

PART IV

Society



Goh Chok Tong on Society

“Race relations are always sensitive in a multi-racial society. I do not want racial riots ever to take place again in Singapore, either through our own stupidity or through spill-over effects from outside. Rather than sweeping sensitive problems under the carpet, we discuss them openly but sensitively and constructively, at the right time and in the proper context.”

~ *National Day Rally Speech, 1998*

“To produce for world markets, and to be a successful knowledge-based economy, we need intellectual capital. In the information age, human talent, not physical resources or financial capital, is the key factor for economic competitiveness and success. We must therefore welcome the infusion of knowledge which foreign talent will bring. Singapore must become a cosmopolitan, global city, an open society where people from many lands can feel at home.”

~ *National Day Rally Speech, 1997*

Navigating Transnationalism: Immigration and Reconfigured Ethnicity

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Tonkichi restaurant is situated on the fourth floor of Isetan, a Singapore branch of one of Japan's largest international department stores. The facade evokes a Tokyo storefront with a wood-tile overhang above the entrance, red-dyed drapes screening the door, and a brightly lit window display of delicately arranged plastic sushi rolls and bowls of plastic ramen noodles. At midday on a Sunday, the restaurant is crowded with young families. The patrons order from a menu in English and Japanese. At various tables, customers converse with one another in Japanese and English, as well as Chinese and other languages. While waiting for their meals, some customers browse through one of several local Japanese-language newspapers available at the entrance.

On a clear day, patrons of Tonkichi sitting by the long window opposite the entrance can look down over a bright, bustling intersection. Four stories down and catty-corner across the road, groups of women picnic in a large open green space adjacent to the Orchard Mass Rapid Transit station. The women share a variety of home-cooked Filipino dishes and snacks purchased from the nearby Lucky Plaza shopping mall. They laugh and joke with each other in Tagalog, Ilocano, and other Filipino dialects. Some call up friends on their mobile phones, inviting them to join the picnic at the *Gulong-Gulong*, the Filipino term they use to refer to this large grassy "rolling-rolling" patch of land. The dressed-up women are busy taking pictures of each other or recording videos of impromptu singing performances. Others play cards, with small bills furtively changing hands. While the vast majority of picnickers are women, a few men courteously accompany the groups and keep them entertained. Those who do not seem to have found any company hang out around the periphery of the field.

Tonkichi restaurant and the *Gulong-Gulong* are located opposite each other across the intersection of Scotts Road and Orchard Road, at the heart of Singapore's internationally renowned shopping district. They exemplify the spatiality and contours of Singapore's evolving transnational ethnic landscape. The emergence of this new



Sunday picnic near Lucky Plaza, 1998

social landscape illustrates the interactions between the state's governance guided by a neoliberal logic and migrant desires and practices in search of livelihoods. Neoliberal governance, as a form of state management, emphasises optimisation and flexibility; it is a way in which a state adjusts political and social spaces in response to the order of global capital.¹ The Singaporean state has exemplified this kind of neoliberal governance since the 1990s, when the "survival" of the nation subtly shifted focus from ethnic harmony to economic excellence as the future of the nation became deeply intertwined with the processes of globalization, and the competitiveness of the nation came to rely on the marketability of its inhabitants.

In this essay, we consider two distinct but closely related features of Singapore in the last decade of the 20th century and early years of the 21st century. Both are related to the flow of migrants into and through the national territory and port-city of Singapore. The first issue we discuss is the implications of these migrant flows for the governance of Singapore, which is simultaneously a nation-state and a transnational municipality. Second, we consider the implications of recent migration at a social level, in the reconfiguration of ethnic diversity in Singapore. While the first issue is primarily one of governance and the latter sociological, in practice each is bound up with the other. Governance, especially policies on immigration and citizenship, plays a large role in shaping the migrant flows that reconfigure Singaporean society, while a reconfigured society, especially in the context of transnational globalisation, requires the state to negotiate the competing demands of national and transnational populations.

During the 1990s, Singapore grew from a population of three million to four million, despite having what the government construed as an alarmingly low, below-replacement-level birth rate. By the turn of the century, nearly a fifth of the population was neither citizens nor permanent residents. During Goh Chok Tong's years as prime minister, given the realities of globalisation, his administration had to balance the concerns of the nation with the practices of transnational municipal governance.

Table 1. Population of Citizens, Permanent Residents and Others

| Year | Total Population (Millions) | Citizens and Permanent Residents (Thousands) | Citizens and Permanent Residents (Percentage) | Others (Thousands) | Others (Percentage) |
|------------------|-----------------------------|--|---|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1970 (Census) | 2,074.5 | 2,013.6 | 97.06 | 60.9 | 2.94 |
| 1980 (Census) | 2,413.9 | 2,282.1 | 94.54 | 131.8 | 5.46 |
| 1981 | 2,532.8 | 2,324.4 | 91.77 | 208.4 | 8.23 |
| 1982 | 2,646.5 | 2,365.7 | 89.39 | 280.8 | 10.61 |
| 1983 | 2,681.1 | 2,406.2 | 89.75 | 274.9 | 10.25 |
| 1984 | 2,732.2 | 2,443.7 | 89.44 | 288.5 | 10.56 |
| 1985 | 2,736 | 2,482.6 | 90.74 | 253.4 | 9.26 |
| 1986 | 2,733.4 | 2,518.6 | 92.14 | 214.8 | 7.86 |
| 1987 | 2,774.8 | 2,553.9 | 92.04 | 220.9 | 7.96 |
| 1988 | 2,846.1 | 2,598.5 | 91.30 | 247.6 | 8.7 |
| 1989 | 2,930.9 | 2,647.6 | 90.33 | 283.3 | 9.67 |
| 1990 (Census) | 3,047.1 | 2,735.9 | 89.79 | 311.2 | 10.21 |
| 1991 | 3,135.8 | 2,795.5 | 89.12 | 341.3 | 10.88 |
| 1992 | 3,230.7 | 2,849.8 | 88.21 | 380.9 | 11.79 |
| 1993 | 3,313.5 | 2,904.5 | 87.66 | 409 | 12.34 |
| 1994 | 3,419 | 2,959.4 | 86.56 | 459.6 | 13.44 |
| 1995 | 3,524.4 | 3,013.5 | 85.5 | 510.9 | 14.5 |
| 1996 | 3,670.7 | 3,068.1 | 83.58 | 602.6 | 16.42 |
| 1997 | 3,796 | 3,123.4 | 82.28 | 672.6 | 17.72 |
| 1998 | 3,927.2 | 3,180 | 80.97 | 747.2 | 19.03 |
| 1999 | 3,958.7 | 3,229.7 | 81.58 | 729 | 18.42 |
| 2000 (Census) | 4,027.7 | 3,273.4 | 81.27 | 754.5 | 18.73 |
| 2001 | 4,138 | 3,325.9 | 80.37 | 812.1 | 19.63 |
| 2002 | 4,176 | 3,382.9 | 81.01 | 793.1 | 18.99 |
| 2003 | 4,186.1 | 3,438.1 | 82.13 | 748 | 17.87 |
| 2004 | 4,238.3 | 3,484.9 | 82.22 | 753.4 | 17.78 |
| 2005 | 4,341.8 | 3,543.9 | 81.62 | 797.9 | 18.38 |

Source: Singapore Department of Statistics, <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/keystats/hist/population.html>, accessed 19 June 2007.

Singapore's status as a "global city" in the post-colonial late 20th century entailed the emergence of a new ethnic landscape that did not replace, but added substantially to, the multi-ethnic schema of Chinese, Malays, Indians and Others (CMIO), through which Singaporeans and others have viewed their city and nation since its independence.

The Other 20 Per Cent

In 1990, just over 10 per cent of Singapore's population, or 311,200, were classificatory non-residents. By 2004, when Goh left office, the number had risen to 753,400 or over 17 per cent of the population. Even these figures illustrating a doubling of non-resident inhabitants are deceptively low, because 2003–2004 happened to be a trough year due in part to the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic. For the last seven years of Goh's premiership, the segment of the non-citizen, non-permanent resident population varied between 17 and 20 per cent of the population and reached as high as 812,000 individuals (Table 1). In all, Goh's administration oversaw a vast influx of immigration into the island nation.

The rise in the number and percentage of Singapore's "non-resident" residents has been under way since the country's founding, roughly doubling every decade from less than three per cent in 1970 to nearly 20 per cent at the turn of the century. In real terms, the migrant influx has transformed Singapore's ethnic landscape. In the national imagery, the country is still defined in terms of the CMIO complex, as a nation of Chinese, Malays, Indians and Others. But the everyday reality is that a Singaporean's experience is far more intricate. By 2000, the number of non-resident inhabitants nearly equalled the number of Malay and Indian citizens combined.

Even this 20 per cent of non-resident inhabitants underestimates the transformation of the population due to immigration. A further, very large category are permanent residents and, beyond that, naturalised citizens. During the 1990s, permanent residency was being granted to as many as 25,000 or more individuals each year.² According to the 2000 census, over 18 per cent of the citizen and permanent resident population were born outside of Singapore (the largest number being ethnic Chinese from Malaysia). Altogether, in 2000, migrants to Singapore accounted for approximately one-third of the total (resident and non-resident) population.

Balancing National and Transnational-Municipal Interests

Singapore is defined by two modes of polity, which as frameworks for governance are often at odds with each other. Since 1965, Singapore has been an independent nation-state. Singapore also continues to be the port city founded by Stamford Raffles and others in the early 19th century. As Singapore's regional importance grew through the subsequent century and a half, it became the inheritor of a millennium-old tradition of powerful Malacca Straits ports. During the Goh years, Singapore increasingly assumed the standing of a "global city". Air travel supplemented and intensified the effects of the sea port that make Singapore a connected node in regional and global systems of trade, travel, markets and migration.³

Most cities are governed as political entities subsumed within much larger nation-states. Their economies and social structures are perceived as encompassed by a larger "domestic" economy and national society. Singapore is a transnational municipality. Governance of Singapore entails all of the mundane details of municipal politics—from managing rush-hour traffic to negotiating residential construction—combined with necessary attention to transnational capital and labour markets. These

challenges of transnational municipal governance must be balanced with the mandate of representing and protecting the interests of a national citizenry. Among the most visible of these challenges for the Singapore government has been balancing transnational openness and national interests.

The growing awareness of migration into Singapore through the 1990s is reflected in Goh's National Day Rally speeches. These speeches lay out the state of the nation and the prime minister's national policy agenda. Through the first six years of Goh's premiership, it was only in 1993 that the "immigration of talent" featured in a significant way in the National Day Rally speech.⁴ The tone of the remarks in 1993 emphasised restrictions on immigration, such as the prohibition on Work Permit holders marrying Singaporeans, as much as the need to "attract talent into Singapore, to top up our natural increase and maintain the dynamism of our society".⁵ By contrast, from 1997–2002, the immigration of "global talent" featured in every speech.

Goh's speeches illustrate the government's efforts to strike a balance between urging openness to immigration while stressing that the government would always put the interests of Singaporean citizens first. In speeches during the second half of his administration, Goh placed greater emphasis on the need for his fellow citizens to accept the place of immigrants in society and signalled a variety of policy initiatives to ease restrictions on immigration into Singapore. In 1997, he suggested a need to change the rules that kept Singaporean women from sponsoring foreign husbands, opening up a "third level of talent" meaning immigration of skilled lower-wage middle-class workers, and reducing university fees paid by foreign students to make Singapore an attractive centre for education.⁶

In 1998, responding to the Asian financial crisis, Goh rebutted calls on the government to repatriate foreign workers in order to "save jobs for Singaporeans". He defended the foreign worker policy by pointing to the construction sector, which would come to a standstill without foreign workers, with negative consequences for the economy and society as a whole.⁷ The consistent message throughout Goh's addresses from 1997–2002 was that Singaporeans needed to welcome global talent, to avoid a protectionist attitude and instead accept that the implicit competition foreign immigrants embodied would ultimately benefit society as a whole.

Only in Goh's farewell speech in 2003 did the topic of global talent and immigrants again fade from prominence. While Singapore did comparatively well during the 1997–1998 Asian financial crisis itself, the economy was flagging in the aftermath of the crisis during the first years of the century. In Goh's 2003 speech, the only reference to foreign workers reflected this mood and the downturn in the immigrant population that matched the downturn in the economy. Goh praised the realism and adaptability of young Singaporeans who, rather than demanding high-flying jobs in tough times, were taking the places of "shampoo girls" from Malaysia and waiters from the Philippines.⁸

Graduated Sovereignty and Flexible Citizenship

The modern notion of citizenship carries implications of radical egalitarianism (all citizens are equal under the law) and sharply delineated boundaries of membership (one is either a citizen of a nation, with the full rights and responsibilities that implies, or one is not). States are presumed to be responsible to and representative of their citizens. Conversely, nation-states in theory do not govern, represent, nor have any responsibility toward non-citizens. But because the sovereignty of nation-states is defined primarily in terms of territory and because people regularly move across

nation-state boundaries, reality makes a hash of these simple notions of citizenship. Where states like Singapore offer the opportunity, individuals take advantage of regimes of “graduated sovereignty” and “flexible citizenship”.⁹ Common notions of national sovereignty imply a standard, undifferentiated governance of national populations. But Aihwa Ong argues that in response to globalisation, states practice graduated sovereignty, in which different parts of the population are subject to different forms of control and enjoy different sets of rights.¹⁰ Under these conditions, allegiance to governments or nations—namely, citizenship—is not fixed by birth but negotiated through social, economic and cultural capital. This is especially obvious in the case of a transnational municipality like Singapore.

As Goh emphasised in his 1998 National Day Rally speech, citizens—in the common sense of the word—form the core of Singapore society.¹¹ A concern for the welfare of citizens before all others was a consistent theme of Goh’s speeches.¹² But from the standpoint of governing a transnational municipality, rather than simply a nation-state, the Singapore government must attend to a broader range of subjects than citizens alone. In order to manage this mobile, transient population, the government oversees a regime of “graduated sovereignty”. In these terms, citizenship, or the relationship of individuals to the state, must be conceived more broadly than implied in common notions of citizenship in Singapore and elsewhere, especially when conditions of globalisation lead people to move across nation-state boundaries at an ever more rapid pace. Understanding Singapore solely in terms of its citizen population is an unwarranted sociological fiction.

Singapore’s system of transnational municipal governance entails engagement with subjects through a hierarchy of reciprocal rights and responsibilities. Citizens are at the pinnacle of this hierarchy, followed by permanent residents, employment pass holders, work permit holders, and a variety of more temporary visitors granted social visit passes and tourist, business, and similar visas. One objective of immigration policy, noted by Goh in 1993, is to draw qualified, talented individuals to the island, see them integrate into Singaporean society as permanent residents and eventually become citizens.¹³ In the latter half of Goh’s tenure, it became increasingly evident that Singapore’s success hinged on managing a flow of transient individuals rather than simply integrating immigrants into the citizenry.

Policies are aimed at attracting and managing two main groups—foreign talent and foreign workers. The bottom line in both cases is to drive Singapore’s competitiveness in a global political economy. The boon and bane of Singapore’s national economy is that it is dependent on international trade in goods and services and succeeds (or fails) primarily on the basis of human resources. Foreign or global talent is necessary, in Singaporean terms, to “top up” the labour pool at the high end of the labour market. In National Day Rally speeches, more than once Goh compared Singapore to New York City and Silicon Valley, noting that neither place could subsist on the talents of only those born there. Rather, they act as magnets for highly talented individuals from around the world. Singapore, thus, must follow a similar model. Foreign workers, on the other hand, are necessary at the bottom of the labour market for two reasons. In the context of rapid economic growth and expansion, they fill the “3D” positions—dirty, dangerous, difficult jobs—which many Singaporeans will not do.¹⁴ They also help to keep both wage and price inflation in check.

The primary means of the government to manage the flow of migrant labour is a graduated scheme of employment passes and work permits. Different types of documents, governed by different sets of rules and privileges, are geared toward migrants

entering the country with different skills and at different salary levels. Employment passes are held by foreign talent while foreign workers hold work permits. The former are differentiated into P1 for those earning \$7,000 per month and above; P2, for incomes of \$3,500 to \$7,000 per month; and Q1 passes, for incomes of \$2,500 to \$3,500. Following the P and Q passes, there is the S pass for foreign mid-level skilled workers (Goh's "third level of talent" proposed in 1997), who should earn \$1,800 minimum monthly income. Below the S pass are Work Permits for foreign workers and domestic workers. The former are granted to low-skill workers in specific sectors who come from "approved source countries".¹⁵ In the last category, foreign domestic workers enter Singapore under even more stringent controls.¹⁶

In addition to the graduated scope of freedoms and restrictions, the potential permanency of migrant experiences is mediated by these schemes as well. The P and Q pass holders are candidates for permanent residency and citizenship. Work permit holders and S pass holders, by contrast, are explicitly assumed to "only come here (to Singapore) to earn a decent living, go home and have some savings for their family".¹⁷ Although some may work for a decade or more in Singapore, they are not in general eligible for integration into the national citizenry, although they can apply for permanent residency.

The graduated sovereignty and flexible citizenship practices of the state's neo-liberal management of different populations have implications for Singapore's citizens as well. While they remain at the pinnacle of the country's formal hierarchy of political-economic rights, they do not live within an exclusive zone of state protection. Moreover, the discourse of a global city has reconfigured the imagination of the Singaporean body politic as well. In an influential passage of his 1999 National Day Rally Speech, Goh differentiated the Singapore citizenry between "cosmopolitans" who "speak English, are international in outlook, skilled in banking, information technology, engineering, science and technology and able to navigate comfortably anywhere in the world, (and) "heartlanders" (who) speak "Singlish", are parochial in interest and orientation, make their living within the country and play a major role in maintaining core values and social stability".¹⁸ Throughout the second half of Goh's administration, this division was used in a disciplinary discourse toward both heartlanders who, in the rhetoric, face competition from global forces, and cosmopolitans whose loyalties to Singapore were placed in question, given their potential for emigration. The fallout of the cosmopolitan-heartlander debate suggested that even citizens of the nation-state faced the harsh possibility of becoming an "excludable" population if not attuned to the global market of human capital.

The New Ethnic Landscape

At a social level, the influx of migrants to Singapore has visibly transformed the ethnic landscape. Ethnicity everywhere involves reading and interpreting the social landscape of a place. We "read" through the sights, sounds, and even smells that we encounter in everyday life.¹⁹ We interpret through culturally learned typologies. The typology of Chinese, Malay, Indian and Other continues to dominate public discourse in Singapore. But the sights, sounds and smells of Singapore no longer fit this typology so neatly. There have always been many "Others" in this port city, but since 1990 their number and visibility have grown significantly.

The emergence of various "ethnic" shopping malls offers the best example of the changing ethnic landscape in Singapore, with Lucky Plaza and Golden Mile Complex being the most widely known.²⁰ Lucky Plaza, situated in the heart of Orchard Road,

gained fame in the 1990s for being a “Little Manila”. Before one even steps inside, the “Filipinoness” of the place is marked by the crowds of Filipinas at the entrance. The majority are domestic maids. Within the building complex, especially from the third floor and above, the ambience and the commodities sold are very different from other shopping centres along Orchard Road. The shops are predominantly remittance centres, Filipino food outlets and small grocery stores selling “Pinoy” products such as music and movies. It is also the primary location where local and Manila-based Filipino newspapers can be bought (in contrast to local Japanese newspapers, distributed in approximately two hundred locations).²¹ For the Filipinos who frequent Lucky Plaza, the food they consume, the language they speak, the clothes they wear and the activities in which they participate embody the “authenticity” of their identity as Filipino migrant workers in Singapore.

Golden Mile Complex is located across town at the tail end of Beach Road, “where Singapore ends and another country begins”.²² Known as “Little Thailand”, this shopping complex is filled on Sundays as well with the aroma of spicy tom yam soup, loud Thai pop music, colourfully lit coffee shops, and hard-drinking Thai construction workers.²³

These two shopping centres are highly visible in Singapore’s urban scene because of the attention they have attracted with hundreds or even thousands of migrant workers congregating there every Sunday.²⁴ Consumption practices intersect with and embody expressions of Singapore’s evolving ethnic landscape in a multitude of other, lesser known sites from Peninsula Plaza—“Little Burma”—located in the City Hall area to “Little Africa”, a food court in Little India frequented by Nigerians and other African migrants.²⁵ These spaces of ethnic demarcation are less publicly visible as they involve smaller numbers of migrants and their locations are largely known only to their own community members.

Global economic disparities as well as Singapore’s policies of graduated sovereignty, illustrated most clearly in the employment pass and work permit scheme, influence the complex configuration of the new ethnic landscape. Migrants from less prosperous countries—Indonesia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Thailand, and others—overwhelmingly occupy the ranks of work permit holders, while those from Japan, Korea, North America, Europe and Australia are overwhelmingly employment pass holders. While there are, for example, many Filipino and Thai professionals working in Singapore, their numbers are dwarfed by those of their co-nationals employed as domestic and construction workers, who embody “Filipino” and “Thai” identity in the Singaporean landscape.

As these examples illustrate, the ethnic landscape of Singapore is configured in terms of spatial factors of dispersion and concentration, and cultural factors of visibility and invisibility. Dispersion and concentration are closely tied to the socio-economic and residential patterns of Singapore’s “new” ethnic communities. Low-skilled migrant workers, such as Filipinos, Thais and Bangladeshi workers in Little India and the Jurong area, tend to concentrate whereas professionals tend to disperse. Like other communities made up primarily of “foreign professionals”, gathering places of the large Japanese community are more dispersed and varied than those of less affluent migrants. While there is some concentration of sites of Japanese consumption in the Orchard, River Valley and other areas, there is no one, singular shopping centre or locale that defines “Japaneseness” in Singapore. Most Japanese in Singapore, like other foreign talent dominated expatriate communities, from Koreans, to Australians, to Poles, to Finns, have more money, more time and more means to try out different places to suit their consumption needs and to maintain a “cosmopolitan” lifestyle.

Others whose presence in Singapore appears more diffuse rather than concentrated include Chinese (variously from Malaysia, mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and elsewhere), Indians and Indonesians. The Chinese and Indian migrants who have come to Singapore in large numbers since the 1990s occupy a broad range of positions in the spectrum of work permit and employment pass holders. They are also among the most likely to “graduate” into permanent residency and citizenship, both because many desire it and because they are seen as most easily integrating into the CMIO polity. Indonesians, on the other hand, are predominantly domestic workers. Compared to their Filipina counterparts they generally have fewer rest days and lower salaries, and perhaps because of this have not generated as visible or uniquely Indonesian spaces of consumption. At the same time, while most Indonesian migrants share ethno-linguistic and religious affinities with Singapore’s Malay populace, their socioeconomic class and to some degree their gender have made them less likely candidates for graduation into permanent residency and citizenship.

Visibility and Invisibility of “New” Ethnic Communities

The striking complexity of Singapore’s evolving ethnic landscape lies not only in the sheer diversity of the population but in the layers of ethnic visibility (and invisibility) of its immigrants. Both Tonkichi and the *Gulong-Gulong*, for example, are famous within their own ethnic communities but remain largely unknown to each other. For the Japanese expatriates dining at a restaurant rated among the top ten in Singapore by a local Japanese newspaper, groups of women picnicking on an open patch of greenery is just a faraway view that they hardly pay attention to on a Sunday afternoon. For Filipinas who picnic and share home-cooked food, Tonkichi is just another fancy Orchard Road restaurant that serves overpriced food. From the street level of the *Gulong-Gulong*, it is not even visible.

The contrasting images and perceptions of these two places render a kind of visibility and invisibility specific to different communities. Tonkichi remains “invisible” to many shoppers along Orchard Road, especially those who are not Japanese. But it is highly prominent for those in the know. The *Gulong-Gulong*, on the other hand, is highly visible to everyone who passes by the intersection, yet it turns invisible in discursive representations of Singapore’s global cosmopolitanism. Similarly, in an account of Singapore’s “Orchardscape”, an influential work on the “portraits of places” that define the “history, community and identity of Singapore”, Lucky Plaza is largely overlooked in favour of more upscale landmarks, even though the authors’ survey finds it the third most cognitively salient landmark on Orchard Road among Singaporean citizens.²⁶

Modalities of visibility and invisibility are not restricted to ethnic place-making and status-related cosmopolitanism. Some ethnic communities are more or less visible than others even though they are of a similar socio-economic status. Visibility hinges on the ways in which different people are “read” as local or foreign, professional or non-professional, and on stereotyping practices that render individuals as belonging to particular communities. While Filipinas and Thais make their presence and identity highly visible by congregating in public shopping centres, *ang moh* (Caucasian) professionals are “racially” distinctive to almost everyone in this Asian-dominant society. By contrast, Japanese and Koreans are less recognisable at first sight, but their origins are read and identities assigned through dress, speech, and manners.

The least visible communities are those which blend into the predominant ethnic groups, creating inter-group invisibility, while still maintaining intra-group

differentiation. For instance, mainland Chinese and Indians from India can hardly be differentiated from Singaporean Chinese and Singaporean Indians by many non-Chinese and non-Indians. However, Chinese from Singapore and China and Indians from Singapore and India recognise each other as different and such differences can have substantial importance for relationships within the “Chinese” and “Indian” communities. The same is true for others, such as Poles, or Finns or Germans, who others more often than not perceive as undifferentiated *ang mohs*.

Because ethnicity is a matter of reading and interpreting signs of difference, in a culturally plural society not all members are attuned to the same signs. Misreadings are an everyday occurrence in Singapore as well, with more or less significant social and personal consequences, many of which have to do with the intersections of the relatively new immigrant ethnicities and socio-economic class hierarchies. For example, a common and personally troubling complaint of many South or Southeast Asian women, especially those whose children have noticeably lighter complexions than their own, is to be perceived in public spaces as their children’s maid and not their mother.

Conclusion

To understand Singapore as a polity, and the policies of the Goh and subsequent administrations in particular, it is crucial to understand the dual nature of Singapore as nation-state and transnational municipality. Over the course of the last century, the first form of polity—the nation-state—became a globally hegemonic mode of politics at multiple levels from international relations to subjective individual identity. In a world dominated by nation-states, Singapore and its citizens entered this mode of political existence in 1965, albeit somewhat reluctantly. But Singapore is simultaneously a “transnational municipality”, a term used to signify a polity operating simultaneously within and beyond the sphere of the nation-state, at the microscopic scale of street-level activity and macroscopic scale of global flows of culture, people, and things.²⁷ This dual nature of the Singaporean polity as it enters the new century defines many of its challenges and opportunities.

Singapore is an exemplary site of flexible accumulation, global flows and similar phenomena that theorists of post-nationalist globalisation have turned their attention to in recent years.²⁸ In this essay, we have sought to sketch a moving subject and provide a sense of the shifting social landscape of Singapore²⁹ and the ways in which Goh Chok Tong and his administration sought to shape and respond to it. For all the rhetoric of social stability with which Singapore is associated, as a transnational municipality it is inherently a space of transition and flux. For the inhabitants of this place, as well as for the government, the difficulty and the promise of Singapore lies in navigating its complex and evolving ethnoscape.

NOTES

1. Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006).
2. Goh Chok Tong, *Prime Minister’s National Day Rally Speech 1993* (Singapore: Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1993), p. 33, <http://stars.nhb.gov.sg/stars/javadjvu/djvuview.jsp?file=/stars/data/djvudoc/gctndr199308e.djvu&keyword=national%20day%20rally>.
3. Howard Dick, “Southeast Asia as an Open System: Geo-politics and Economic Geography”, in *Locating Southeast Asia: Geographies of Knowledge and Politics of*

- Space*, ed. Paul H. Kratoska, Remco Raben and Henk Schulte Nordholt (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2005).
4. Goh Chok Tong, *Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's National Day Rally Speech on 11 August 1991* (Singapore: Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1991), <http://stars.nhb.gov.sg/stars/public/viewPDF.jsp?pdfno=ND%20Rally%201991>(English).pdf.
 5. Goh Chok Tong, *Prime Minister's National Day Rally Speech 1993*, p. 40, <http://stars.nhb.gov.sg/stars/javadjvu/djvuview.jsp?file=/stars/data/djvudoc/gctndr199308e.djvu&keyword=national%20day%20rally>.
 6. Goh Chok Tong, *Prime Minister's National Day Rally Speech 1994* (Singapore: Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1994), pp. 28–39, <http://stars.nhb.gov.sg/stars/public/viewPDF.jsp?pdfno=gct19940821.pdf>.
 7. Goh Chok Tong, *Prime Minister's National Day Rally Speech 1998* (Singapore: Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1998), pp. 49–53, <http://stars.nhb.gov.sg/stars/public/viewHTML.jsp?pdfno=1998082302>.
 8. Goh Chok Tong, *Prime Minister's National Day Rally Speech 2003* (Singapore: Ministry of Information and the Arts, 2003), p. 31, <http://stars.nhb.gov.sg/stars/public/viewHTML.jsp?pdfno=2003081707>.
 9. Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999).
 10. *Ibid.*, pp. 215–6.
 11. Goh Chok Tong, *Prime Minister's National Day Rally Speech 1998*, p. 53.
 12. Goh Chok Tong, *Prime Minister's National Day Rally Speech 1997* (Singapore: Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1997), p. 39, <http://stars.nhb.gov.sg/stars/javadjvu/djvuview.jsp?file=/stars/data/djvudoc/gctndr199708e.djvu&keyword=national%20day%20rally>.
 13. Goh Chok Tong, *Prime Minister's National Day Rally Speech 1993*, pp. 40–1.
 14. Pattana Kitiarsa, “The ‘Ghosts’ of Transnational Labour Migration: Death and Other Tragedies of Thai Migrant Workers in Singapore”, in *Asian Migrations: Sojourning, Displacement, Homecoming and Other Travels*, ed. Beatriz P. Lorente, Nicola Piper, Shen Hsiu-Hua and Brenda S.A. Yeoh (Singapore: Asia Research Institute, 2005).
 15. The different sectors include construction, service, manufacturing, marine, and town council conservancy services. Different sectors recruit from different “approved source countries”.
 16. Foreign domestic workers are subject, for example, to more stringent English language requirements and regular tests for pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.
 17. *The Straits Times*, 13 September 1997.
 18. Brenda S.A. Yeoh, “Cosmopolitanism and its Exclusions in Singapore”, *Urban Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 12 (2004), pp. 2431–45.
 19. Kelvin E.Y. Low, “Ruminations on Smell as a Sociocultural Phenomenon”, *Current Sociology*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (2005), pp. 409–11.
 20. In a study of the rapid expansion of shopping malls in Singapore from the late 1970s and early 1980s, Sim Loo Lee speculated whether a stratification of “ethnically” distinct shopping malls would emerge, by which she imaged malls dominated by Chinese, Malay or Indian consumers. The emergence of this phenomenon based not on the “old” ethnic configuration of CMIO but on the “new” configurations of ethnicity in Singapore highlights the extent to which ethnic difference has lessened in salience among citizens while being culturally visible and elaborated for non-citizen “others”. See Sim Loo Lee, *Study of Planned Shopping Centers in Singapore* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1984).

21. In the early 2000s, at least two or three Filipino newspapers or magazines were produced and distributed in Singapore targeting the local Filipino community. However, these publications were not very economically viable, so they came and went. In the same period, Singapore had about half a dozen local Japanese newspapers, which were economically more viable and therefore had more stable production histories. Korean, Burmese and numerous other newspapers or magazines targeting "new" ethnic communities were produced during the same period as well.
22. Tommy Wee, "Thai-dyed mile", *The Straits Times*, 14 September 2001.
23. T.Y. Chia, "Listen to the Thai's Speak: The Case of Golden Mile Complex" (Academic Exercise, Department of Geography, National University of Singapore, 2003); Patana Kitiarsa, "Village Transnationalism: Transborder Identities among Thai-Isan Workers in Singapore", paper presented at the Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting, Chicago, 2 April 2005.
24. Zhang Juan, "Ethnic Boundaries Redefined: The Emergence of the 'Permanent Outsiders' in Singapore" (Masters Thesis, Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore, 2005).
25. K.H. Chua, "Little Africa ... in little India", *The Straits Times*, 29 January 2006.
26. Henry W.C. Yeung and Victor R. Savage, "The Singaporean Image of the Orchard-scape", in *Portraits of Places: History, Community and Identity in Singapore*, ed. Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Lily Kong (Singapore: Times Edition, 1995); and "Urban Imagery and the Main Street of the Nation: The Legibility of Orchard Road in the Eyes of Singaporeans", *Urban Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (1996), pp. 473–94.
27. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
28. *Ibid.*; Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*; and Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*.
29. As an epilogue to this discussion, in mid-2006, the construction of a 55-storey commercial high-rise project began on the prime real estate of the *Gulong-Gulong*, displacing the Filipinas who had established it as a focal point of their community in Singapore. The project is being managed by a Japanese construction firm.