

11

Songs for the Nation: Migrant Pasts and Global Futures in Singapore

Kelvin E.Y. Low

He toils nameless and unheralded under the tropical sun during the rest of the year, one among thousands of foreign workers in Singapore. But yesterday, Mr Karu Gajarathi Raju's name rang out from the stage at The Float@Marina Bay, when he was announced the winner of Singapore's first-ever Migrant Workers Talent Quest.¹

Introduction

Singapore's inaugural 'Migrant Workers Talent Quest' was organised on 19 December 2010 by Migrant Workers Centre (MWC), a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO).² The contest coincided with International Migrants Day (18 December), which was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2000.³ According to the manager of MWC, the event was organised to 'recognise the contributions of migrant workers'.⁴ Moreover, the choice of location for the competition, Marina Bay platform – a floating stage that sits along the bank of the Singapore River, acting as a temporary stadium – was significant given that important events such as the 2010 Youth Olympic Games and Singapore's National Day Parade have been hosted there.⁵ Such a commemorative event may be read as an attempt to remember and to appreciate 'what they (migrant workers) have done and what they have contributed to Singapore's economy and society', as underscored by the guest of honour, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Manpower and Health, Hawazi Daipi.⁶

Although one might regard the event as an avenue through which foreign workers can be honoured, and hence remembered, for the work that they perform in a host country,⁷ acts of remembering their presence and work require further interrogation concerning the

degree to which migrant incorporation takes place at different social, political, and economic levels. In other words, how are foreign bodies perceived in the broader landscape of Singapore's development and progress, and to what extent can one argue that there exists a space of belonging for migrant communities in the nation state? As a corollary, a related question involves analysing the role of memory in incorporating foreigners within the national narrative of a country. How are memories of the nation's past selectively presented in relation to foreign communities, contextualised within Singapore's history as an immigrant country?

In this chapter, I analyse national day songs produced and disseminated in Singapore in its annual celebration of independence, given that this genre of songs has received scant attention concerning the ideology⁸ of constructing notions of belonging and home vis à vis migrant pasts and global futures. Through them, I reflect upon how memories of the nation are reproduced and, in the process, how migrants are presented within these songs. Recent studies have shed light on the relationship between songs, memory politics, and culture.⁹ The connections between memory, migration, and music have also been explored in such works as Boletsi's study on songs as migratory object in relation to national myths and the Balkan nations,¹⁰ and Nair's research on cultural memory and migrant displacement vis à vis *rai* music and Moroccan immigrants living in Spain.¹¹ These works illustrate how music becomes a significant cultural marker that warrants a closer inspection of the historical context with which music is produced, as well as its correlated political engagement, manoeuvring thus beyond 'music-immanent analysis'.¹²

Songs contain dual ideological purposes. First, songs supported and encouraged by the state act as ideological devices through which the building and maintenance of national identity can be pursued.¹³ As Adorno puts it, 'a country's music has become a political ideology by stressing national characteristics, appearing as a representative of the nation, and everywhere confirming the national principle'.¹⁴ On the other hand, songs also exhibit resistant elements that are highlighted in attempts to question the status quo of the country, such as state governance.¹⁵ In this respect, national songs may be regarded as political products¹⁶ that are harnessed either by state elites or others in the attempt to inculcate a constructed version of the nation's progress intended by the former, or to question the ruling elite's policies and legislations in the case of the latter. This chapter focuses on the former in an attempt to illustrate how memories of migrants and their work in Singapore have

been commemorated and highlighted in the interest of delineating a platform for which heritage can then be produced.

Furthermore, an analysis of music in relation to national identity, migration, and social memory needs to take into account both lyrics (through which intended meanings are conveyed) and visuals (as portraits of the migrant past). Drawing on both allows a more comprehensive look at how music and its manifest emotive sentiments are mobilised to present symbolic and affective nuances in the relationship between national identity and music.¹⁷ In order to argue for songs as products of memory-work, it is important to consider how a national narrative has been interwoven into music and its accompanying lyrics and visuals. In the context of Singapore, I suggest that national songs are underlined with a national narrative spanning the early years of Singapore through colonial, postcolonial, and present-day contexts. National narrative, as Yadgar has suggested, is a story through which a nation recounts itself, comprising a 'national', 'common' past, a structure which delineates individuals as a national collective, and a sense of a projected future.¹⁸ In other words, national narrative fundamentally refers to a nation's 'history, struggles, and mission'.¹⁹

In Singapore, national songs such as 'Count on Me Singapore', 'Stand Up for Singapore', 'We Are Singapore', and 'There's a Part for Everyone', have proliferated since the mid-1980s, released annually in conjunction with the national day celebrations in August. They are produced and promoted by the Psychological Defence Division of the Ministry of Communications and Information.²⁰ Apart from being sung in schools and at community events, these songs are also broadcast through television and radio, delivering messages of unity and loyalty so as to galvanise a sense of belonging to the nation. I show how through time the songs highlight the manner in which Singapore's migrants have paved the way towards the development of the nation. I will also address how notions of 'belonging' and 'home' have developed in relation to Singapore's growth as a cosmopolitan city in the last three decades. Heritage policies, in this context, are exemplified through songs that can be analysed sensorily, through both visual and aural representations that act as socio-political vehicles for articulating national identity and framing heritage production. Embedded within these processes are issues about how far migrants – from Singapore's past and present-day contexts – are either incorporated in connection with the productions of Singapore's memory, or excluded through policy measures that tend to discipline and control migrants as transient workers.

Singapore as an Immigrant Nation

Singapore is a polyglot, multinational nation. This city state has seen its share of overlapping diasporas²¹ comprising streams of sojourners from India, China, the Malay archipelago and other further places, ruled by a small group of European colonists in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries.²² As a British colony, founded in 1819 and established as a British trading port by Sir Stamford Raffles, Singapore's population grew exponentially from around 1000 in 1819 to over 100,000 by 1871,²³ passing the 200,000 mark at the turn of the twentieth century.²⁴ By 1965 when Singapore became an independent republic, the population count stood at approximately one and a half million.²⁵ Since the 1960s, Singapore has had a steady inflow of migrants arriving first from Malaysia, followed by immigrants from India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Thailand, Myanmar, Pakistan, and the Philippines by 1978, constituting other recognised sources of labour.²⁶ Based on the recent 'Report on Labour Force in Singapore, 2010'²⁷, released by the Ministry of Manpower, non-residents in the labour force amount to about one third of the total workforce population: 1,088,600 workers out of a total of 3,135,900. The make-up of non-Singaporeans working in the city state may be further distinguished through a spectrum which indicates differentiated ends of income, education, and skills qualifications.²⁸

As Rahman records, foreigners issued with a P pass (under the rubric of 'Employment Pass') are those who possess professional qualifications and seek to work in a capacity ranging from the professional and managerial, to the administrative.²⁹ These skilled professionals are also regarded as a primary category of permanent residents, and plausibly of Singapore's future citizens. In contrast, low-skilled workers are given a 'work permit' (WP) and the government's policy on this category of foreign manpower is more restrictive, managing this group as a temporary phenomenon through a 'use and discard' principle.³⁰ Workers who fail to carry their WP card with them face the risk of repatriation and of being barred from employment in Singapore.³¹ These legislative regulations translate into the use of such differentiating terms as 'foreign talent' and 'foreign worker'. The former are valorised as a pool of skilled manpower (*viz.* 'elites') who are to be persuaded to settle down in Singapore and be incorporated into its cosmopolitan endeavour,³² while the latter – used to describe the category of migrants who engage in low-waged unskilled work or semi-skilled contract labour, originating mainly from the region including Bangladesh,

India, Thailand, Burma, and China³³ – are merely instrumental in the sustenance of the economy, representing a pragmatic investment in human capital. As Velayutham notes, foreign talents are ‘a privileged group who are invited to partake in the national cosmopolitan project... [and are] encouraged to bring their families to Singapore, take up permanent residence and are even encouraged to become Singapore citizens’, while foreign workers ‘are not permitted to settle in Singapore or bring their families’ despite their contributions through the undertaking of manual and menial labour.³⁴ With this preferential distinction in mind, I show later, how both categories of foreigners have been incorporated into the ‘memoryscape’ of Singapore through gestural remembrances in different ways.

Migrant Incorporation, National Songs, and Gestural Remembrance

Migrant Beginnings, Growth and Development

In ‘This is My Land’ (*Sing Singapore* 1988), a celebration of migrant pasts, growth and development are evidently captured through the following lyrics:

This is my land, and island where I wander free
 Land of my birth where my heart longs to be
 Her friendly shores welcomed our fathers long ago
 My spirits soar as strength to strength I watch her grow
 Arise, awake, our land is calling strong and clear
 We will defend the isle we hold so dear
 We all belong to this nation so brave and strong
 This is our land
 O Singapore, We love you so

The reference to migrants who have arrived in Singapore in her early years is made at the point they, as ‘fathers’, are ‘welcomed’ many decades ago. The process of Singapore’s growth is likewise captured, but importantly, witnessing the growth of the country lends a sense of strength and heightened spirit. This leads to a further sentiment of belonging, where everyone (‘We all belong’) in Singapore – both migrants and citizens – can claim Singapore as ‘our land’. As an extension, the trope of migrant beginnings and concomitant belonging can similarly be discerned through the song ‘One People, One Nation, One Singapore’, which highlights, yet again, Singapore’s history of

immigration as a port that attracted migrants from the region and beyond:

We've built a nation with our hands
The toil of people from a dozen lands
Strangers when we first began, now we're Singaporean
Let's reach out for Singapore, join our hands forevermore
Chorus:
One people, one nation, one Singapore
That's the way that we will be forevermore
Every creed and every race, has its role and has its place
One people, one nation, one Singapore³⁵

The focus on Singapore's immigrant history is similarly captured in the music video of this song, where the opening scene – in sepia tones to present a picture of nostalgia and of reminiscence about the past – features migrant lightermen toiling on the Singapore River,³⁶ Indian coolies, Chinese rickshaw pullers,³⁷ and quick shots of shop houses in Chinatown (typically living quarters for migrants from all walks of life) who all represent the 'toil of people from a dozen lands', instrumental in having 'built a nation' collectively. Together with a brief shot of a *samsui* woman³⁸ carrying heavy loads over her shoulders, the video clearly depicts how these migratory figures have paved the way towards a modern Singapore. The scene then changes to a series of different family units that represent the multiracial make-up of the populace, now featured in colour.

Within this first national narrative emphasising a migrant past, collective growth and belonging, the lyrics illustrate not only an acknowledgement of the contributions of migrants. They also reflect upon how they have been regarded as 'Singaporean' through time, given their toiling and effort in building the nation together. Another way of interpreting such memory-testaments of a migrant past and collective hard work may be in relation to the Singapore government's stance on remembering the contributions and sacrifices of a quondam migrant populace, and on capitalising on their virtues as moral lessons from which the younger generation can learn. Crediting the efforts of Singapore's 'forefathers', then Minister for Health, Chua Sian Chin, noted that the country's survival and prosperity relied on inculcating youths with the qualities that pioneering migrants possessed, coupled with a sense of patriotism and discipline:

We must inculcate our youths not only the qualities of hard work, determination, thrift and enterprise of our forefathers, but also that

of a social discipline and a fierce patriotism to the nation. (*Straits Times*, 1 June 1969)

This focus on Singapore's migratory history, conjoined with creating enthusiasm about economic growth and infrastructure development, demonstrate how immigrants in the last century have been incorporated into the memoryscape of Singapore as a nation that paved its own way towards progress in its postcolonial period. More importantly, Singapore's pioneers are placed within the domain of 'economic heritage'³⁹ as can be seen in the *Committee on Heritage Report* that was put together in 1988:

We must learn from the pioneering spirit of those who came before us so that we constantly renew work values and maintain the adaptiveness which underlies our economic success today. (1988:7–8)

Developing a Cosmopolitan Outlook and Staying 'Home'

In 2002, then Prime Minister (PM), Goh Chok Tong, spoke of encouraging Singaporeans to foster an entrepreneurial spirit, but to remember to return 'home' after their overseas venture. Questioning the extent to which Singaporeans feel a sense of rootedness, Goh ponders:

The more the Government provides for Singaporeans, the higher their expectations of what the Government should do. The more we educate Singaporeans, and the more economic opportunities we create for them, the more internationally mobile they will become... will Singaporeans be rooted to Singapore? Will enough Singaporeans stay here, to ensure our country's long-term survival?⁴⁰

Employing the polarity of 'stayers' versus 'quitters', Goh then argues that Singaporeans will stay on only if they regard Singapore as a 'home for themselves and their children', and not as a 'hotel'. And if such a sentiment is present, then it follows that Singaporeans will 'return and fight' and will also 'work with passion and conviction for our future'.⁴¹ Through this speech, Goh puts forward the notion of Singapore as 'home', given that this was a place where '[e]very Singaporean has given a part of himself, big or small, to the country', and where Singapore is 'the sum of our dreams, our fears, our sweat'.⁴² Describing those who 'will run away whenever the country runs into stormy weather' as 'quitters', Goh points out that the 'stayers' form a majority of the population

who are committed to the nation and will 'come back when needed, because their hearts are here'. The boundary of the nation state is then expanded by Goh to also include 'the thousands of loyal Singaporeans who live around the world'. As Velayutham puts it, 'the government's aim has been to develop a Singaporean populace that is *global in outlook but rooted in the local*' (emphasis in original).⁴³ In this sense, while some Singapore citizens take up the role of economic emigrants with a temporary sojourn, 'home' is still regarded as an anchorage, as their foundation.

Interestingly, Goh's speech also included a message on international talent that was tied to the growth and development of the country. Commenting on how Singapore's foreign imports won medals at the Commonwealth Games, Goh spoke in response to the negative reactions of some Singaporeans who indicated an absence of pride in the sporting achievements, given that the nation's sports representatives were not locals. By arguing that these foreigners have also assumed citizenship, and settled down with their families here, these athletes have 'trained hard and played their hearts out for Singapore'.⁴⁴ A link to the nation's migrant past was then made, where Goh recalled:

Not so long ago, our parents and grandparents came from China, India and elsewhere. Did anyone question their contributions to Singapore? Of course, we should develop our Singapore-born sportsmen and women. We are doing so, even to the extent of getting international coaches for them. And we will see what more we can do to develop them.⁴⁵

In a similar way to how the erstwhile migrants of Singapore are tied to the emphasis on economic heritage, the migratory context of Singapore – with reference to the need for foreigners in the economy – in the 21st century is also justified by a rhetoric of economic development situated within a global future:

Because of the quality of our people, and our economic success and social progress, we are taken seriously by other countries. We enjoy an influence disproportionate to our size. But if we now shut our doors to talent, we will soon become like any other Third World city of three million people. Then we will find life quite different. We will become a small fish – a guppy – in a small pond. To swim among the big fishes in the ocean, we have to top up our population with international talent.⁴⁶

'Home' in this sense, can only prosper if (1) Singaporeans come back from overseas and are willing to do their part as citizens; and (2) talents from outside are recruited and incorporated into the workforce of the nation so as to boost and further maintain Singapore's economic competitiveness, both regionally and globally. The justification for foreigners thus stems from an economic arithmetic, not unlike how migrants in history have been marshalled into the sphere of economic heritage, as discussed earlier.

Goh's notion of 'stayers' may be gleaned from national songs written in the twenty-first century, including 'Where I Belong' (2001), sung by local songbird Tanya Chua, who has achieved success in the Taiwanese and Chinese popular music scene. The choice of Chua to sing this song is more than apt, given that she has (continually) returned to Singapore after flourishing in her music career overseas. In the music video for 'Where I Belong', the song opens with Chua in a cab, pulling away from Singapore's Changi Airport (hence signalling that she has returned) and going down the highway into the city. Paralleling the scenery, Chua sings of how 'bright lights' shining 'on the streets at night' guide her 'closer to home', which is a place that she will 'be safe and warm', and which is where she belongs. 'Home' in this instance, is also made up of 'friends and families', of 'precious memories', where one's 'heart and soul' is – all of which relate closely to Goh's speech. Scenes of school children running, of life in housing estates, and of Singapore's financial district, all come together in presenting 'home', which has both tangible and intangible components.⁴⁷ In this landscape of 'home', the figure of the migrant worker appears conspicuously absent, given that the boundaries of 'home' are seemingly not made permeable for the foreign figure.

In 2005, 'Reach Out for the Skies' was sung by local singer Taufik Batisah and local actress, Rui-en. Where its predecessors seem to have left out the presence of foreigners, 'Reach out' provides a somewhat cursory inclusion of foreigners; specifically foreign 'talents' as opposed to foreign 'workers'. The song tells of how things were difficult in the past ('The journey seemed unsure/But through it all/We've kept the flame alive'), and now, with this foundation, Singaporeans are encouraged to 'reach out for the skies' and to 'soar up high' in order to achieve 'our dreams' and to 'make our destiny'. Staying true to the formulaic presentation of Singapore's multi-faceted dimensions, including pronouncements on the multiracial populace, the importance of education (featuring a group of graduates in their convocation gowns), and scenes of families in harmony, the music video also incorporates brief

shots of foreigners depicted in two separate scenes. First, in a set-up where both singers take the lead in an upbeat dance routine to complement the song, a host of white-collar workers accompany them. As the camera pans across the room, one discerns two Caucasian men within the group that largely comprised locals, joining in the dance moves. Apart from that, a second scene presents Batisah dancing in the midst of young children, guiding a Caucasian young girl with the dance movements; yet again, the scene is as cursory as the former.

Arguably, these two clips reflect upon the idea that foreigners in 'our' midst are no longer an anomaly, and hence they appear to be easily incorporated in different aspects of Singapore's social life, including the workplace, as well as in a childcare setting.⁴⁸ Such incorporation, one should note, however, is framed within a larger agenda – that of pursuing further achievements, where foreigners have become part of the landscape in a collective bid towards further material progress and development. This underlying goal is evident, seen in a recent initiative put forward by the National Trade Union Congress's Learning Hub and the MWC, known as the 'Knowing Singapore Programme'. Designed as a one day course for foreign workers to 'learn about the Singaporean way of life',⁴⁹ the programme included an opportunity to visit a temple in Little India, a taste of local snacks at Chinatown, as well as being acquainted with more banal 'norms' in Singapore, such as having to ensure that one's laundry was not soaking wet when left out to dry in the context of high-rise flats. The MWC Chairman, Yeo Guat Kwang, was reported as having said:

It's important that these workers will be able to productively (by working well with their Singaporean colleagues) and effectively contribute to the economy.⁵⁰

Ostensibly, attempts to integrate foreigners into the social habits and norms of Singaporeans do not end with this opportunity for learning about a different lifestyle. Instead, and as Yeo has stated, the ultimate goal would be for foreigners to be able to 'contribute to the economy', hence reflecting upon the gestural incorporation and remembrance of the presence of foreigners, regarded in the main as economic apparatuses. The same tune is sung by the current PM, Lee Hsien Loong, who stated that 'a higher inflow of foreign workers is unavoidable' given the need to 'focus on a productivity-driven economy to achieve sustainable growth for the next 10 years'.⁵¹ Approximating a figure of around 80,000 workers, Lee says that the country's need for foreigners

was inevitable as ‘the economy [would be] stifled’ if the importation of foreign manpower was blocked, and thus when ‘growth is not there, our workers will suffer’. Conversely, the presence of foreign workers will act as ‘reinforcements to grow our economy and create better jobs for Singaporeans... [as] foreign workers supplement our ranks and enable us to build successful companies’. Furthermore, Lee makes a clear distinction between ‘foreign workers’ and ‘immigrants’, pointing to the latter category as comprising ‘PRs’ (permanent residents) and ‘citizens’. He explains the differentiation accordingly:

Foreign workers are transient. We need them to work in the factories, in the banks, hospitals, shipyards, construction projects. When the job is done, they will leave. When there are no jobs here, they will go. So temporarily, the economy is hot, I think we can accept higher numbers... That’s foreign workers. Immigrants, the PRs and the citizens are far fewer. We are very careful whom we accept. Not only must they contribute to our economy but they have also got to integrate with our society and strike roots here.⁵²

By virtue of distinguishing between different immigrant categories, Lee indicates an explicit hierarchy of how the populace is prioritised: ‘The basic principle for us is always citizens come first... citizens before PRs, PRs before other foreigners and non-residents’. Overall, the state’s economic agenda, forming the rationale for a steady stream of foreign manpower inflow, represents an identified need for both international skilled labour and a low-skilled economic workforce within the dual labour market of Singapore.⁵³ Where foreign talents are included, and therefore remembered, within Singapore’s cosmopolitan make-up, foreign workers at the lower end of the economic spectrum are concomitantly excluded. Such exclusion thus lends further nuances to memory selectivity and incorporation. Instead of formulating a simple dichotomy that migrants are incorporated or otherwise, national songs such as ‘Reach Out’ show how specific categories of foreigners are remembered and, thereby, others are purposively left out, except for labour provision.

Music – in this case, national day songs – acts as a cultural marker of national identity that is selective in its instrumentalisation of migrant pasts and present-day sense of belonging. In so far as visuals of migrants’ presence in the early decades of Singapore’s growth as a nation were interwoven with the music in videos of these songs, the idea of Singapore as a ‘nation’ was built up, even though the actual

policies that govern foreign workers tend to adopt an exclusionary stance, given the transient stay of this category of migrants. On the other hand, foreign talents are a privileged group of economic immigrants who are viewed as potential contributors not only to the nation's economic growth but to the demographic needs of Singapore, given declining birthrates.⁵⁴ National identity, according to Edensor, requires the drawing of 'boundaries between self and "other"'.⁵⁵ In this context, the 'other' is not perceived simply as a homogeneous category. Instead, the 'other' is represented by foreign labour occupying differentiated scales of the economic spectrum. Such boundary-making processes – which I have exemplified vis à vis songs and memory-work as well as migratory policies – thus provide insights concerning 'who and who does not belong to the nation', since practices of inclusion and exclusion are always ongoing.⁵⁶

Concluding Remarks

While the notion of migrant incorporation in the wider literature on immigrant communities routinely address problematics of integration, assimilation, and adaptation⁵⁷ through social memberships in different ways that indicate legal and economic participation in the main,⁵⁸ other discussions address how nation states and government discipline foreign workers.⁵⁹ Furthermore, studies on the role of memory in relation to immigrant incorporation and histories of migration have recently emerged vis à vis conceptual threads that deal with notions of belonging,⁶⁰ material culture,⁶¹ and heritage discourses.⁶² In order to address the interplay between national memory and incorporation of migrants, my analyses of songs, combined with a brief appraisal of foreign labour policies – following O'Flynn's argument that national identity 'comprises multiple identifications that arise from a plurality of social contexts and subject positions'⁶³ – demonstrated how memories of migrants and migration are deployed in constructions of the nation's past (which also lays the foundation for the development and growth of Singapore as an island state) while present-day foreign labourers are regarded as a short-term group of workers in cosmopolitan Singapore, who are left out of the heritage landscape of the nation. Additionally, foreign expatriates are regarded as a source of economic viability as well as a supplement to the populace.

I argued that Singapore's national narrative operates in different ways across the different phases of Singapore's growth as a nation. To begin with, the national narrative of the 1980s was one that focused

on Singapore's migrant beginnings, leading to economic growth and infrastructure development. From the 1990s on, such a narrative modulates into one that has the added dimension of a cosmopolitan outlook, or what one might call a global future. While the narrative of the eighties may contain a 'set of identifiable heroes',⁶⁴ such as early migrants who toiled as coolies, labourers, or in other occupational niches, the latter narrative embodies what the nation is projecting in terms of its present and future contexts – a discourse of cosmopolitanism that requires selectivity in recruiting different categories of migrant labour to comply with the larger interest of the nation's global competitiveness and demographic supplement.⁶⁵ In this manner, the incorporation of migrants into the memoryscape of Singapore as a nation transpires mainly in the earlier national narrative, thereby delimiting their remembered presence as pioneering figures temporally. Even if migrant workers of today take on the same work and endure similar hardships in comparison to Singapore's migrant ancestors, their contributions are received in somewhat different ways. This is because they have joined the workforce in Singapore at a stage of advanced development and hence fall outside the ambit of pioneering exaltations, as I have discussed elsewhere.⁶⁶ Any national narrative as an ideological device for memory-work, therefore necessitates the dual processes of remembering and forgetting; a dynamic that is recurrent in many studies on social memory and nations. In this, the cultural and socio-political boundaries of the nation are thus made apparent through sonic memory-work.

I have attempted to delve further into these varied processes of inclusion and exclusion in terms of how migrant workers have either been incorporated into memory productions, or have been marginalised as a result of how their presence has been perceived by the ruling elite (as a transient but necessary economic workforce engaging in 3D – degrading, dirty and dangerous⁶⁷ – work, and as a source of 'nuisance' or 'threat' to citizens) as well as Singaporeans. I have also proposed that migrant incorporation in the context of Singapore stands as a process stemming from economic rationale and the ideology of pragmatism and survivalism, practised by the ruling party since independence.⁶⁸ In addition, incorporation is also evident through other sociocultural avenues of everyday life in Singapore including events and programmes such as *International Migrants Day*, *Talent Quest*, and the *Singapore Citizen Journey*. It follows that memory-incorporation of migrant workers may be conceived as *gestural remembrances*, founded upon an economic predisposition⁶⁹ and registered concomitantly with non-incorporation

in terms of the boundaries of familial unit formation and citizenry.⁷⁰ I developed the term *gestural remembrances* from Lee's notion of *gestural politics* in his discussion on civil society in Singapore.⁷¹ He contends that while citizens are encouraged by the state towards becoming active citizens with regard to raising political opinions, there are still ideological and political boundaries determined by the state, which cannot be transgressed. Similarly, I suggested that the extent to which migrant workers are incorporated into the memoryscape of Singapore is evidenced through avenues of gestural remembrances, where processes of integration are still not intended by the state, given the country's main economic demand for migrants as a transient workforce. Such memory-work or commemorative attempts by the state to incorporate the history of migrants may be aligned with Kong's suggestion that early migrants' pioneering spirit could be comprehended through the notion of 'economic heritage',⁷² with an emphasis on the national import of such endeavour, rather than a celebration of the substance of individual aspirations. Avenues through which both state and non-state agents attempt to venerate the contributions of migrant workers hence operate at a gestural level with no weighted consideration for a more inclusive sojourn in Singapore, given the state's instrumental logic in wielding its management of foreigners within a knowledge-based economy.

Gestural remembrance or incorporation is a national strategy for how migrants are perceived culturally and economically, displaying the processes of migrant transmutation from immigrant figures of the past recruited into the economic heritage into, in contemporary times, the dimension of economic demands. This is best captured by the current PM in his 2010 National Day Rally on connecting the nation to an immigrant heritage and on being open to welcoming foreigners within the same economic logic in relation to a global past and future:

Immigration is going to be a continuing issue for us. How do we keep the door open while protecting the interests of Singaporeans? How do we welcome citizens while holding on to our values? ... We will have to manage, monitor, adjust as we go along. *But remember, we ourselves are all descendants of immigrants. Our ancestors came poor, but their descendents worked hard and prospered. Had our ancestors not come here, today, Singapore would not exist.* So we have to continue to be open today so that we bring in the right people, manage the difficulties whatever they may be *so that a generation from now, Singapore will still be thriving and prospering.* (emphases mine)

From economic heritage to economic utility, it may be argued that the Singapore state's gestural incorporation of its immigrant population employs a consistent national narrative. Equally, it may be argued that with development comes the latent effect of signalling Singapore's successful economic management and material comforts.⁷³ This may be better understood as what Brown terms 'civic nationalism'⁷⁴ – where Singapore's ruling elite, the People's Action Party (PAP) government, has generally succeeded in cultivating sentiments of pride and patriotism vis à vis the country's well-paved economic growth alongside some material welfare provisions.

My proposal for the employment of gestural remembrance/incorporation in evaluating the extent to which migrants are remembered for their contributions helps in interrogating the notion of migrant incorporation in the wider literature across different dimensions. They include: an awareness of the different categories of foreign manpower in the context of Singapore (foreign 'talent' versus foreign 'worker' and the concomitant work passes and attendant legislations), which shed light on differential incorporation; the economic ethos that accounts for gestural incorporation; an analysis of the extent to which incorporation can be identified and evaluated through national songs, ministerial speeches and foreign labour policies; and the role of memory-work in explaining avenues of non-incorporation with regard to the construction of national boundaries vis à vis 'home' and a cosmopolitan future.⁷⁵

In essence, erstwhile and current generations of migrants, are welcomed, remembered and commemorated on the basis of the state's constant focus on economic survivalism. This axiom means that gestural remembrances and incorporation are dictated by an economic perspective while, on the other hand, the perennial reminder and construction of 'home', which is targeted at Singaporeans both locally and overseas, is another thread of the government's management of an economic developmentalism that is married to a cosmopolitan outlook. Given Singapore's relative youth as a nation, the state's construction of its past, and the linkages it makes to the present-day context, therefore revolve around a formulaic treatment of history, which is deemed to go forward in the future following the dictum of an economic calculus. As PM Lee states: 'We are managing the inflow of foreigners who want to live and work here. Many want to become permanent residents and new citizens, but *we will only select those who can add value to Singapore*' (emphases mine).⁷⁶ The constantly emphasised need for migrant contributions, be they located within the category of 'talent' or of 'worker', is a reflection of how the government reminds

the nation and, by and large, the world that human capital is vital for the nation's survival.

Notes

1. Elizabeth Soh, 'Foreign Workers Take Centre Stage.' *Straits Times*, 20 December 2010.
2. Soh, 'Foreign Workers Take Centre Stage.'
3. See <http://www.un.org/en/events/migrantsday/> (last accessed on 27 February 2011).
4. Soh, 'Foreign Workers Take Centre Stage.'
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Radha Basu, 'Why it Pays to Improve Maids' Lot.' *Straits Times*, 19 December 2010.
8. See Theodore Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, translated from the German by E.B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1976).
9. See Dale A. Olsen, *Popular Music of Vietnam: The Politics of Remembering, the Economics of Forgetting*, (New York & London: Routledge, 2008); James E. Roberson, 'Memory and Music in Okinawa: The Cultural Politics of War and Peace', *Positions: East Asia Critique* 17, 3, 2009, 683–711; Victoria Vorreiter, *Songs of Memory: Traditional Music of the Golden Triangle* (Chiang Mai: Resonance Press, 2009).
10. Maria Boletsi, 'Migratory Objects in the Balkans: When the Sound of the Other Sounds Strangely Familiar', in Rocio G. Davis, Dorothea Fischer-Hornung and Johanna C. Kardux (eds), *Aesthetic Practices and Politics in Media, Music, and Art*, (New York: Routledge, 2011), 145–169.
11. Parvati Nair, 'Voicing Risk: Migration, Transgression and Relocation in Spanish/Moroccan Rai', in Ian Biddle and Vanessa Knights (eds), *Music, National Identity and the Politics of Location*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 65–80.
12. Michael Meyer, *The Politics of Music in the Third Reich*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc, 1991), 3.
13. Phua Siew Chye and Lily Kong, 'Ideology, Social Commentary and Resistance in Popular Music: A Case Study of Singapore.', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 30, 1, 1996, 215–231; Sue Tuohy, 'The Sonic Dimensions of Nationalism in Modern China: Musical Representation and Transformation.', *Ethnomusicology*, 45, 1, 2001, 107–131.
14. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, 155.
15. See, for example, Lily Kong, 'Music and Cultural Politics: Ideology and Resistance in Singapore.', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 20, 1995, 447–459; Phua and Kong, 'Ideology, Social Commentary and Resistance in Popular Music'; Tan Shzr Ee, 'Manufacturing and Consuming Culture: Fakesong in Singapore.', *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 14, 1, 2005, 83–106. See also, www.talkingcock.com, a website that provides (humorous) political commentaries and satires on various aspects of Singapore's governance and ideology including a section on 'Alternative National Day Songs' presented with rewritten lyrics. In *Not the Singapore Song Book* (1993), various

- national songs have also been reworded to act as commentaries or resistance to, *inter alia*, government campaigns, military conscription and family planning policies.
16. Compare with Laurie A. Brand, 'National Narratives and Migration: Discursive Strategies of Inclusion and Exclusion in Jordan and Lebanon', *International Migration Review*, 44, 1, 2010, 78–110.
 17. See Kong, 'Music and Cultural Politics'; Lloyd Miller and James K. Skipper, 'Sounds of Black Protest in Avant-Garde Jazz', in R. Serge Denisoff and Richard A. Peterson (eds), *The Sounds of Social Change: Studies in Popular Culture*, (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1972), 26–37; Tuohy, 'The Sonic Dimensions of Nationalism in Modern China'.
 18. Yaacov Yadgar, 'From the Particularistic to the Universalistic: National Narratives in Israel's Mainstream Press', *Nations and Nationalism*, 8, 1, 2002, 55–72.
 19. Brand, 'National Narratives and Migration', 81.
 20. Phua and Kong, 'Ideology, Social Commentary and Resistance in Popular Music'.
 21. Brenda S.A. Yeoh, 'Cosmopolitanism and its Exclusions in Singapore', in Lee Yong-Sook and Brenda S.A. (eds), *Globalisation and the Politics of Forgetting*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), 137–152.
 22. Lily Kong and Brenda Yeoh, 'Nation, Ethnicity, and Identity: Singapore and the Dynamics and Discourses of Chinese Migration', in Laurence J.C. Ma and Carolyn Cartier (eds), *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, Place, Mobility, and Identity*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 193–219.
 23. Saw Swee-Hock, 'Population Trends in Singapore, 1819–1967', *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 10, 1, 1969, 36–49.
 24. Kong and Yeoh, 'Nation, Ethnicity, and Identity'.
 25. *Ibid.*
 26. Noorashikin Abdul Rahman, 'Managing Labour Flows: Foreign Talent, Foreign Workers and Domestic Help', in Terence Chong (ed.), *Management of Success: Singapore Revisited*. (Singapore: ISEAS, 2010), 199–216.
 27. <http://www.mom.gov.sg/statistics-publications/national-labour-market-information/publications/Pages/report-labour-force-sg.aspx>, (last accessed on 28 February 2011).
 28. Youyenn Teo and Nicola Piper, 'Foreigners in Our Homes: Linking Migration and Family Policies in Singapore', *Population, Space, and Place*, 15, 2009, 147–159.
 29. See Md. Mizanur Rahman, 'Management of Foreign Manpower', in Lian Kwen Fee and Tong Chee Kiong (eds), *Social Policy in Post-Industrial Singapore*, (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 145–172, 153 for a further breakdown of the P pass into two categories (P1 and P2) and the attendant difference in monthly wages.
 30. Brenda S.A. Yeoh, 'Migration, International Labour and Multicultural Policies in Singapore', *Working Paper Series* No. 19, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, 2004; Yeoh, 'Cosmopolitanism and its Exclusions in Singapore'.
 31. Rahman, 'Management of Foreign Manpower'.
 32. Selvaraj Velayutham, *Responding to Globalisation: Nation, Culture and Identity in Singapore*, Singapore: ISEAS, 2007; Yeoh, 'Cosmopolitanism and its Exclusions in Singapore'.

33. Abdul Rahman, 'Managing Labour Flows'.
34. Velayutham, *Responding to Globalisation*, 138–9.
35. See <http://www.singsingapore.org.sg/songs-content.asp> (last accessed on 2 March 2011). Interestingly, national songs such as this one are not always products of Singaporean musicians (the lyrics of this song were written by Jim Aitchison). Also, other songs, including 'Stand Up for Singapore' (1984), 'Count on Me Singapore' (1986) and 'We Are Singapore' (1987), were composed by Canadian composer-producer Hugh Harrison (see Juniper Foo, 'In Search of the Singapore song.' *Straits Times* 6 August 1989).
36. The Singapore River was where trade goods passed. It was a centre for the country's trading activities during the colonial period up to the mid 20th century (see T.C. Chang and Shirlena Huang, 'Recreating Place, Replacing Memory: Creative Destruction at the Singapore River.', *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 46, 3, 2005, 267–280; Stephen Dobbs, *The Singapore River: A Social History, 1819–2002*, (Singapore: Singapore University Press), 2003. The importance of the river in Singapore's history is also endorsed in other national songs such as 'Home' (1998/2011) – 'Sail down the river which brings us life/Winding through my Singapore' – and the music videos of 'We Are Singapore' (1987) and 'We Will Get There' (2002).
37. James Francis Warren, *Rickshaw Coolie: A People's History of Singapore (1880–1940)*, (Singapore: Oxford U.P., 1986).
38. *Samsui* women migrated from Southern China to Singapore in the early half of the 20th century, mainly toiling as construction workers but also in other occupation niches including domestic service, sewing and repair work. They have been venerated in Singapore as pioneering figures who have contributed extensively to the infrastructural development of Singapore, hence forming important icons in the memoryscape of Singapore (see Kelvin E.Y. Low, 'Interpreting Media Constructions of *Samsui* Women in Singapore.', *BiblioAsia*, 5, 3, 2009, 18–22).
39. The other four domains of heritage include nation-building, multicultural heritage, heritage of the man-made environment, and heritage of the natural environment (*The Committee on Heritage Report*, 1988, 27–29).
40. Prime Minister's National Day Rally Speech, 2002. See www.mha.gov.sg (last accessed on 4 March 2011).
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*
43. Velayutham, *Responding to Globalisation*, 83.
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*
47. In tandem, Phua and Kong, 'Ideology, Social Commentary and Resistance in Popular Music' argue that images in videos of national songs have been purposefully selected so as instil a sense of national pride, and also to serve as a reminder that Singapore is a peaceful, comfortable and harmonious country.
48. In a 2006 national day song, 'My Island Home', singer Kaira Gong croons about how Singapore is 'home' for her, where the video version of the song comprises a momentary scene of Caucasian men playing rugby at the Padang, an important landmark in Singapore's history, as it was the site

- where the victory parade of the Japanese forces surrendering Singapore to the British took place, and in recent years, the venue for Singapore's National Day Parades. Additionally, this video also included a scene where Caucasian children and a woman are presented as interacting with locals at 'home'. A third scene that has incorporated foreigners is of a group of men seated in a straight line in a local barber shop. A middle-aged elderly Caucasian man sits in the centre of this line-up of Singaporeans, demonstrating how a foreigner can 'go local' by visiting a low-end hair saloon, as compared to enlisting the services of more upmarket hairdressers.
49. Melissa Kok, 'Learning to Go Local in S'pore.' *Straits Times*, 20 September 2010. A similar programme had also been implemented in the same year, pertaining to foreigners who had intentions of becoming Singapore citizens. Called the 'Singapore Citizenship Journey', the course includes 'tours to historical sites, community sessions with grassroots leaders and an online quiz on Singapore history before would-be citizens get their identity cards' (Melissa Kok, 'New Course to Help Migrant Workers Fit in.' *Straits Times*, 7 April 2010).
 50. *Ibid.*
 51. Kor Kian Beng, '100,000 Foreign Workers Needed: PM.' *Straits Times*, 15 July 2010.
 52. The transient nature of foreign workers may be gleaned from policies that govern or discipline their presence and the degree to which they are not incorporated into Singapore society. For instance, a foreign worker's work permit may be revoked if he or she violates certain provisions, including a change of occupation other than that specified in the permit, becoming pregnant (in the case of domestic workers), or marrying a Singaporean without prior approval (see Rahman, 'Management of Foreign Manpower', 163–165).
 53. Hing Ai Yun, Lee Kiat Jin and Sheng Sixin, 'Mainland Chinese "Foreign Talents" in Singapore', *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 37, 2009, 757–777.
 54. Teo and Piper, 'Foreigners in Our Homes'; Yeoh, 'Cosmopolitanism and its Exclusions in Singapore'.
 55. Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2002), 24.
 56. Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, 25.
 57. Stephen Castles, 'Migration and Community Formation under Conditions of Globalisation,' *International Migration Review*, 36, 4, 2002, 1143–1168.
 58. Elliott R. Barkan, 'Introduction: Immigration, Incorporation, Assimilation, and the Limits of Transnationalism', in Elliott R. Barkan (ed.), *Immigration, Incorporation and Transnationalism*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 1–23; Rainer Bauböck, 'Changing the Boundaries of Citizenship: The Inclusion of Immigrants in Democratic Polities', in Rainer Bauböck (ed.), *From Aliens to Citizens: Redefining the Status of Immigrants in Europe*, (Aldershot: Avebury, 1994), 199–232; Val Johnson, "'The Moral Aspects of Complex Problems": New York City Electoral Campaigns against Vice and the Incorporation of Immigrants, 1890–1901', in Elliott R. Barkan (ed.), *Immigration, Incorporation and Transnationalism*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 63–93; Aolejandro Portes and Jozsef Böröcz, 'Contemporary Immigration: Theoretical Perspectives on Its Determinants

- and Modes of Incorporation,' *International Migration Review*, 23, 3, 1989, 606–630.
59. Abdul Rahman, 'Managing Labour Flows'; Noorman Abdullah, 'Foreign Bodies at Work: Good, Docile and Other-ed.', *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 33, 2005, 223–245; Fred Arnold and Suwanlee Piampiti, 'Female Migration in Thailand', in James T. Fawcett, Khoo Siew-Ean and Peter C. Smith (eds), *Women in the Cities of Asia: Migration and Urban Adaptation*, (Colorado: Westview Press, 1984), 143–164; Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration*, (3rd edn. Hampshire: Palgrave, 2003); Rahman, 'Management of Foreign Manpower'.
 60. Anne-Marie Fortier, *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space, Identity*, (Oxford: Berg, 2000).
 61. Caroline Attan, 'Hidden Objects in the World of Cultural Migrants: Significant Objects Used by European Migrants to Layer Thoughts and Memories', in Kathy Burrell and Panikos Panayi (eds), *Histories and memories: Migrants and their History in Britain* (London & New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006), 171–190; Divya P. Tolia-Kelly, 'A Journey Through the Material Geographies of Diaspora Cultures: Four Modes of Environmental Memory', in Kathy Burrell and Panikos Panayi (eds), *Histories and Memories: Migrants and their History in Britain*. (London & New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006), 149–170.
 62. Kelvin E.Y. Low, *(Re)membering the Samsui Women: Social Memory and Historiography in Singapore*, (Bielefeld: University of Bielefeld. PhD, 2010).
 63. John O'Flynn, 'National Identity and Music in Transition: Issues of Authenticity in a Global Setting', in Ian Biddle and Vanessa Knights (eds), *Music, National Identity and the Politics of Location*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 19–38, 25.
 64. Brand, 'National Narratives and Migration'.
 65. Jonathan V. Beaverstock, 'Servicing British Expatriate "Talent" in Singapore: Exploring Ordinary Transnationalism and the Role of the "Expatriate" Club', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 37, 5, 2011, 709–728; Ye Junjia and Philip F. Kelly, 'Cosmopolitanism at Work: Labour Market Exclusion in Singapore's Financial Sector', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 37, 5, 2011, 691–707.
 66. Low, *(Re)membering the Samsui Women*.
 67. A. Kaur and I. Metcalfe (eds), *Mobility, Labour Migration and Border Controls in Asia*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), xiii.
 68. Chua Beng Huat, 'Re-opening Ideological Discussion in Singapore: A New Theoretical Direction', *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, 11, 2, 1983, 31–44; Chua Beng Huat, 'Pragmatism of the People's Action Party in Singapore: A Critical Assessment', *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, 13, 2, 1985, 29–46.
 69. Hussein Mutalib, 'Singapore's Embrace of Globalisation – and its Implications for the Republic's Security', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 23, 1, 2002, 129–148.
 70. Teo and Piper, 'Foreigners in Our Homes'.
 71. Terence Lee, 'The Politics of Civil Society in Singapore', *Asian Studies Review*, 26, 1, 2002, 97–117.
 72. Lily Kong, 'The Invention of Heritage: Popular Music in Singapore', *Asian Studies Review*, 23, 1, 1999, 1–25, 10.

73. Jon S.T. Quah, 'Globalisation and Singapore's Search for Nationhood', in Leo Suryadinata (ed.), *Nationalism and Globalisation: East and West*, (Singapore: ISEAS, 2000), 71–101.
74. David Brown, *Contemporary Nationalism: Civic, Ethnocultural and Multicultural Politics*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 93.
75. Aaron Koh, 'Global Flows of Foreign Talent: Identity Anxieties in Singapore's Ethnoscape', *Sojourn*, 18, 2, 2003, 230–256.
76. Li Xueying, 'Hold on to Core Values Amid Changes: PM Lee.' *Straits Times*, 2 February 2011.

Copyright © 2012. Palgrave Macmillan. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except fair uses permitted under U.S. or applicable copyright law.