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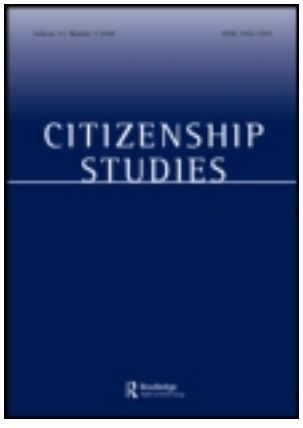

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Immigration, society and modalities of citizenship in Singapore

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Immigration, society and modalities of citizenship in Singapore

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In this article, I argue that three modalities of citizenship are at play in Singapore: liberal, communal and social. Using a grounded theoretical approach, I highlight the instances in which these modes of conceptualizing citizenship appear in discourse, practice and policy. While past scholarship has highlighted the contrast between liberal and communal modes of citizenship, the social mode has been largely subsumed and obscured within the rubric of communal (or communitarian) democracy and ethno-nationalist citizenship. The article analyzes the interplay among these three modes of citizenship as they played out in the discourse surrounding the 2011 General Election in Singapore. The tension between citizens and noncitizens has become a central political issue in Singapore. Less recognized, but highlighted in my analysis, liberal and communal senses of citizenship are in tension not only with each other but also with a notion of the *social* based on relationships of mutual benefit and obligation rather than communal, categorical belonging. Drawing on Robert Esposito's critique of modern ideas of community and (re)theorization of *communitas*, I argue that in the case of Singapore and elsewhere, reintroducing a notion of the social (as distinct from the communal) holds potential for discourses, practices and policies that can transcend the divisiveness associated with communalism and the socioeconomic inequalities associated with liberalism.

Keywords: citizenship; community; immigration; neoliberal; Singapore; transnationalism

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Introduction

As the twenty-first century has begun to unfold, states and societies in Asia are negotiating the social, economic and political cross-currents of global capitalism, territorialized nation-states and transnational migration. Situated in the context of those broad trends, this article examines the grounded ideological struggle taking place in Singapore over citizenship, nationalism, political-economy and the social imaginary. The article grounds a consideration of three modalities of democratic citizenship in the historical, social and political context of Singapore. I use 'modality' in a manner akin to its usage in Giddens' (1984, 29) structuration theory, as interpretive schema or 'stocks of knowledge which actors draw upon in the production and reproduction of interaction (and) whereby they are able to make accounts, offer reasons, etc.' (cf. Brouwer and Asen 2010, 16–23). I refer to these modalities of citizenship as liberal, communal and social. Beyond Singapore, similar contested discourses are at play, particularly in the more prosperous of East and Southeast Asian societies (e.g., Chang 2012; Chung 2010; Ho 2011; Kashiwazaki 2013; Kim 2012; Lee 2012; Seol 2012; Shipper 2006; Tseng and Wu 2011; Wang 2013). The Singapore experience, while unique in its own ways, speaks to the dynamics of nationalism, transnational mobility and neoliberal capitalism playing out across the globe but

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particularly in East and Southeast Asia (cf. Kofman 2005; van Houdt, Suvarierol, and Schinkel 2011; and Soysal [1994] for discussions of Europe; Somers [2008] for a treatise focused on the United States).

My concern in this article is with how the *demos* of democratic citizenship is conceptualized and practiced (cf. Bauböck 1994,183–186; Beckman 2013; Dahl 1989).[1] Democracy and nation-states are inextricably linked in the contemporary international order. The nation-state's primary claim to legitimacy within the international system is that it represents the interests of a *people*; or in other words, a *demos*. Many autocratic Asian leaders, as well as autocrats elsewhere, have argued against the value of formal (that is to say, electorally based) democratic governance, but always on the grounds, however flimsy at times, that a strong authoritarian hand was necessary for the good of the people – in other words, the nation or *demos*. I emphasize this point to stress the global, international hegemony of 'democracy'; that any state's legitimacy rests powerfully on its claims to operate in the best interests of 'a people,' even for the most autocratic states (Zakaria 1997; Mutalib 2000). With regard to Singapore, while some challenge its status as a democratic country – pointing to the People's Action Party's (PAP) continuous hold on power since independence in 1965 and various controls on the press and civil society – it holds regular, contested national elections and the PAP is subject to democratic constraints. Moreover, my focus in this article is with the processes and conceptualization of citizenship in Singapore, not whether Singapore should be categorized as democratic, 'soft authoritarian' or otherwise (cf. Kamaludeen and Turner 2013).

Asian states and societies, moving ever further from their anticolonial and postcolonial historical moments, face new challenges in defining the *demos* of the nation-state. This is particularly true in societies where transnational migrants seeking to improve their lives are arriving in substantial numbers. Many of these societies feel the need for such immigrants in order to fuel economic growth and in many places to make up for low fertility rates among local populations. Nowhere are these dynamics more acutely felt than in Singapore. The challenge is how to manage and integrate migrants within existing societies. For the past two decades, scholarship on citizenship has attended to these transnational aspects of society and citizenship. Most of these authors limit their discussion to citizenship in Europe or more broadly the West (e.g., Joppke 2010; Somers 2008), even in cases where they argue for a 'globalization of citizenship' (e.g., Kivisto and Faist 2007; Soysal 1994) or frame their case in terms of general theory (e.g., Bauböck 1994). The point of departure of such work tends to be the integration of migrants into preexisting frameworks of liberal-democratic governance and the extension of social welfare to women, minorities, migrants and others, via Marshall's statist 'social citizenship.' In this article, my focus is on how 'the society' governed by the state is conceived, and the implications of these concepts for emergent polities.

The challenge of immigration in East and Southeast Asia is somewhat different from that in Europe or the West and is closely tied to ongoing processes of forging autonomous political modes of modern citizenship in young, postcolonial nation-states of rapidly developing East and Southeast Asia (cf. Chang 2012; Chung 2010; Ho 2006, 2011; Kashiwazaki 2013; Kim 2012; Lee 2012; Shipper 2006; Seol 2012; Sun 2012; Tseng and Wu 2011; Wang 2013). Previous work by Chua (1996, 1999, 2010), Ong (1996, 1999, 2006) and others, who chronicle these historical transitions, distinguish between (neo)liberal citizenship and communitarian citizenship (cf. Goh D.P.S. 2012; Ho 2006; Kamaludeen and Turner 2013; Montision 2012; Tan 2008; Sun 2012). I argue that a further distinction is necessary between communal and social citizenship in order to fully address the grounded debates taking place about immigration and citizenship in Singapore

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and elsewhere.[2] In the following section, I discuss the analytical basis of this distinction before turning to the historical and contemporary grounds through which the debates over these modalities of citizenship work out in practice in Singapore.

Modalities of democratic citizenship

Each modality of democratic citizenship – liberal, communal and social – is founded in different understanding of relationships among persons as 'the people,' as citizens and as the *demos* that constitutes the basis of rule in a democracy; or alternatively, the *nation* of a nation-state. When Ong makes reference to 'elements that we think of as coming together to create citizenship – rights, entitlements, territoriality, a nation ...,' (2006, 6). she is drawing on two influential European traditions of thinking about democratic citizenship. One, signified by rights and entitlements, is the liberal mode of citizenship, historically influenced by both the French and American revolutions. The other, communal mode of citizenship, is signified by territory and nation and draws historically on a German (Bismarckian) tradition (see Brubaker 1992; Joppke 2010, 19–20). Both resonate with varied histories of anticolonial and postcolonial nationalist notions of citizenship outside of the West (Mamdani 1996, 2000).

In the opening vignette of *Flexible Citizenship*, Ong (1999, 1) relates a story of how during the transfer from British rule, a Hong Kong official 'fished a number of passports from his pockets.' Citizenship, as signified by a passport, is conceptualized in this (neo) liberal mode as an individual possession. In *Flexible Citizenship*, Ong traces how such a mode of citizenship works through a particular neoliberal cultural logic of transnationalism in relationship to new zones of graduated sovereignty.[3] Throughout her major works on citizenship and sovereignty, Ong focuses her critique on neoliberal 'mutations' of citizenship but does not go far in addressing traditional, almost nostalgic, notions of 'what we long assumed to be a homogenous collectivity and a unified space of citizenship' (2006, 16).[4] Writings on Singapore in particular have overwhelmingly analyzed citizenship through a neoliberal lens (e.g., Montision 2012; Sun 2012; Teo 2011; cf. Ho 2006, Tan 2008).

In critiquing the same sorts of neoliberal cultural logics identified by Ong, Chua (1996, 1999, 2010) has written extensively on the idea of communitarian democracy as an alternative to liberal democracy. The problem that Chua and others highlight with liberal democracy is its radical individualism, which emphasizes rights and freedoms of individuals over and above collective interests. Communitarianism, by contrast, is a gloss for an ideological emphasis on 'collective well-being above individual rights and interests' (Chua 1999, 576).[5] Moreover, neoliberalism has promoted a form of liberal values, which gives precedence to economic rights and private interests of individuals who control the most financial capital over the political, civil and human rights that might be claimed by economically less advantaged individuals (cf. Somers 2008).

While seeking to pose an alternative to neoliberalism, Chua and others who draw on the concept of 'communitarian democracy,' have not adequately distinguished between notions of the *communal* and the *social*. I argue that clearly conceptualizing this distinction is crucial because it speaks to the grounded ideological debates and state policies being promulgated in Singapore and elsewhere. While ideas of the communal and social both exceed liberal individualism, they do so in radically different ways, with important practical implications. It leads me to argue for a concept of relational social citizenship rather than one based in boundary drawing, which is found even in recent scholarship calling for a more 'global' citizenship. Authors such as Soysal (1994) and

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Kivisto and Faist (2007) do not fundamentally challenge the boundary-drawing, *communal* conceptualization of citizenship, but rather call for an expansion of the boundary of inclusion, often based on an appeal to human rights (see also Bauböck 1994; Brysk and Shafir 2004).

To delineate between communal and social, I draw on Esposito's (2010) incisive critique of modern notions of 'community.' Modern ideas of community, whether ethnically, racially, nationally, religiously or otherwise configured, imagine a collectivity based on typological sameness; members of a community share something in common. A notion of citizenship and democracy, based on the idea of a 'unified collectivity' as Ong puts it, is what I refer to as *communal* and is the modern notion critiqued by Esposito. It is a notion that 'a people' (nation, race, ethnic group) are constituted through some qualitative commonality. Race, ethnicity and nation (in terms of modern political citizenship) all draw on different qualitative reference points to ground their communalisms. Racialized discourses ground commonality in biology – blood, genetic heredity, skin color or other features. Ethnicized discourse grounds commonality in culture – dress, eating habits, rituals, adherence to certain religious beliefs, language and the like. Nation (which was once synonymous with 'race') has come to signify modern political state-defined nationality, materially grounded in passports and other identity documents, but presumed to be a quality of an individual rather than a possession of that individual (as in the liberal mode). While Singapore has a distinctly modern identity, Ho (2006) demonstrates that communal, everyday discursive boundary drawing takes place between citizens and noncitizens.

Esposito argues, in contrast to this modern notion of community, that *communitas* refers not to 'commonality' but to 'communication' and that communication refers to relationships between and among subjects based on difference not on sameness. Another way to term this conceptual distinction is as a distinction between the 'communal' and the 'social.' In the communal sense, communities exist because people imagine them to exist (Anderson 1991). While national or other communities are often imagined to share some sort of primordial traits, their existence is contingent on the symbolic production of their boundaries, not on fixed typological similarities of their members nor on their members having any necessary practical connection to one another (Barth 1969; Cohen 1985; Taylor 2004). Social relations, by contrast, are relationships across difference embedded in practices of exchange rather than in cognition, signification and imagination. A social network for instance, as it is used in social network analysis, is defined through exchange (of material goods, companionship, advice, etc.), which at its core involves relationships between subjects who give to or receive from others something that the receiving subject lacks. Importantly, what distinguishes social exchange from liberal (market) exchange is the notion that these transactions imply ongoing relationships of debt, obligation and reciprocity.[6]

To summarize these three modalities of citizenship: Liberal, or neoliberal, citizenship is a mode in which citizenship is imagined and practiced as a property that individuals own. In the modality of communal citizenship, the boundaries of citizenship are signaled discursively and citizenship is grounded in typological thinking that some relevant property distinguishes two groups (us, the citizens, from them, the noncitizens). Social citizenship suggests that citizenship rests neither in a property that individuals own nor a property of what individuals are, but rather in the circuits of debt, obligation and reciprocity incurred in our relationships with others. Moreover, these circuits constitute the social as an ongoing process of relationship, not a fixed or bounded entity. In order to further examine and ground these competing notions of democratic citizenship, I turn now to the case of Singapore.

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Argument and methodology

Citizenship studies include a range of more-or-less normative and sociological approaches (Joppke 2010, 1–6; Somers 2008, 22–23; Turner 1997; Werbner and Yuval-Davis 1999, 28–30). The present article is sociological in orientation, insofar as it presents the discursive struggle over citizenship in Singapore and the interplay of three conceptual frames or modalities through which citizenship is discursively presented and debated – (neo)liberal, communal and social. The typology is not derived from general theory and applied deductively to Singapore. In particular, 'social citizenship' here is not derived from Marshall's influential work, in which social citizenship refers primarily to access to state welfare and state guarantee of redistributive rights (Dwyer 2004; Isin and Turner 2007, 5–9; Kivisto and Faist 2007, 54; Marshall 1950; Yalçin-Heckmann 2011). I am focusing, rather on how the society or community (*communitas*) is conceptualized, as a polity of mutual benefit and obligation. These relationships are mediated by the state but founded in sensibilities of social, communal or individual (liberal) entitlement that exceed the state (cf. Stack 2012).

My starting point has been broader research on Singapore, particularly with respect to migration and transnational processes (Thompson 2009; Thompson and Zhang 2009). I generalize the specifics of the Singapore case to broader concerns by relating this typology to contemporary theories of citizenship in recent work by Beckman (2013), Joppke (2010), Kivisto and Faist (2007), Somers (2008) and Stack (2012), among others, as well as general social theory, particularly Giddens' (1984) use of modalities[7] in structuration theory and Esposito's (2010) theory of society as *communitas*. In conclusion, I suggest on normative grounds the value of emphasizing social citizenship and conceptualizing Singapore society – or other societies – in terms of Esposito's *communitas* as a means of resolving tensions between liberal and communal modalities of sociality and citizenship.

The primary empirical data presented below come from print media, political party manifestos and online sources. The analysis is also informed by a broader body of fieldwork in Singapore. During the period of 2009–2010, I followed the 'differentiation' campaign, described below, on a more-or-less daily basis in *The Straits Times* and *TODAY*, two of Singapore's leading English-language newspapers.[8] From 2009 onward, I compiled clippings from these two newspapers, which I later supplemented with online content searches using the Factiva database. These form the primary source material for tracing a shift in government policy from the mid-2000s through the end of 2010, particularly since Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong assumed office in mid-2004. An earlier analysis examined the policies of his predecessor Goh Chok Tong, Prime Minister from 1990 to 2004 (Thompson and Zhang 2009). From late 2010 through May 2011, I closely followed the run-up to the May 2011 General Election.

The temporal pivot of my analysis is the May 2011 General Election. Through the first half of 2011, as the General Election became increasingly immanent, I focused more intensively on the political discourse around foreigners and other issues – following everyday discussions, newspapers (*The Straits Times* and *TODAY*), online forums (particularly, though not exclusively, *The Online Citizen* and *Temasek Review*). During the campaign period, I examined the platforms or 'manifestos' and other online and print statements of the various political parties. And I attended rallies of the Worker's Party (WP) and Reform Party (RP) and viewed dozens of speeches from other parties available online. My interest and analysis rests on this broadly construed public discourse.[9]

Focusing on the 2011 General Elections, I analyze the spectrum of positions taken by the PAP based on it record in the run-up to the elections and those of Singapore's major

opposition parties based on their platforms, campaign speeches and other statements of policy as well as their critiques of PAP governance. Most political analyses in Singapore focus on how well or poorly the PAP will do vis-à-vis other parties in aggregate and tends to lump all non-PAP parties together as 'the opposition.' I demonstrate that important differences exist among the opposition parties on their prescriptions for handling the 'influx of foreigners' that Singapore has experienced. Furthermore, I argue that these map onto different modalities of democratic citizenship.

My argument and analysis also draw on more than 10 years of experience working and living in Singapore, including a series of research projects focused on transnationalism and migrant experiences in the city-state. Although it is not formally presented and analyzed below (cf. Ho 2006, 2011; Kim 2012; Miller-Idriss 2006; Montision 2012; Stack 2012; Sun 2012; Tseng and Wu 2011), my arguments are informed by extensive discussions with Singaporean and non-Singaporean professionals, Singaporean and non-Singaporean tertiary students anxious about their futures, civil society actors, migrant and domestic workers from Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines and elsewhere, and interviews and focus groups with low-income Singaporeans. All these encounters and an ongoing attempt to understand the diverse experiences and anxieties that inform the friction over immigration and debates around citizenship in Singapore are crucial to my analysis of the public discourse and politics of citizenship.

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Foreign influx and differentiation

On 7 May 2011, Singaporeans voted in the most hotly contested national elections in decades. After the votes were counted, the PAP was returned to power with 60.14% of the popular vote and 81 of 87 seats in parliament.[10] Although the result would be considered a landslide in many countries, for the PAP it represented the party's worst showing in any election since 1965 when Singapore became an independent nation.[11] In the wake of these results, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong described the election as a 'watershed.' PAP leaders admitted that the party and the government needed to undertake serious reconsideration of social and economic policies followed over the prior decade.[12] Although Singapore had weathered events such as recessionary environments in 2001 and 2008–2009 and the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) scare in 2003 remarkably well and although it had risen to enjoy one of the highest per capita gross domestic products (GDP) in the world – above that of the USA, Japan and Europe – the mood in Singapore was one not of contentment but of stress and strain on the social fabric of the nation.

The major issues of the 2011 General Election – rising cost of living, housing shortages, a strained transportation infrastructure, depressed wages, income inequality, and others – all revolved around one central issue: a rapid influx of foreign labor and immigrants over the preceding decade. From 2000 to 2010, the population grew from 4.03 million to 5.08 million, overwhelmingly due to immigration and rising numbers of temporary migrant workers. Singapore is experiencing the social and political tensions driven by the dynamics of global capitalism, national politics and transnational migration. As a transnational municipality with no national hinterland, Singapore's position in Southeast Asia makes it a site in which the pressure of these forces is particularly intense (Ho 2006; Montision 2012; Sun 2012; Teo 2011). While such dynamics are found in other affluent nations in Asia, the tensions between global capitalism, national politics and transnational migration, and their implications for nationally conceived democratic politics, is only beginning to be examined extensively in Asian contexts (e.g., Chung 2010;

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Chang 2012; Ho 2011; Kashiwazaki 2013; Kim 2012; Lee 2012; Seol 2012; Shipper 2006; Tseng and Wu 2011; Wang 2013). The intensity and visibility of these tensions in Singapore make it a valuable case in foreshadowing how these dynamics may unfold over the coming decades elsewhere in Asia.

From the mid-2000s onward, as discomfort grew on the ground among citizens, the government responded through a campaign to 'differentiate' between citizens and noncitizens in terms of benefits, subsidies and access to public services. Articles in *The Straits Times* date the beginnings of the differentiation policy to Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's promise, upon taking office in 2004, to 'treat citizens better, though he also stressed that PRs should not be made to feel unwelcome' (Khalik 2010). Various sorts of differentiation and benefits exclusive to citizens existed before 2004 and in the few years following many new, relatively small differentiations appeared, such as enhanced parental leave for legally married parents whose children were citizens.[13] But it was not until late 2009 that an aggressive campaign of 'differentiation' really got under way (Hussain 2009). Over the period of a year, 'differentiation' or the withdrawal of benefits, subsidies and general public services from noncitizens became seen as a general policy to be applied across all sectors of the civil service.[14]

Government ministries and other bodies rolled out the following changes between late 2009 through 2010: In December 2009, the Ministry of Education announced a plan to triple school fees for children with permanent residency to as much as $853 per year while raising fees to between $4000 and $6000 per year for 'foreign' students.[15] Overall, these changes would affect 60,000 children or 12% of Singapore's preuniversity students.[16] In January 2010, the Ministry of Health proposed further widening the gap in healthcare subsidies between permanent residents (PRs) and citizens, which had first been introduced three years earlier (Khalik 2010). In 2007, the subsidized rate for PRs had been reduced by 5% and eliminated altogether for noncitizens and non-PRs (Hussain 2009). Prior to 2007, no difference in subsidized rates existed between citizens and noncitizens. In February 2010, polytechnics and Institutes of Technical Education (ITEs) announced larger fee hikes for noncitizens (Oon 2010). The following month, the government introduced further restrictions on PRs in the government-managed Housing Development Board (HDB) real estate market, which makes up most of the housing available in Singapore.

A *Straits Times* report in February 2010 summarized various reforms, as well as reiterating the range of 'perks' and subsidies already available only to citizens and in place long before the differentiation campaign of 2009–2010, including a 'baby bonus' (a cash handout given on the birth of a child), childcare subsidies, a parenthood tax rebate, new HDB flats at less than market value, resale market housing grants of $30,000–40,000, CPF (pension fund) and Medisave top-ups, Edusave scholarships for students, New Singapore Shares and financial aid for low-wage workers (Oon 2010). Throughout 2010, the differentiation campaign continued in various forms. At the end of August 2010, a $9000 bonus was announced for active National Service Men (compulsory military service, which accounts for most male Singaporeans between their late teens and mid-30s). While second-generation PRs are required to perform National Service (NS), the bonus was announced as a distribution only for citizens (Chang 2010). In September 2010, the Singapore Police Force announced that in line with the 'differentiation' policy it would stop issuing Certificates of No-Criminal Conviction (CNCC) to noncitizens, which are required by some countries for immigration and some employers when hiring.[17]

These policy changes for the most part did not convey additional benefits to citizens (with important exceptions, such as the $9000 NS bonus). Rather, they consisted mainly of withdrawing subsidies and services or increasing fees and taxes on noncitizens. But by

doing so, they highlighted a state-led transfer of resources from noncitizens to citizens. For example, the minister of health estimated that the reductions in subsidies to noncitizens would amount to a savings of $7 million a year. *The Straits Times* reported that these monies would be 'channeled to more Singaporeans' (Khalik 2010). Similarly, the $9000 NS bonus was described not merely as a show of appreciation to men in uniform, but as 'a move to show that citizens come first' (Chang 2010).

Substantively and discursively, the policies of the differentiation campaign reinforced both liberal and communal notions of citizenship in Singapore. By emphasizing the 'perks' of citizenship, these policies reinforced the sense of citizenship as a valuable possession; something that those holding Singapore citizenship should feel grateful for and see as valuable to themselves as individuals. During this same period, the (neo)liberal sense of citizenship as a valuable possession to be acquired was further underscored by well-publicized cases of high-profile individuals taking up Singaporean citizenship, such as the Chinese film superstars Gong Li and Jet Li. Simultaneously, the differentiation campaign emphasized the exclusivity of citizenship and sharpened the communal, symbolic boundary between citizens and noncitizens. The campaign was not about rational economic choices. If anything, these moves were portrayed as economically risky, as they might drive away both job-creating corporate foreign talent and low-cost labor leading to wage and price inflation. Rarely if ever was it argued that Singapore could not afford the public goods and services being withdrawn from noncitizens; only in some cases that they were in short supply.

The 2011 General Election

As foreshadowed by the differentiation policy, the 'influx of foreigners' was a central issue of the 2011 election campaign. Immigration was not the only issue nor was it always first among Singaporeans' concerns. Polling by *The Straits Times* found foreign migrants *per se* did not rank as highly for voters as concerns around housing and the rising cost of living (Chang 2011). Many Singaporeans were at pains to state that they were not xenophobic, that their irritation was not aimed at foreigners but at government policies and that Singapore remained an open, multicultural, multiracial society. Nevertheless, the issue of foreign workers and immigration was conspicuous throughout the run-up to the election. I would argue that it was more central than the aforementioned, published poll numbers suggest.[18] The immigrant influx was at the center of all other issues. Immigration was seen as a driving cause of the rising cost of living, low wages, unaffordable and limited housing, limited hospital beds, overcrowded public transportation and other 'social ills.'

Six opposition parties contested against PAP incumbents island-wide with only one uncontested constituency.[19] More often than not, particularly in everyday discussions and also in the media, these parties were portrayed as 'the Opposition.' While the press focused on various personalities among the opposition, little discussion took place in terms of the substance of different parties' platforms and policies. In fact, the parties put forward substantially different proposals with regard to immigration and foreign workers. The significance of these differences was not merely in the prescriptions they offered. More fundamentally, the approaches of different parties, including the PAP, suggest different modes of conceptualizing citizenship.

In analyzing the individual proposals and overall approach of the different parties, I argue that they map onto different liberal, communal and social modalities of democratic citizenship. The ways in which they map onto these ideal types is far from perfect. Moreover, I am not arguing nor suggesting that the PAP or opposition parties had these

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modalities explicitly in mind. Rather, my project here is to make these implicit, grounded and contested modalities of citizenship explicit through this analysis, in order that their implications can be brought more clearly into the arena of public discourse in Singapore and elsewhere.

As detailed above, the PAP's pragmatic policy shifts during the post-1997 period exhibit affinities with both liberal and communal citizenship, though PAP discourse with its emphasis on duties, obligations and privileges of citizenship, as opposed to a rights-oriented discourse, is also compatible with social citizenship. With regard to the opposition parties, I focus on four parties that spelled out the clearest policies on citizenship and immigration. The proposals and vision for Singapore of both the WP and Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) implied a notion of social citizenship. By contrast, the platforms and rhetoric of the RP and Singapore People's Party (SPP) offered a strongly communal vision of citizenship. In terms of actual governance, the pragmatically oriented PAP has exhibited all three modalities of democratic citizenship to one degree or another over its decades-long rule of Singapore.

Through its policies over the decade prior to the 2011 General Election, the PAP shifted course from a liberal, open immigration policy to an emphasis on differentiation. At mid-decade, concerned with declining economic and population growth, the PAP encouraged immigration and supported businesses in importing foreign labor, including more opportunities for foreigners to occupy middle-income levels through introduction of an 'S-Pass,' which filled the gap between Work Permits for the lowest paid workers and Employment Passes for the highest paid. In the latter part of the decade, the government began to tighten its immigration policies and launched the 'differentiation' campaign detailed above.

Opposition parties responded to this environment in two ways. One was to call for greater limits on the inflow of migrant labor and immigration. The SDP, for example, was most explicit in calling for a rejection of the government's 6.5 million population target. Similarly, the WP explicitly called for slower population growth that would not overburden the country's housing and transportation infrastructure. The other response of opposition parties to the previous decade's rising tide of immigration and migrant labor was to call for greater 'differentiation' and restrictions on access that noncitizens living in Singapore would have to public services, housing, education and other public goods. Some of these proposals clearly outlined ways in which to extract greater surplus value from migrant and immigrant labor and funnel that surplus for the benefit of citizens.

The RP and SPP proposed policies aimed at differentiating and imposing additional taxation on foreign labor, which in turn would be used to subsidize and benefit citizens in various ways. The RP, in its rhetoric, was arguably the most passionately anti-immigrant party in the elections. At a rally in the West Coast constituency, for example, one of its speakers railed against immigrants from the Philippines, China and India taking away jobs from Singaporeans. In an impassioned voice, drawing one of the largest cheers from the crowd, he questioned, 'Do you think these foreigners are going to defend Singapore? Or are they going to destroy it?'[20]

The RP's manifesto listed 19 points including a 'requirement for new citizens and PRs to do NS (National Service) or pay a lump sum tax instead.'[21] The manifesto also called for 'privatization of (two government-linked companies) and distribution of equity to Singaporean citizens of more than five years standing,' which was the only proposal in any party manifesto explicitly differentiating between new and old citizens, rather than simply between citizens and noncitizens.

The SPP, while not as vitriolic as the RP in its anti-immigrant campaign rally rhetoric, spelled out the most extractive policy recommendation aimed at drawing on the surplus value created by noncitizens in the work force in order to cross-subsidize the welfare of Singapore citizens. The SPP policies included a proposed a 17.5% flat tax on the employment of foreigners. The justification for the tax was that companies must contribute 16% into Singaporean employees' CPF (pension fund), making citizens more expensive to employ. The tax on foreign workers, however, would not go toward the pensions of the noncitizens, rather 'this 17.5% tax collected from skilled foreign labor and EP holders can be collected under a fund paying for skills-upgrading subsidies for the local Singapore citizen.'[22]

In addition to policies aimed at taxing migrant labor in order to enhance subsidizes and benefits from government coffers for citizens, restricting access to property ownership by noncitizens was another central tenet in many opposition manifestos. In Singapore, public or HDB housing makes up over 80% of the total housing market. Most of the opposition political parties proposed to further restrict noncitizens' already limited access to the HDB housing market. The SPP, for example, called for 'an immediate moratorium on sale (of resale public housing) to permanent residents.'[23] The WP manifesto recommended that 'permanent residents (PRs) should only be allowed to buy resale flats if they have been PRs for at least 3 years.'[24]

In contrast to RP, SPP and other parties' calls for ever-greater differentiation between citizens and noncitizens, both the SDP and the WP (apart from the resale flat restriction mentioned above) eschewed calls to place greater taxes or restrictions on noncitizens living in Singapore. Rather, their platforms focused on limiting immigration in order to push up wages as well as a 'Singaporean first' policy aimed at requiring companies to prove that Singaporean workers were not available before hiring foreign workers. Throughout its manifesto, the SDP placed strong emphasis on implementing a minimum wage (a policy espoused by numerous other parties and explicitly opposed during the campaign period by the PAP). Although not explicit on the point, the SDP's manifesto implied that a minimum wage would apply to the entire workforce, citizens and noncitizens, in stating that a minimum wage 'will make businesses more judicious in employing cheap foreign labour and force them to upgrade the workforce.'[25] Similarly, the WP Party manifesto repeatedly stated sentiments to the effect that 'WP is not an anti-immigrant party. We welcome immigrants who contribute to the economic vibrancy, diversity and future population growth of our nation. However, we believe that the rate of immigration should not exceed the capacity of the country's infrastructure and the comfort level of the local population.'[26]

Democracy, society and competing modalities of citizenship

Contrary to some expectations, including opposition party warnings that the differentiation policies would ease after the 2011 General Election, the government's reaction to the election results has been in large part a continuation and expansion of 'differentiation' policies. Prominent examples include an extra tax imposed on property purchases by noncitizens, further fee hikes for schools, enhancing the privilege citizens enjoy in selecting primary schools for their children and a further reduction in the PR healthcare subsidy rate. Rhetorically, the issue of the foreign influx has remained prominent in Singapore as well. The Prime Minister's August 2012 National Day Rally Speech, the most important annual political speech in Singapore, focused on how foreigners would be handled and how the government would take care of citizens. And

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prominent incidents pitting Singaporeans against non-Singaporeans have made headlines in the news and on the Internet.

Historical, political-economic and cultural-ideological contexts within which modalities of citizenship are grounded play an important role in how they intersect with one another. In Singapore, citizenship debates unfold in an emphatically modern civic-national context. The main reason for Singapore's split from Malaysia in 1965 was a dispute over citizenship, the assertion of Malay supremacy and institutionalization of Malay (or *bumiputera*) privilege (Cheah 2002, 98–102). *Bumiputera* (literally 'princes of the earth') refers to the status of Malays and other indigenous groups in Malaysia in contrast to Chinese, Indians and others, who are considered perpetual '*pendatang*' (immigrants), even after many generations in Malaysia.[27] Ong (2006, 192) notes that Singaporeans have felt, particularly in the early 2000s, that they were made 'second-class citizens' in their own country, drawing on a discourse of 'reverse *bumiputeraism*,' seeing foreigners as given special treatment at the expense of natives. Ironically, given Singapore's historical foundations, the recently intensified differentiation policy is a shift toward institutionalizing a nativist neo-*bumiputeraism*, through ever-sharper distinctions between the privileges of the 60–65% of the population who are citizens over and against the 35–40% who are not.

Citizenship in Singapore has by no means been reduced to simple communal, let alone ethno-racial sensibilities. It remains possible to acquire Singaporean citizenship. Despite some calls to distinguish between 'new citizens' and 'native born citizens,' the government has not done so. The path to citizenship, however, has become narrower. In the wake of the sharp curtailment of PR permits granted from 2009 onward, between 2010 and 2011, the absolute number of PRs dropped for the first time in Singapore's history, from 541,000 to 532,000. The greatest expansion in the population between 2010 and 2011 was among 'nonresidents,' who grew in number by 89,400 and from 25.7% to 26.7% of the population. While citizens increased in absolute numbers by 26,500, they continued to drop as a percentage of the population from 63.6% to 62.8%, whereas in 2000, citizens made up 74.1% of the population.[28] With fewer PRs and more people living in Singapore than ever before as 'nonresidents' (noncitizens and non-PRs), an even wider substantive gap between citizen and noncitizen status has opened up.

Despite the discursive dominance of liberal and communal senses of citizenship, a sense of social citizenship has some currency in Singapore's public sphere as well. Returning to Esposito and the concept of *communitas* or the social, founded not in sameness but exchange across difference, social citizenship implies a recognition of interdependency and a broader view of 'Singapore society' than one confined to those who carry formal citizenship or are defined in narrow albeit modern nationalist terms. Among opposition parties, the policies advanced by the SDP and WP were largely embedded in a concept of social citizenship. Despite sharing the same 'Singaporeans first' rhetoric found across the political spectrum and calling for limits on the growth of the foreign migrant population, both the SDP and WP advanced policies that would improve conditions for all those living and working in Singapore, not merely citizens. Implicitly, most, if not all, SDP and WP policies, such as minimum wage laws, cut against the grain of the PAP's 'differentiation' policies as well as the more radically communal and expropriating policies espoused by other opposition parties.

Certain high-profile, civil society groups concerned with social issues promote an ethos of social citizenship as well. For example, Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2), which is among the most prominent civil society group working with low-wage migrant

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workers, portrays the migrant workers' role in Singapore as contributing to and deserving of consideration within Singapore society:

> Migrant workers are the hidden backbone of our society. They build our award winning architecture, keep our streets clean and help raise our children … They deserve fairness, dignity and respect. At TWC2, it is our mission to build … a society that recognizes and values the important contribution they make to our households, economy and country.[29]

Moreover, despite its pragmatic adoption of both (neo)liberal and communally oriented policies toward citizenship over the past two decades, the PAP's neo-Confucian principles have long contained a sense of social citizenship emphasizing duty and responsibility toward others.[30]

Conclusion

Singapore's recent experience, particularly around the 2011 General Election, highlights competing if largely implicit modalities of democratic citizenship. In a liberal mode, citizenship is thought of and practiced as something owned by an individual – a form of individual property that conveys certain entitlements to the person holding it. It is a collectable, obtainable property. Individuals may inherit this property through birth, earn it through residence, achieve it through skill or merit or in some cases seemingly purchase it through schemes that offer citizenship to high-net-worth individuals who invest or purchase property in a country.[31] In a communal mode, citizenship is treated as a property or quality of people, based on classification or typology and signaled discursively in rhetoric of 'us' against 'them' (cf. Lee 2012). While these modalities of citizenship are not incompatible, they are distinct and can be at odds with one another. Singapore's liberalization of citizenship in the 1990s and early 2000s – both *de jure* liberalization in extending citizenship to 'highfliers' and highly skilled immigrants as well as *de facto* liberalization in extending various benefits of citizenship to transnational migrants – was met by a backlash and recalibration of government policy, shifting discourse and practice toward communal citizenship.

The interplay between (neo)liberal-individualist and communal values mutually work to deny the obligation (*munis*) of the social; and thus are mutually at odds with the modality I have called social citizenship. (Neo)Liberalism denies the individual's obligation to others; recall Margaret Thatcher's famous comment that there is no such thing as 'society,' there are only individuals. Communalism denies obligation to others on the basis of categorical exclusion – we are only ethically responsible to 'people like us'; echoing Agamben's (1998) influential discussion of '*homo sacer*,' those who are excluded from ethical consideration. Both neoliberal and communal citizenship are potentially divisive, but appealing. Neoliberalism offers opportunity, based on individual merit or at the very least, individual wealth. Communalism, based on categorical membership, offers entitlement and belonging without obligation. Social citizenship – *communitas* – offers debt and obligation; a relationship with others built on *nothing* in common.[32] Neoliberalism and communalism speak to self-interest, either of the individual or the group. Social citizenship (*communitas*) speaks to our ethical relationships and obligations to others.

The modalities of citizenship found in Singapore have some resemblance to the notions of citizenship that Stack (2012) finds among his informants in Mexico. Like Stack, I am arguing for an understanding of citizenship both grounded in local discourses and conceptualized beyond the state. For Mexico, Stack (2012, 872–873) argues that a notion of 'civil sociality' – resonating with what I term social citizenship – was particular salient

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among his informants. In the case of Singapore, the notion of social citizenship or civil sociality is muted by both (neo)liberal and communal discourses (cf. Ho 2006; Sun 2012; Teo 2011). The importance of grounded-theoretical work is to develop understandings of citizenship that resonate with local sensibilities. In the case of Singapore, and much of the rest of transnational, globalizing, postcolonial Asia, the imperative to develop autonomous politics remains strong, raising both practical and conceptual problems when the 'globalization' of citizenship is theorized overwhelmingly from liberal, Western points of departure (e.g., Bauböck 1994; Brysk and Shafir 2004; Kivisto and Faist 2007; Joppke 2010; Soysal 1994). By grounding our analysis in local discourses and understandings, whether in Mexico (Stack 2012), Singapore (Ho 2006; Montision 2012; Sun 2012) or elsewhere (e.g., Chang 2012; Ho 2011; Kashiwazaki 2013; Kim 2012; Lee 2012; Miller-Idriss 2006; Seol 2012; Tseng and Wu 2011), we develop '(theoretical) imaginings arising from specific spatial and historical locations … as part of a new universal enterprise of knowledge building' (Goh B.L. 2012, 90). The objective is for social theory – in this case of citizenship – to be both locally relevant and translocally comparative.

Various critical thinkers, such as Chua Beng-Haut in Singapore, have sought ways to conceptualize a nonliberal or communitarian but nevertheless democratic polity. Singapore is often criticized for not meeting various standards of liberal democratic governance.[33] Yet, the government maintains a high degree of legitimacy among the population based on pragmatism, efficacy and efficiency. Criticism of PAP governance from a liberal, individualist rights-based perspective is frequently seen as a form of neocolonial practice and anathema to building a strong postcolonial, national society. While democracy has become a strong international norm, at least insofar as state and government legitimacy is tied to the welfare of the people governed – i.e., the *demos* – discursively and practical defining that '*demos*' or citizenry remains an ongoing process. Through an analysis of discourse and practice in Singapore, I have argued that it is not enough to distinguish a 'social' or argue for responsibility to 'society' over and above liberal-individual interests. Communitarian analysis needs to recognize the distinction and consequences between the communal and social (*communitas*) in conceiving and practicing democratic citizenship.

Notes

1. Kivisto and Faist (2007, 13–14) highlight the important relationship between democracy and citizenship: 'citizenship cannot be conceived without its twin sibling: democracy.' Contests over modalities of citizenship are closely related to struggles over forms of democratic governance, in Singapore and elsewhere (e.g., Benhabib et al. [2013], who focus on modalities of democratic governance, rather than citizenship *per se*). The relationship between the discourses of citizenship outlined in this article and emergent democratization of Singapore's politics is an important issue, but one that cannot be fully explored here.
2. My analysis here can be seen as an extension of Crowley (1998), who argues that the social basis of citizen is taken-for-granted in the classic and influential work of T.H. Marshall and that making it explicit is necessary for conceptualizing a 'post-national' notion of citizenship. See also Yalçin-Heckmann (2011).
3. The point of Ong's critique is that neoliberal transnationalism is undermining traditional notions of national citizenship, in which all citizens should be treated equally under the law (sovereignty) within a uniform and specified zone (territory) of a singular nation-state.
4. But see also, Ong (1996) for her critique of the racialization of citizenship in the USA.
5. Chua distinguishes his conceptualization of communitarian democracy from that of Etzioni, which Chua argues is still essentially grounded in rights-based liberal ideology; whereas Chua's aim is to conceptualize a communitarian democracy which is not tied to liberalism (see Chua 2010, 200–201; cf. Etzioni 2007).

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6. Esposito (2010, 4–5) traces this aspect of the analysis to Mauss's (1967) analysis of gift exchange.
7. Modality in Giddens' sense corresponds roughly to Brubaker's (1992) use of 'cultural idioms' of citizenship. A 'modality' is not, however, a grand and historically fixed idiom in the sense that Brubaker proposes cultural idioms of French civic citizenship and German ethno-national citizenship. In direct contrast to Brubaker, I am arguing that these three competing modalities – or ways of thinking about citizenship – all exist in Singapore's political discourse (cf. Joppke 2010, 19–20).
8. *The Straits Times*, published by Singapore Press Holdings has long been considered Singapore's paper of record; its main competitor is *TODAY*, a free daily published by MediaCorp beginning in the early 2000s. By circulation, these are the two most widely read newspapers in Singapore.
9. For more detailed discussions of Singapore politics and nuanced insights in to particular actors based on first-hand interviews and other methods, see for example: da Cunha (2002, 2012) and Kamaludeen and Turner (2013) for analysis of the 2011 General Election and democratic developments in Singapore.
10. "A New Chapter and a Time for Healing," *TODAY Online*, May 8, 2011 (accessed May 15, 2011).
11. Singapore Elections: http://www.singapore-elections.com/ (accessed May 15, 2011).
12. "Distinct Shift in Political Landscape, Says PM Lee," *TODAY Online,* May 8, 2011 (accessed May 15, 2011).
13. See http://www.mom.gov.sg/employment-practices/employment-rights-conditions/leave-and-holiday/Pages/childcare-leave.aspx.
14. *TODAY*, September 14, 2010.
15. 'Foreign student' is a complex category in Singapore. It includes students who are sent to study in Singapore by families in China, Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia and elsewhere. It also includes children living in Singapore on dependent passes, whose parents are Employment Pass holders or whose parents are spouses of Singaporean citizens living in Singapore on Long-Term Social Visit Passes.
16. Jeremy Au Yong, "School fee Changes for Non-S'poreans," *The Straits Times*, December 21, 2009; Leow Si Wan and Yen Feng, "School Fee Hike Reasonable to Most," *The Straits Times*, December 23, 2009; Teresa Tan, "Bride and Gloom," *The Straits Times*, March 19, 2011.
17. *TODAY*, September 14, 2010.
18. In his detailed analysis of the 2011 General Election, da Cunha (2012, 24), similarly argues that the 'huge influx of foreigners' was an issue of greater significance on the ground than published poll numbers suggested.
19. Parties Contesting the 2011 General Election: People's Action Party (PAP), National Solidarity Party (NSP), Reform Party (RP), Singapore People's Party (SPP), Singapore Democratic Alliance (SDA, which was a two party coalition of the Singapore Malay National Organization and Singapore Justice Party), Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) and Worker's Party (WP). Prior to the election, the PAP held incumbency in all but two single-member constituencies.
20. Reform Party Rally, Clementi Stadium, 1 May 2011.
21. Reform Party, Election Manifesto, http://thereformparty.net/voting-rp/election-manifesto/ (accessed May 13, 2011).
22. Influx of Foreigners: Singapore People's Party, http://www.spp.org.sg/foreign-immigrants/ (accessed May 13, 2011).
23. Public Housing: Singapore People's Party, http://www.spp.org.sg/public-housing/ (accessed May 13, 2011)
24. The Workers' Party, *Toward a First World Parliament: Manifesto 2011*, p. 40.
25. Singapore Democratic Party, Foreign Workers, http://ge2011.yoursdp.org/solution/73/foreign-workers (accessed May 14, 2011).
26. The Workers' Party, *Toward a First World Parliament: Manifesto 2011*, p. 26.
27. A similar situation can be found, for example, among ethnically Korean and Chinese populations in Japan.
28. National Population and Talent Division, *Population Brief 2011* (2011); the published figures are rounded to hundreds.
29. TWC2 website, http://twc2.org.sg/getinvolved/donate/ (accessed November 11, 2011).

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30. Chua (1999) for instance quotes Lee Kuan Yew succinctly: 'By Confucianist, I mean duty to friends and family.'
31. One of many post-2011 GE policy changes was to substantially modify such a scheme in Singapore, which had offered PR status on the basis of investment rather than residence.
32. Esposito (2010) provides an extended argument regarding the absence and nothingness – the unbridgeable gap – between self and other upon which and across which *communitas* or (in my words) the social is constructed through practice.
33. For example, Freedom House, http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2011/singapore.

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