived social capital. In her work on international student mobility in higher education institutions in the UK, Suzanne Beech (2015) argued that mobility among young people has become normalised. In other words young people see overseas travel, in this case for the purpose of study, as expected, since many of their peers are doing likewise and there is an expectation that they will at some stage become international students themselves. Respondents regarded themselves as transnational cosmopolitans, describing themselves as ‘global citizens’ and ‘internationals’ while others took pride simply in living, studying and working overseas. Mohan, a 25-year-old Indian national studying in Singapore, elaborated upon this self-perception as a global citizen:

So I like to view myself as a globalized [person] ... Yes. Global identity. I go places, I take something from them, and also I share my things with them.

Respondents explained that they considered themselves ‘global’ or global citizens because they were transient, which they considered a positive

experience and one they continued to strive for. Kala, the undergraduate in Singapore whom I referred to earlier in this chapter, considered herself a global citizen and did not identify with any single country. She is ethnic Indian who was born in Indonesia but grew up in Malaysia:

I am Indian but I've lived in several different countries over my life so I don't exactly identify myself as one particular—from one particular country, yeah if I had to tell when I first came here I used to tell people I was from Indonesia rather than I'm Indian or I'm from Malaysia instead, even though I was born in a different country. So in that sense I feel like every country I've been to I belong there equally, yeah there's no particular more or less in terms of where I belong

Mohan and Kala equated transience with global citizenship primarily because they were living in a foreign country. As mentioned in preceding chapters, there were respondents who had previous long-term transient experience prior to their current work and/or study in Australia and Singapore, and this was often due to family and work commitments. As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, more respondents in Singapore than in Australia had extensive transient transnational experience. This could be due to more respondents in Singapore being full-time skilled workers with previous overseas working and educational experience. Sarah, who worked in Singapore, said she takes her 'global citizenship seriously' primarily because she has lived in transience for a good part of her life. Thirty-five-year-old Sarah also explained that because she has had experience living in different countries, she was able to make comparisons between them:

Well, I have moved around all my life so it, I don't really have, feel that I have a home so I think that sometimes can be an advantage if you're working overseas ... Yeah, I do take global citizenship seriously. I think I like thinking of myself as an adaptable person so I like the challenges of working overseas ... So yeah, I like Singapore, I like learning about other cultures and yeah, that's important to me.

For Sarah, living in Singapore was relatively easy and she was able to adapt to life there primarily because it is a global city itself. It also features the additional appeal of linguistic familiarity, since English is one of the main languages spoken and is also the language of choice for education and government. In addition, more than a quarter of Singapore's current resident population is made up of transient migrants who occupy different levels

of the workforce. Sarah also described herself as adaptable. Adaptability is a point I highlighted in the chapter ‘Transient Migrants: A Profile of Transnational Adaptability’, noting that respondents were highly adaptable actors in transience. Those who were frequently transient and had prior experience living, working and/or studying overseas adapted very quickly to new environments, as Sarah pointed out in relation to her own experience.

### GLOBAL ENGLISH-LANGUAGE MEDIA

The phrase ‘global citizen’ has almost always been synonymous with the term ‘cosmopolitan’ (Armstrong, 2011, p. 2). The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines ‘cosmopolitan’ as: ‘familiar with or representative of many different countries and cultures’ with a sub-sense of ‘having an exciting and glamorous character associated with travel and a mixture of cultures’ (322). Yet being ‘familiar with... many different countries and cultures’ goes beyond transnational mobility: respondents considered themselves cosmopolitan even with regards to their choices of entertainment and news sources. They watched programs and listened to music in their own languages, whether from their home nations or from other countries and cultures (e.g. ethnic Chinese respondents outside of China consuming music, films, television and Internet-productions from Taiwan and Hong Kong). This study instead revealed that respondents engaged more with English-language American productions than any other language medium. Moreover they preferred English-language productions made outside of their host nations, even though Australia and Singapore use English as the language of choice in government and education.<sup>10</sup> In Australia the only locally made television shows which respondents watched were reality franchises which reflected English-language (American) music such as *The Voice* (de Mol, 2012–present) and non-culturally specific but English-language cooking shows such as *Masterchef* (Roddam, 2009–present).

Generally respondents preferred listening to English-language music from the USA or the UK and watch television shows and films from the Hollywood entertainment industry.<sup>11</sup> They also preferred accessing online news programs that were American and UK dominated, particularly CNN and the BBC. While both networks are well-established and widely known popular news agencies, they are also generally accepted as international news specialists. Transient migrants knew CNN and the BBC from their home nations as international news specialists and would turn to them while in the host nations more so than the nationally based news sites

reflective of happenings in Australia and Singapore. While the commercial and government-funded news agencies in Australia (e.g. Channel 10 and Australian Broadcasting Corporation, respectively) and the government-funded entertainment and news conglomerate in Singapore (e.g. Mediacorp Channel 5) are understandably and necessarily parochial in their reporting, they do report on international news; nonetheless they were still not the news agencies of choice for respondents.<sup>12</sup>

Respondents, in other words, considered their global identity in terms of global media. Kala went on to explain that enjoying Hollywood and Bollywood entertainment was representative of her status as a global person, while 26-year-old Indonesian Arun, who was working in Singapore, saw himself as global in terms of the news websites he accessed. Meanwhile Deena, a postgraduate student from India studying in Melbourne, contemplatively considered the role played by (broadcast and social) media as part of global connectivity. They stated:

I love music, movies. When it comes to movies I mainly favour English and Indian movies rather than anything else, yeah when it comes to interests I guess it's something that most people—like most global people would do it's just the normal. (Kala)

I'll stick to like global websites, CNN and channel news Asia. They'll tell me stuff about Indonesia that the Indonesia media won't really say. (Arun)

We always say the world is like a global village I think media is playing a very integral part and making us very much connected. (Deena)

Theoretical work on globalisation (e.g. Appadurai, 1996; Giddens, 1991) acknowledges that the global circulation of people, cultures and ideas together with advancements in communication technologies creates schisms in individuals and groups as they become linked to multiple nations while simultaneously uprooted from their place of birth or cultural origin. Transnational movements can thus involve the circulation of ideas and cultures through other means (e.g. through media and communication technologies) (Ang, 1985; Castells, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2009) besides physical movements of people. Respondents who identified themselves as global citizens who are connected to nations that include those they were born in, have citizenship in and interest in is a condition which some theorists see is the ability for individuals to identify with a particular nation and its values even though membership is not apparent due to geographical displacement (e.g. Fox, 2005; Ong & Nonini, 1997). Respondents

thus developed ‘global’ identities as they connected with people, cultures, ideas, products and events other than those of their home nations. Furthermore, geographical displacement did not prevent these individuals from forming communities overseas, unified precisely by their common connection to a distant nation.

Global entertainment media was responsible for contributing to respondents’ global identities, even before their overseas sojourn had commenced. This is because respondents were already exposed to global entertainment through advancements in media technology, which has seen the rapid spread of media products and their messages (Hall, 1973; Staiger, 1993) across international boundaries. Transient migrants who identified as global citizens with global identities did not see themselves as geographically restricted. The conditions of globalisation which allowed respondents to see themselves as global citizens were facilitated by the flows of ideas and cultures (Appadurai, 1996) and through exposure and use of communication and media technologies (Ang, 1985; Castells, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2009).

The transient migrants interviewed for this book provided different reasons for not listening to or reading news from host nation news sites. These ranged from a disinterest in the politics of the host nation and in what was happening in the host nation unless such issues impacted them directly (e.g. changes in permanent migration policies) to an inability to identify with the issues affecting the host society or with the ways in which English or their ethnic cultural languages were spoken in the host nation. These reasons reveal a desire to feel ‘international’ and cosmopolitan rather than local. Respondents here thus revealed more than just ‘a sense of non-national affiliation’ (Delanty & Inglis, 2011, p. 1) but rather the complexities of being a global citizen which, as Delanty and Inglis (2010, 1) have pointed out, is about ‘a much wider range of issues, all of which are to do with how to think and act in ways that systematically take account of living at a time of wide-ranging and deep-seated global connectivity among all people on the planet’. A fundamental part of this connectivity is communication, or more precisely the language of communication.

### *The Significance of English*

In their report on Australia’s engagement with Asia, Ang, Tambiah and Mar (2015) argued for the importance of Asian-language education for creating bridges between Australia and Asia, claiming that ‘smart engagement with Asia requires breaking the vicious circle of monolingualism’.

Foreign-language education remains essential for Australia: it is not sufficient to rely solely on English ‘in the expectation that others will adapt’ (10). While I do not dispute the importance and usefulness of Asian languages, particularly as a means of improving the Australian education system, I question the de-emphasis of English-language skills as a functional link for engagement between Australia and Asia. The most compelling objective respondents had was to speak better English, particularly among those studying in Australia. Many respondents I spoke with expressed a desire to improve their English-speaking skills. They saw possessing good English-language skills as a positive step for their future and a personal commodity to possess in their global mobility. The ability to speak good English, in other words, was equated with success and was considered highly desirable (Piller & Takahashi, 2006). Affluent and increasingly affluent Asian countries such as Japan and China, for instance, have English-language schools staffed by native-speaking English-language teachers from Australia, New Zealand, Europe and America. These schools are attended by locals wanting to acquire English-language skills, which they see as a form of social capital and an identifier of success (Yang, 2016). However, travelling to an English-speaking country in order to study in English and where English is the medium of instruction was considered even more prestigious, since this allowed respondents to differentiate themselves from those who are still in the home nation.

Respondents stated that they engaged in English-language media productions such as film and television together with looking at YouTube videos such as TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) Talks in order to improve their language skills. The intention to learn English was not surprising for some of those interviewed and who took part in the online survey in Australia since they were specifically in the country as English-language students. Other transient migrants, particularly the undergraduate and postgraduate international students studying in Australia, also professed a desire to learn and improve their English-language skills. Many felt their language skills were not good enough and were embarrassed to speak in English to native speakers, as explained by 34-year-old Korean Cindy who was studying in Australia:

Yes and I could see my other friends, like Taiwanese or other Chinese, I also feel very stressful to talk with local students because their speaking is very fast and they, even they, I think even they can’t guess which words we can’t get it, because they haven’t been in, like a situation, they are natural English speaker.

It must be noted though that while Singaporean respondents also expressed a desire to improve their English-language skills, respondents in Australia were more enthusiastic about this and who revealed that they would like to do this through their consumption of entertainment and news media. Nineteen-year-old Ngoc from Vietnam, who was an undergraduate in Australia, said that he had been studying English from a young age and grew up watching English-language television shows and films. His intention to immerse himself in the English language was strong, to the extent he stated that he was not interested in accessing any Vietnamese media while in Australia. In addition to studying English from an early age he had also lived in the USA. For Ngoc, watching television had helped him learn a lot about English:

Actually yeah, it's quite helpful for me like when I watching TV for subtitles—English subtitles, I learn a lot of from these, I learn a lot of like—a lot or a lot of sentence.

Another way respondents said they improved their spoken English skills was by conversing with other transient migrants from non-English-speaking backgrounds. This provided them with the opportunity to converse in English without the embarrassment they feel when talking to native speakers of the language. Cindy explained:

But among international students, even though some of student, if English is really bad we can just understand.

A possible reason why respondents considered acquiring English-language skills a priority was because they considered the language an avenue for integration in the host nation. Rick, a 24-year-old Chinese national who was undertaking his postgraduate studies in Australia, saw the value in improving his English as necessary and practical in order to integrate with locals and to feel a sense of belonging in Australia:

I try to talk with them but maybe because my English very poor so I can't communicate very well. And also they maybe don't want to make the situation become too awkward so they just stop it to talking with us, so maybe I, just think I need to improve my English skill and try to talk with them and living to ... to feel [more] suited ... [to] Australia.

In a 2015 survey on Australian attitudes towards national identity, citizenship, immigration and tradition (Sheppard, 2015), nine out of ten Australians felt that the ability to speak English was important to ‘being truly Australian’. While the survey of 1200 Australians discussed Australian attitudes towards fellow Australians, the veneration of English as a variable which allows people to blend into Australian society is an important one. In the chapter ‘Identity on My Mind’ I raised the point that respondents did not desire to stand out. One of the ways of avoiding this, as respondents in this research astutely understood, was by improving their English-language speaking skills. Do Singaporeans hold similar views about the English language?

In previous work I have done on transient migrants and language in Singapore, I argued that the ability to speak English, particularly localised English, was important for integration (Gomes, 2015a). Singaporeans complain incessantly online that one of the main ways in which they take issue with transient migrants is their inability to speak Singapore English, or ‘Singlish’ as it is called. Additionally, when I went to Singapore to do fieldwork as part of the research for this book, I found the Singaporeans whom I spoke to were angry that some transient migrants were unable to converse in basic English. They felt that as foreign guests and future permanent residents working and studying in Singapore, transient migrants should learn how to speak basic English in order to communicate with locals. The theme that was most prominently brought up by Singaporeans was that they felt alien in their own country, because transient migrants were not conversing in the common language so often used by Singaporeans themselves to communicate with each other.<sup>13</sup>

Respondents’ self-identification as global citizens was not only due to their appreciation of their experiences as transient migrants coupled with an awareness of their engagement with global media (particularly English-language American and UK productions) and the significance they placed on the English language itself but was also due to a consciousness of the friends they kept.

### A MATTER OF FRIENDS

For respondents, part of being a global citizen was about having ‘global friends’—friends from nations other than their own or the host nation. Sari, a 20-something postgraduate student in Singapore who was from Indonesia, and Rebecca, a 20-year-old ethnic Chinese New Zealand stu-

dent studying in Australia, explained that having global friends was beneficial for them in the long term for practical reasons, such as being able to contact them while travelling and for potential job opportunities:

For me I think it's important to have very global friends, because I love travelling. So I can contact whoever is in there because, well if I'm saying that, I want to go to Australia I can contact who my friends are, whatever. (Sari)

So I mean, having international friends around, you can sort of have a global network ... I'm sure that they will, we can interact with each other. It's important to me, of course. (Rebecca)

As highlighted in previous chapters, a few respondents in both Australia and Singapore considered themselves different from locals because they came from different cultures and because of this felt they were in some way 'better' than locals. They expressed that coming from other countries—with some having the experience of transience prior to their current Australian or Singaporean transient experience—allowed them to have different perspectives to locals, primarily because they had undergone cultural experiences which were different to those had by the citizens of the host nation. As I discussed elsewhere in this book, respondents also reported feeling that those longer-term residents of the same ethnicity were likewise different from them, primarily because they considered them to be more 'Australian' or more 'Singaporean' and thus did not really identify with them. They explained that those of the same ethnicity as them (e.g. ethnic Chinese in Australia and Singapore) were culturally different because they were born in or grew up in the host nations and had been subjected to very different influences. These responses are not surprising and echo the findings of Weiss and Ford (2011) when they interviewed 15 Southeast Asian international students in Australia. Weiss and Ford's research showed that their respondents not only identified themselves as cosmopolitan subjects but also felt that because they were born in Asia and were studying in Australia they had more international experiences than local students.

While literature on transient migrants overwhelmingly concludes that making local friends is necessary for their mental and emotional well-being (e.g. Reddon, 2014; Sawir et al., 2008), not all respondents in the current study felt this to be the case. Twenty-four-year-old Hui, who was from China and studying in Australia, stated that she was happy in transience even without local friends. She explained that she had been in Australia for the past three years but never managed to make friends with locals. She

clarified that while she was embarrassed at this inability to make friends with Australians, she had come to terms with it and learnt to cope by making friends with other Chinese instead. She explained that she was happier not being stressed trying to make local friends and that irregardless she felt more comfortable being around people who were similar to her. In other words, she was happy for her social networks to be almost exclusively dominated by Chinese international students:

Like when I'm with the Chinese [in Australia] I'm a Chinese person but when I'm with Australians ... I'm more like an outsider. That's when I'm with other people from other countries I'm an international person ... I've studied in both Adelaide and Melbourne so I think people in Adelaide ... are more friendly towards ... people [in general] but they might be more conservative towards internationals. Yep and most of them don't talk to internationals, whereas in Melbourne people are used to internationals. So when they see me they see me as a person not as an international who speaks poor English. So they would talk to me. They'd be friendly as well.

While some of Hui's friends were fellow international students from the Asian region, she considered her Chinese (international student) friendships as being the most significant to her. Hui described the factors as to why she makes friends with fellow Chinese and other international (students) as being 'both push and pull'. She felt that Australians were not really interested in getting to know her because she is an international student which, unsurprisingly, made her feel alienated. Hui clarified that she felt more at ease with fellow Chinese because they speak the same language and she was comfortable with them. Despite not having any local friends, Hui continued to make observations on Australian society. She explained that while she has lived and studied in different Australian cities it was Melbourne—the place she was currently studying at the time of our interview—which she felt to be most accepting of diversity. She attributed her positive experiences in Melbourne to the city's diverse population and further explained that the people there treat her 'as a person not as an international who speaks poor English'. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Melbourne's diversity is due to large numbers of its permanent and temporary residents being born overseas. In its most recent report on population, the ABS reveals:

In the city centre, close to two-thirds of the residents of Melbourne CBD (68 per cent), Carlton (63 per cent), and Southbank (61 per cent) were

migrants in 2011. The close proximity of these suburbs to the University of Melbourne, RMIT University and a range of other higher education providers makes them especially popular with international students. In 2011, a quarter of the population of Melbourne CBD and a third of the population of Carlton were international students (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012b).

Hui, in other words, had learnt to adjust to life in transience. She explained that once she accepted that there was a (self-perceived) gap between herself and Australians and that the differences between them could not be easily reconciled, she found living in transience easier. Her way of adjusting to life in Australia was not to expect close relationships with locals but rather to be happy with largely superficial encounters.

While having co-nationals as friends was important for living life in transience, similar connections seemed to be decreasing in relation to the friends respondents left behind in their home nations. The respondents I spoke with were candid about how they felt less connected to the national collective of their respective home nations because of the declining relationships they had with homeland friends.

As I have mentioned elsewhere in this book, respondents felt that they were different from their peers back in their home nations precisely because they were studying, working and/or studying in a foreign country. Living, working and studying overseas, as I have signposted earlier in this chapter, allowed respondents to gain social capital which differentiated them from their peers who had never left home. They preferred the company of fellow countrymen and women who had also had the ‘global’ experience of living, studying and/or working overseas. As 21-year-old Mariah, a Malaysian student studying in Australia, put it:

Most of my ... friends are now ... also are studying abroad ... I still do keep in touch with them through Facebook group messages ... If there’s any major updates that happen in our lives so we would update each other.

Mariah further explained that while she would marry a fellow Malaysian, she would prefer him to have also had an overseas experience. She felt that the overseas experience makes people more ‘open’ than those who have never left the home nation:

Like me and my Malaysian friends, we often say that we want to get married, go and get married to someone who studies overseas because there will be,

like, your mindset will be more open I think, in seeing some things and not as narrow-minded as them [who never left the home nation].

Respondents acknowledged that being away from the home nation puts a strain on friendships back home. They professed a reason for this was the impact living overseas had had on them. Kim, a 23-year-old Korean medical student in Australia, for instance, explained that being in transience affected her relationship with friends who never left Korea. Kim described how such friends admonished her for her views on her home nation, primarily because she had been in transience for a significant period of time:

They treat me like I don't know much to comment on certain issues because I'm not physically in Korea and I haven't faced the situation.

While Kim had been living and studying in Australia for close to eight years at the time of her interview with me, she clearly still felt connected to Korea:

Well, like I want to be Korean. I was born in Korea and my native language is still Korean.

The difficulties Kim experienced with her friends back home may be one of the reasons why she also expressed a desire to stay in Australia rather than to go back to South Korea. For her, finding a life partner was important and she felt that she would only go back if she has difficulty finding one in Australia:

Oh I don't know, I feel like I'm struggling here, at least if I go back to Korea my mother will push me into a match-making session to make sure I get married, I don't know.

Considering a match-making service in South Korea is not uncommon. Match-making is a million-dollar industry and popular with university-educated South Koreans in their early 30s (Kang, 2012). If Kim returns to South Korea in order to find a life partner, the chances are she will marry a South Korean who has the same education, class and financial status as her. Since there is a strong probability she will make use of South Korean match-making services, she will also have the opportunity to dictate the kind of men she would like to meet. Like Mariah, she might want to meet potential life partners who have also lived overseas.

While I have discussed throughout this book the role played by communication technology in helping transient migrants live their everyday lives in transience, it is necessary to again acknowledge the part it will play in future transience.

## CONNECTING TO HOME THROUGH COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Without a doubt the increasing use and connectivity provided by improvements in communication media and digital technologies, in particular social media, has enabled both permanent and transient migrants to remain connected more so than ever before to their national homelands (Hjorth, 2011; Hjorth & Arnold, 2012). Respondents I spoke to said that they stayed in touch with their families through regular two-way communication (e.g. online chatting such as Skype, telephony and messaging apps such as WhatsApp) and with their friends in the home nation and elsewhere through social media. Many respondents reported browsing through their social media friends' posts (e.g. comments and photographs) without directly engaging in two-way conversations. In doing so they ensured they were always up-to-date with the events and conditions of their home country, albeit passively. While respondents were generally diversified in their social media use, almost all respondents had Facebook accounts, which they actively used.<sup>14</sup> Facebook, in other words, was the social media site of choice among respondents.

What we can gather from the Facebook activities of respondents is that this platform allowed them to keep wholeheartedly engaged with the activities of their friends from home, while not constantly engaged with them through traditional two-way verbal and written conversations. In a recent study I conducted with colleagues (Gomes et al., 2014) on the significance of social media as a form of connectedness between international students and the home nation, it was concluded that:

The use of social media to stay in contact with friends and family from the home nation may assist students with forming imaginary bonds with their homelands. Doing so provides international students with virtual home-based support networks, which then allow them the opportunity to pursue and form local social networks with students other than those who come from their countries of birth (13).

Social media, in other words, allows transient migrants to actively engage with the homeland while overseas.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Transient migrants see themselves as global citizens and aspire to live out this aspect of their identity by living and working overseas. Australian international education needs to realise that permanent residence is not the sole or even primary reason for coming to Australia. While the prospect of attaining permanent residence after graduation is attractive, it is not a prime motivator for studying in Australia. Instead, international students largely see their education in Australia as a step to going elsewhere, particularly for purposes of work. Likewise, the Singapore government needs to be aware that while it sees the educated and skilled ‘foreign talent’ as necessary for the economic survival of Singapore and thus offers them pathways for permanent residence, settling in Singapore for the rest of their lives is seldom part of their long-term plan. The primary reason why the Singapore government sees its future as in the hands of new permanent migrants and citizens is because of lowering Singaporean birth rates, a retiring population and, since the late 1980s, a ‘brain drain’. The government may thus need to create alternative residency options for transient migrants, which may inevitably positively affect Singaporeans who themselves are living permanently or temporarily overseas. One such issue which should be addressed is the issue of dual citizenship. Currently, Singapore citizens are unable to hold dual citizenship. Hence new citizens have to give up the citizenship of their birthplace while Singaporeans living elsewhere who take up the citizenship of their adopted country have to relinquish, often begrudgingly, their Singaporean citizenship. Governments who only allow single citizenship must acknowledge that transnational mobility for extended periods of time, particularly for reasons of work, represents a significant shift in global labour and employment conditions.

International education providers, irrespective of whether they are in Australia, Singapore or elsewhere, might perhaps positively harness international students’ self-perception as global citizens and their aspirations for global mobility by tapping into existing global alumni networks. Alumni here could act as mentors—in person or even remotely via Skype or social media—to current international students. Putting international students in touch with alumni would allow them to develop their self-perceived identities as global citizens, nurture interpersonal relationships between individuals who are not co-nationals, provide possible post-study employment opportunities and allow alumni to be involved in a positive and mutually beneficial way with current students.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have suggested that transient migrants in both Australia and Singapore hold aspirations for transnational mobility, with future ambitions to live and work in the big cities of Europe, North America and Asia with the possibility of returning to the home nation in the future. While they may desire permanent residence in the host nations of Australia and Singapore, this does not mean that they wish to stay there for the rest of their lives. Transient migrants see themselves as global and cosmopolitan subjects. They differentiate themselves from host as well as home nation societies precisely because of their transnational transient experience and harness what they see as helping them achieve this aim, such as bettering their English-language skills. Transient transnational mobility in other words becomes *the* desired cultural and social capital of this generation of temporary migrants irrespective of national and ethnic confines.

## NOTES

1. I am making the assumption that they were Australian viewers since this was a locally produced program which aired in Australia. The comments I refer to were posted the day after the program was aired.
2. The ease of attaining permanent residence for temporary migrants was an election issue in the 2011 Singapore General Elections which saw the incumbent People's Action Party lose more than a third of the popular vote.
3. The findings of the face-to-face interviews in Australia support the JWT survey.
4. While 201 respondents in Australia and 112 respondents in Singapore took part in the online surveys, not everyone completed them in their entirety. The figures for the online survey quoted here are based on respondents who completed the question on permanent residency.
5. This information is not publicly released. Often the public only learns about such figures if a Member of Parliament requests the information during Parliament or when a news outlet is doing a feature on the issue.
6. There is data on this because permanent residents have to renew their permanent migrant visas after the first five years.
7. Unskilled workers in Singapore would not be able to stay because of restrictions on their visa, which is also known as a 'work permit'.
8. For instance some permanent residents and first-generation citizens in Australia were former international students who grew to like their host nation to the point of making it their permanent home.

9. This chapter specifically looks at international students and non-working holiday workers in terms of their transnational mobility since they stay longer in the host nations and have opportunities for future permanent residence. Unlike exchange students and working holiday makers, their current circumstance is not specifically for short-term travel. Besides the white-collar workers, non-working holiday makers also include those who are on bridging visas and on dependent's visas.
10. Australia, meanwhile, is one of the world's almost exclusively English-speaking nations, together with Great Britain, the USA, Canada and the UK.
11. I have mentioned elsewhere in this book that popular music bands and singers from the UK are often mistaken for American acts because of the power of the American music industry to produce, promote and distribute music acts. One example of such a transnational music act is the UK band One Direction.
12. Singapore's entertainment and news outlets—whether state-funded (e.g. Mediacorp) or international (e.g. BBC) are regulated by the government.
13. Anecdotally, in discussions with Singaporean friends about the use of English in Singapore, I was told that speaking good English is now valued among Singaporeans. They noted that Singaporeans who went to schools which emphasised spoken and written English as a vital part of the curriculum were held in high esteem. Schools which commonly emphasised English in this way were typically the Catholic mission schools. These schools, although founded by Catholic missionaries during the colonial period of Singapore's history, are governed by the nation's Ministry of Education just like any other school in Singapore. However, internally these schools strive to produce students with excellent English communication skills and take pride in their students doing exceptionally well in English-language examinations during the national assessment programs such as the Cambridge 'O' and 'A' levels.
14. Other social media sites used by respondents were: Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, QQ, Weibo, WeChat, Snapchat, KakaoTalk, blogs, YouTube and Tumblr.

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## Conclusion

While I was working on the material for this book, stories on transient migrants in Australia and Singapore were appearing periodically in the local media. In Australia, international students were appearing for largely unsavoury reasons (e.g. allegations of cheating and preferential treatment in courses, forming ‘ghettos’ and being taken advantage by greedy landlords and employers), skilled workers took centre stage in discussions about work rights and working holiday makers were often portrayed as not having any rights whatsoever and thus susceptible to exploitation at the hands of employers. In Singapore, meanwhile, reports on transient migrants behaving badly (e.g. the Little India riots of 2013, which saw rioters from South Asia take to the streets after a South Asian worker was fatally hit by a bus) dominated the local news scene, social media and alternative media sources such as *The Online Citizen*, *Redwire Times* and *Mothership.Sg*. More often than not these stories and their headlines tend to be tantalising if not downright salacious, being designed to evoke a particular emotional response in readers. For the most part such stories do not reflect the everyday conditions of transient migrants in both these countries, which may otherwise be of little interest to the wider public. In writing this book I hope to provide a voice for the many transient migrants who live in Australia and Singapore but who remain largely unnoticed because of their temporality; even though they are very much part of the ethnographic landscape in these two countries.

Transient migrants face various challenges while overseas. Almost always physically separated from their families and in countries which are, on various levels, linguistically, culturally and socially different to what they are used to, transient migrants often resort to creative yet practical strategies in order to cope with everyday life overseas. Moreover, transient migrants are different from permanent migrants (both permanent residents and citizens) because they are merely on sojourn in the host nation. Hence their social and cultural connections and emotional and personal investment in the host nation are remarkably different from that of permanent immigrants, as are the strategies which they are required to adopt. This book has also demonstrated that the strategies of coping with life in transience include self-determination in terms of self-perceived identities which are brought over from the home nation (e.g. ethnic cultural practices) or developed in transience (e.g. newfound religions such as Christianity). Also, these self-perceived identities may be either permanent (e.g. current nationality) and/or temporary (e.g. visa status). I also point out that that temporary identities located in transience based on circumstance (e.g. being international students or working holiday makers) contribute to transient migrants' developing identities, in this case, that of global citizen.

#### DIFFERENT COUNTRIES, DIFFERENT GROUPS BUT SIMILAR PATTERNS

While Australia and Singapore—the countries featured in this book—are outwardly two very different nations, a closer glance reveals the presence of significant similarities. Australia, for instance, while geographically located in Asia, considers itself a Western nation arguably because it adopted British cultural and social values as part of its almost 230-year history as a colonised country of the UK (Macintyre & Clark, 2003). Additionally, many of those born in Australia can trace their heritage to Anglo-Celtic Europe because of this colonial history. Singapore, while also a former colony of the UK, revels in its Asian cultural and societal roots and constitutes a 'settler country' home to a predominantly Chinese, Malay and Indian ethnic citizenry. Both countries, however, are also very similar on two broad fronts: they are both transient hubs which increasingly host multicultural populations. Australia is a beacon for international students, particularly tertiary students and especially those from the nearby

Asian region, while also being host to largely middle-class working holiday makers from Europe, North America, Latin America and Asia. Singapore is also host to large numbers of transients from the lower, middle and even upper classes because of its determination and current conditions as a developed economy. This book, however, chose to concentrate on the transient middle class. In Singapore this group is locally known as foreign talent. While Singapore is somewhat determined to become an international student hub, the current middle-class transient migrants it attracts are white-collar workers, some of whom made the transition from international student to worker within the city-state.

The transient migrants featured in this book were far from homogenous. International students differ from exchange students primarily because the former are studying towards an Australian or Singaporean institutional award, while exchange students are awarded by the institution in their countries of enrolment. Moreover, international students stay in Australia and Singapore for longer periods of time, as compared to the usual 6- (maximum 12-) month duration of most exchange students in both these countries. Students are also different from workers since students are consumers while workers contribute to production. This of course is made more complicated by the fact that some students, especially those in Australia, may work part-time, while workers may also be doing part-time study. In this book there were more students in Australia than Singapore who had part-time work, while almost no workers admitted to doing any part-time study in either country, though this could be due to the conditions of their respective work visas.

The working respondents in Australia and Singapore were different from each other as well. In Australia, most of the workers who took part in this study were working holiday makers, while those in Singapore were either in contract or permanent positions. The holiday makers were often university-educated or had aspirations for undertaking (further) tertiary study. The work that they did in Australia was casual or contract and often took place in service industries. The workers interviewed in Singapore were also university-educated, whether in Singapore, the home nation or elsewhere, and held positions in various industries such as finance and hospitality. In addition, because of the conditions of their visa, working holiday makers could only stay in Australia for a maximum of two years, often demonstrating great mobility as they held a variety of occupations in the states and territories they travelled through.

Needless to say, my respondents came from ethnic, cultural and language groups that were clearly distinct from each other. Their diversity however did not stop at those junctures. Each group of transient migrants I looked at come from nationalities which are different from each other. For example, while they may both come from Asia, respondents from India were appreciably different from respondents from China. Indians, for instance, have larger families than their Chinese counterparts because of China's one-child policy. This thus makes the family dynamics between both cultures arguably different. Likewise, ethnicity did not presume similarity. As I have pointed out in various chapters, diasporas which may be ethnically similar and thus culturally connected are not homogenous, since they are influenced by the nations they have settled in. Hence, an ethnic Chinese from Singapore is not culturally homogenous with an ethnic Chinese from Taiwan. Even if they came from the same country, they spoke different languages. For instance a student from the northern part of India will be able to speak Hindi while those from the southern part would be fluent in Tamil.

Additionally, there were specific differences I found in the various groups of respondents in terms of their current behaviour and aspirations. I discovered, for instance, that more respondents in Singapore than in Australia desired permanent residence, perhaps because of more job opportunities and the perception that respondents in Singapore had regarding the ease of obtaining permanent residence and the benefits that go with it (e.g. ability to purchase Housing Development Board flats). More respondents in Singapore than in Australia reported having local friends, although admitting that these friendships typically did not last due to different life trajectories (e.g. no longer being in contact with male friends from secondary school and junior college because the latter entered national service while the former entered local tertiary institutions). While Christianity was the dominant religion among respondents who either brought their faith with them or found religion in transience, more respondents in Singapore than in Australia were of the Christian faith, in large part because more Christian respondents who took part in this study in Singapore had brought their faith with them from the home nation, as in the case of the Indonesian Christians and the Filipino Catholics. This book also sheds light on the increasing significance of the Christian faiths in Singapore, since Christian denominations make up the fastest-growing religion in the city-state.

Through these differences, however, this study has managed to identify some common patterns in the ways in which respondents conducted themselves in order to navigate everyday life in transience. This book documents these commonalities, which can be seen in terms of patterns across the different groups of transient migrant respondents. The patterns of adaptability, connections and disconnections, community, identity formation, maintenance and (re)discovery, English as language of mobility, North American media and identity, and aspirations for further transient mobility shed light on how transient migrants approach matters of belonging, identity and community. The book also details the ways in which transient migrants resort to previous experience in the home nation and elsewhere in order to adapt to life in transience, relying on current and evolving variables such as identities, social networks, media consumption (particularly from America), communication use and aspirations for the future in order to cope with the rigours of life in transience.

Transient migration is an exciting yet understudied research space. This book scratches the surface of the complex strategies transient migrants use in order to navigate daily life in a foreign country. These strategies include the social and cultural spaces transient migrants occupy, together with the significance placed on the richness of their identities. This book also makes it clear that regardless of whether they are international students, exchange students, workers or working holiday makers, transient migrants in Australia and Singapore create communities and (social) networks whose memberships are based on current circumstance (e.g. international student/exchange student/worker/working holiday maker). More so in the cases of students and workers, these groups are primarily comprised of people from the home nations, followed by people from their home regions. However, while the home nation featured prominently for respondents, particularly in terms of identity and creating a sense of belonging while overseas through the replication of everyday home nation life, respondents correspondingly had an ambivalent relationship with aspects of their home nations. Here they admitted that they saw themselves as different from their peers who never left the home nation and only wholly identified with others from the homeland who were themselves transient and transnationally mobile—a credible reason for the growing sense of distance some respondents admitted to. Clearly transient migrants are fascinating subjects to study, particularly when looking at their ability

to adapt organically in response to their mobility. What, though, are the effects transient migration has on host nation societies?

### WHAT NEXT?

While the primary aim of this book has been to document how transient migrants organically develop strategies to navigate everyday life in their host nations, I also wonder about the effects transient migrants have on local ethnic communities. While I have noted that Singaporeans may be ethnically similar to the transient migrants living, working and studying in Singapore, they nonetheless generally detest such ‘foreigners’, feeling largely threatened by their presence. They fear transient (and new permanent) migrants overpopulating the country and make clear distinctions between new citizens and native-born Singaporeans. Singaporeans also strongly believe that transient migrants deprive locals of employment opportunities and education places. In addition, vast numbers of Singaporeans vocalise that the increasing numbers of transient and permanent migrants are destroying the social and cultural fabric of the nation, despite Singaporeans tracing their lineage to many of the contributor nations. Meanwhile in Australia the anti-immigration movement which, admittedly, is more anti-Islam and anti-asylum seeker in make-up, nevertheless has a multicultural hue. Anti-immigration rallies such as those organised by a network known as *Reclaim Australia* have attracted groups such as *Rise Up Australia*, a Christian political group headed by a Sri Lankan migrant pastor which boasts a multicultural membership. *Rise Up Australia*, ironically, also runs on an anti-multiculturalism platform. Somewhat mirroring protests in Singapore, unions in Australia have also been voicing their anger at the rising numbers of foreigners working there, also citing reduced local employment opportunities. Like the anti-asylum seeker and anti-Islam rallies, union members who have been protesting in the streets have a multicultural make-up.

Given the inevitably increasing numbers of individuals who will be living in transience in the future, be it for work, study or humanitarian reasons and across socio-economic and cultural lines, how should countries supporting multicultural societies react and respond to transient migration? What are the immediate and possible long-term impacts of transient

migration on local ethnic community identities, attitudes and practices? These are questions that need to be addressed, as we are well and truly embedded in an age of transient and transnational mobility.

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# APPENDIX I

## DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENTS

### *Face-to-Face Interviews*

#### *Australia*

##### Gender

	<i>Freq (n = 100)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
M	42	42.0
F	58	58.0

##### Age Range Home Country

	<i>Freq (n = 100)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
19–24 years	48	48.0
25–29 years	38	38.0
30 years and more	14	14.0

## Home Country

	<i>Freq (n = 100)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Bangladesh	2	2.0
Belgium	1	1.0
Brazil	1	1.0
Chile	1	1.0
China	11	11.0
Colombia	4	4.0
Czech Republic	1	1.0
France	6	6.0
Germany	2	2.0
Hong Kong	1	1.0
India	8	8.0
Indonesia	3	3.0
Iran	1	1.0
Italy	3	3.0
Japan	1	1.0
Jordan	1	1.0
Malaysia	5	5.0
Mexico	2	2.0
New Zealand	1	1.0
Pakistan	3	3.0
Peru	1	1.0
Philippines	1	1.0
Singapore	9	9.0
South Korea	6	6.0
Spain	1	1.0
Sri Lanka	1	1.0
Sweden	2	2.0
Taiwan	1	1.0
Netherlands	1	1.0
United Kingdom	8	8.0
Unites States of America	5	5.0
Vietnam	6	6.0

## Length of Stay in Australia

	<i>Freq (n = 100)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Three months and less	12	12.0
3.1 to 6 months	17	17.0
6.1 months to 1 year	20	20.0
1 year 1 month to 2 years	21	21.0
2 years 1 month to 3 years	14	14.0
3 years 1 month to 4 years	11	11.0
4 years 1 month and more	5	5.0

## Visa Status

	<i>Freq (n = 100)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Missing values</i>
International student visa	59	60.8	3
Working holiday visa	19	19.6	
Exchange student visa	8	8.2	
Bridging visa	7	7.2	
Temporary Work (Skilled) visa (subclass 457)	3	3.1	
Temporary Graduate (Subclass 485) Visa	1	1.0	

*Singapore*

## Gender

	<i>Freq (n = 102)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
M	43	42.7
F	59	57.3

## Age Range

	<i>Freq (n = 102)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
18–24 years	56	54.4
25–29 years	26	25.5
30 years and more	20	19.4

## Home Country

	<i>Freq (n = 102)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Missing values</i>
Indonesia	25	24.8	2
China	19	18.8	
Malaysia	14	13.9	
India	9	8.9	
South Korea	5	5.0	
U.K.	5	5.0	
Vietnam	5	5.0	
Philippines	4	4.0	
U.S.	4	4.0	
Hong Kong	3	3.0	
Australia	2	2.0	
France	1	1.0	
Italy	1	1.0	
New Zealander	1	1.0	
Norway	1	1.0	
Thailand	1	1.0	

## Length of Stay in Singapore

	<i>Freq (n = 102)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Missing values</i>
Three months and less	5	5.1	4
3.1 to 6 months	9	9.1	
6.1 months to 1 year	14	14.1	
1 year 1 month to 2 years	15	15.2	
2 years 1 month to 3 years	14	14.1	
3 years 1 month to 4 years	3	3.0	
4 years 1 month and more	38	37.3	

## Visa status

	<i>Freq (n = 102)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Missing values</i>
international student visa	61	60.4	1
working visa	39	38.6	
dependent's pass	1	1.0	

*Online Survey**Australia*

## Gender

	<i>Freq (n = 198)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Male	97	49
Female	101	51

## Length of Stay in Australia

	<i>Freq (n = 201)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
20 and less than 20	19	9
21–25	90	45
26–30	64	32
31–35	18	9
35–40	7	3
41 and above	3	1

## Home Country

	<i>Freq (n = 101)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Australia	5	4.95
New Zealand	2	1.98
United Kingdom	9	8.91
Ireland	3	2.97
France	5	4.95
Italy	3	2.97
The Netherlands	1	0.99
Germany	3	2.97
Sweden	1	0.99
Greece	1	0.99
Gibraltar	1	0.99
Cyprus	1	0.99
China	9	8.91
Korea	1	0.99
India	12	11.88
Pakistan	7	6.93
Nepal	2	1.98
Sri Lanka	1	0.99
Malaysia	7	6.93
Indonesia	4	3.96
Singapore	2	1.98
Vietnam	4	3.96
Philippines	4	3.96
Brunei Darussalam	1	0.99
Bhutan	1	0.99
Myanmar	1	0.99
Bangladesh	1	0.99
Thailand	1	0.99
Ghana	1	0.99
Mauritius	1	0.99
Brazil	1	0.99
Chile	1	0.99
Afghanistan	1	0.99
Iran	1	0.99
United States of America	2	1.98

## Length of Stay in Australia

	<i>Freq (n = 101)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Less than or equal to 3 months	7	6.93
3.1 to 6 months	20	19.80
6.1 months to 1 year	23	22.77
1 year 1 month to 2 years	20	19.80
2 year 1 month to 3 years	8	7.92
3 year 1 month to 4 years	6	5.94
4 years 1 month to 5 years	8	7.92
More than 5 years	8	7.92
“44”	1	0.99

## Visa Status

	<i>Freq (n = 189)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Student Visa	92	49
Working Holiday Visa	53	28
457 Visa	12	6
Bridging Visa	14	7
Family on Student Visa	2	1
Other	16	8

*Singapore**Online survey*

## Gender

	<i>Freq (n = 112)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Male	45	40
Female	67	60

## Length of Stay in Singapore

	<i>Freq (n = 112)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
20 and less than 20	17	15
21–25	74	66
26–30	17	15
31–35	2	2
36–40	0	0
41 and above	2	2

## Home Country

	<i>Freq (n = 101)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Malaysia	22	22
China	23	23
Hong Kong	10	10
India	11	11
Indonesia	10	10
Vietnam	8	8
Singapore	7	7
United States of America	4	4
Philippines	2	2
Thailand	1	1
Britain	1	1
South Korea	1	1
Bangladesh	1	1

## Length of Stay in Singapore

	<i>Freq (n = 101)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Less than or equal to 3 months	5	5.0
3.1 to 6 months	10	9.9
6.1 months to 1 year	14	13.9
1 year 1 month to 2 years	13	12.9
2 year 1 month to 3 years	12	11.9
3 year 1 month to 4 years	7	6.9
4 years 1 month to 5 years	9	8.9
5 years 1 month to 6 years	11	10.9
6 years 1 month to 7 years	6	5.9
More than 7 years	12	11.9

### Visa Status

	<i>Freq (n = 99)</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Student Visa	63	64
S-Pass	17	17
Personalised employment passes (PEP)	0	0
Employment Pass	13	13
Dependent's Pass	0	0
Other(Please specify)	6	6

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