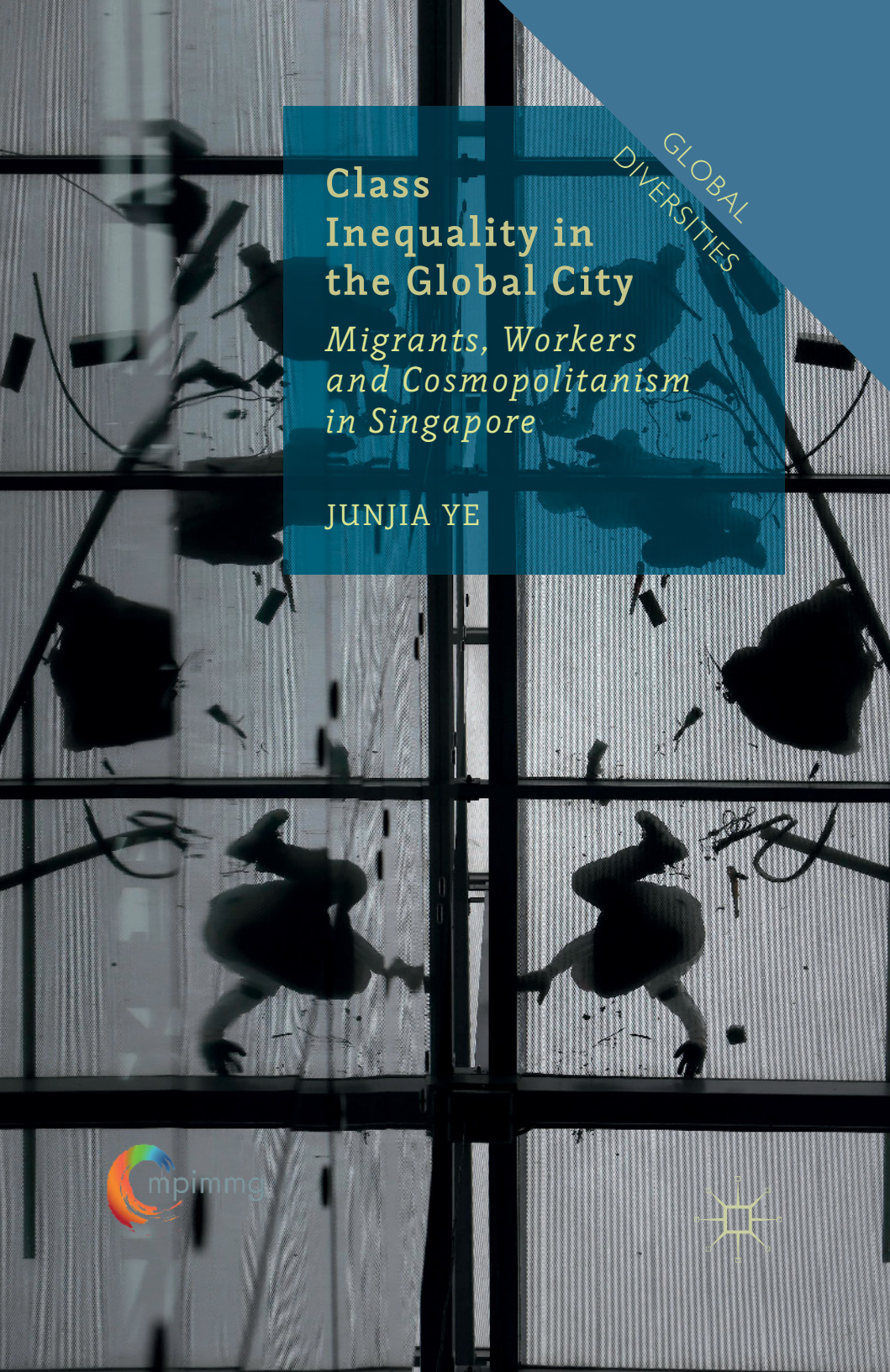
GLOBAL DIVERSITIES
Class Inequality in the Global City
Migrants, Workers and Cosmopolitanism in Singapore
JUNJIA YE
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Global Diversities

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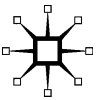

CLASS INEQUALITY IN THE GLOBAL CITY: MIGRANTS, WORKERS AND COSMOPOLITANISM IN SINGAPORE

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2016 978-1-137-43614-6

First published 2016 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of Nature America, Inc., One New York Plaza, Suite 4500, New York, NY 10004-1562.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

ISBN 978-1-349-68342–0
E-PDF ISBN: 978–1–137–43615-3
DOI: 10.1057/9781137436153

Distribution in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world is by Palgrave Macmillan®, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Ye, Junjia, 1981– author.
Title: Class inequality in the global city : migrants, workers and cosmopolitanism in Singapore / Junjia Ye.
Description: Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York, NY : Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. | Includes index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2015039312 | ISBN 9781137436146 (hardback)
Subjects: LCSH: Social classes—Singapore. | Equality—Singapore. | Immigrants—Singapore | Working class—Singapore. | Cosmopolitanism—Singapore. | Singapore—Social conditions. | Singapore—Economic conditions.
Classification: LCC HN700.67.Z9 S652 2016 | DDC 305.5095957—dc23
LC record available at http://lccn.loc.gov/2015039312

A catalogue record for the book is available from the British Library.

Contents

Acknowledgements

Various institutions provided financial support for this work. In particular, I would like to thank Challenges of Agrarian Transition in Southeast Asia, the Pacific Century Graduate Scholarship and the University of British Columbia.

The perspectives presented here have greatly benefitted from conversations and engagements with many people (often I think, without knowing it!). I am grateful to my friends and family in Singapore, Canada and New Zealand who have been with me at different points of my writing this book. I want to thank the editors and reviewers of this manuscript in its various forms. Audience and student responses to seminars, talks and lectures have been important in shaping my thinking and I thank all those who have contributed to this process. I want to thank my colleagues at Massey University who provide a collegial and fun working environment. There are some people who have helped me more specifically and I am fortunate to have their support. I am immensely thankful to Steve Vertovec at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity for encouraging me to embark on this book project and for his helpful comments on the manuscript. Both my mentors, Jim Glassman of the Department of Geography at the University of British Columbia and Philip Kelly of the Department of Geography at York University, deserve special mention. Aside from providing steadfast intellectual support with great patience and humour, they have contributed greatly to my ideas while giving me a lot of room to grow, and for this I am grateful. Their work and our conversations inspire me to become a more rigorous geographer. I also want to thank my friends and colleagues at the Department of Geography, University of British Columbia, especially Guanming Low and Lawrence Santiago for their friendship. The Social and Cultural Geography group at the National University of Singapore gave helpful and constructively critical comments for different parts of this work. Over the past few years, a number of others have also provided much insight. I thank them in (what one scholar has termed) the most democratic way I know how – in alphabetical order: Tim Bunnell, Jamie Gillen, Elaine Ho, Michael

Leaf, Jamie Peck, Gerry Pratt, Brenda Yeoh and Henry Yu. Each of them pushed me to consider questions whose answers I continue to ponder.

***

This narrative is dedicated to the many individuals who became my research respondents. I am indebted to the staff and volunteers of the NGOs who took me in and the workers who so generously offered their time, friendship and observations that I had no right to expect but without which this study would not have been possible. I can only hope that this work conveys my gratitude, admiration and solidarity towards the resilience, pain and humour I saw throughout my fieldwork.

Finally, to my mother, Kwan Liang, whose love, sense of adventure and unwavering faith in me continue to see me through it all.

Introduction: Globalizing Class, Migration and Divisions of Labour in the City-State

This book examines the nature of inequality as experienced through class and cosmopolitanism in the lives of different workers, both migrants and non-migrants, in a global city. It is about how aspirations, expressed through the hopes, desires, goals and will of workers as well as those of actors and organizations of the Singaporean state, bring the politics of cosmopolitanism to bear in a changing labour market. I explain how processes of cosmopolitanism, class and self-hood are intertwined and configured through the model of development in the city-state, which continues to rely strongly and strategically on migrants in its segmented workforce. While distinctive in its national development processes, Singapore is similar to many other globally connected cities in that its labour market configurations result from particular trends of economic development that are dominant in the global political economy. Through various forms of economic restructuring and management known as neoliberalism, wages and conditions of work – such as those in care and construction industries – have been depressed. The impact of these trends has also travelled beyond the borders of the global city, motivating people elsewhere to move into the city for work. Many of the least desirable jobs are now carried out by these new arrivals. I reject ideas of neoliberal conspiracy and migrant worker victimization. While much of the literature on global cities discusses the polarization of incomes and occupations, this case study expands this perspective by highlighting the fragmented socio-economic continuum that results from Singapore's quest to maintain its status as a global city. The impacts of these changes are experienced by

employees in different sectors, including those who are most readily thought of as included within the cosmopolitan imaginary, but it bears remembering that it is migrants who are taking on the most precarious jobs in the city-state. Through an empirically driven analysis, this book shows that while immigration and labour market change may have been led by capitalist logic and may have been at the expense of many, it is also animated by the motivations and strategies of many workers and their communities as a response to economic restructuring. In this sense, the dynamics of class and cosmopolitanism reproduced through Singapore's labour market stretch beyond its national boundaries and are connected to much wider processes and geographies.

By many accounts, recent changes in Singapore fit understandings of what a successful global city is. The city-state's aspirations as a global financial centre are focused on expanding its influence over the organization and management of global capital flows (Henderson et al., 2002). Measures in line with Singapore's development towards becoming a "liveable and sustainable city" with a "high quality of environment to live, work and play" have been enviously studied by different city planners around the world. The Fraser Institute lists Singapore, with an annual GDP of $54,101 in 2013, as the second freest economy in the world, right behind Hong Kong (Fraser Institute Economic Freedom of the World Report, 2014: 148;[1] World Bank[2]). At the 2014 World Cities Summit, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong highlighted that "efforts have gained Singapore recognition internationally – rankings, different measures have gone up."[3] Its cosmopolitanism and its rapid development have also been widely celebrated and studied around the world. By developing its inward and outward-reaching geographies, its aspirations have been spatialized to be highly conducive to capital accumulation. Aside from developing a high level of control and servicing functions within its boundaries, Singapore has further developed its extra-territorial reach to disperse its sites of production. Its population is also rapidly internationalizing, with Singaporeans moving abroad for work and education and, as this book will show, newcomers moving in.

On this side of the twenty-first century, Singapore has again been transformed by immigration. An unprecedented number of newcomers have, with the largest increase being in the labour migrants

sustain its workforce. The hidden story of the glimmering, exemplary city, even when dressed in the discourse of "liveability", however, is also the story of a segmented labour force that keeps the global city working.

Beneath, or indeed as part of, the celebration of hybrid coexistence through the discourses and practices of cosmopolitanism and multiracialism lurks another form of difference that is, as in many other global cities, all too often unmentioned in Singapore. Besides neither having a minimum wage nor an official poverty line, Singapore has one of the world's highest Gini coefficients – a measure of the income distribution of a nation's residents where 0 reflects complete equality and 1 indicates complete inequality. It was logged at 0.478 in 2014 (*Straits Times*, 2014[4]). For all its successes, Singapore demonstrates staggering contrasts of wealth, poverty and power. It also relies on increasing numbers of foreign-born workers to do the jobs that locals cannot be persuaded to do.

Neil Smith asked in 2000, "What happened to class?" (2000: 1). In the context of capitalism-led forms of multiculturalism and various increasingly vocal strands of identity politics, class difference, it seems, still remains the great unmentionable form of inequality amongst people in global cities. In Singapore, class is thickly written across a segmented socio-economic landscape peopled not only by Singaporeans but also by a large and growing number of migrant workers. Who does what work and to what ends are questions that must continue to be asked, especially in a place where discourses of meritocracy and cosmopolitanism are so frequently touted as banners of success and growth.

A common element of conceptualizations of cosmopolitanism is the emphasis on openness to other cultures, although there is much debate on how this openness is understood (Vertovec and Cohen, 2002). There are several problems with the conventional depiction of cosmopolitanism: it assumes the cosmopolitan is part of an elite; it configures cosmopolitanism as a series of personal attributes; it prescribes a moralistic discourse of coexistence; and it does not deal with the everyday practices that produce this openness (Noble, 2009). I address these issues by looking at how state, corporate and individual imaginations of inclusion and exclusion through the labour market reproduce particular vernaculars of cosmopolitanism. As Sassen argues, "cosmopolitanism" often disguises

the exercise of power which is compounded in the reproduction of global cities, whose workforces are fortified by a finely tuned selection of migrant workers in various sectors (2001). Indeed, the movement of migrant workers with diverse backgrounds into a global city such as Singapore means its population must work, live and play in a heterogeneous, yet often exclusionary, setting. In this book I examine what class in this setting means. There are two key objectives I set out to address. Firstly, I highlight the underpinnings of the development model of Singapore, which has, in many respects, been regarded as a successful one. I explore the politics of its labour market, which includes a significant proportion of migrants, both nationally and in the workplace. I do so by developing a cultural analysis of class at different scales, through an in-depth qualitative approach based on 14 months of fieldwork. Data collection was conducted through ethnographic processes of repeated interviews, conversations and participant-observations involving employees, NGO staff and volunteers, and hiring personnel at different companies. This data allowed me to achieve the second objective of this book which is to demonstrate that the ways in which class inequality, as differentiated positioning in the labour process, as identity and as aspiration, is intimately connected with politics of citizenship, gender and race. Rather than assuming exclusions are imposed on both local and migrant workers, I address the myriad ways in which workers themselves are integral to the reinvention and narrative strategies employed by city leaders in line with neoliberal restructuring.

Migration and the growing diversity that follows necessarily present multidimensional challenges and possibilities within the wide-ranging landscapes of Southeast Asia. While such flows of people, goods and ideas are not new, the sheer pace and scale of economic, political, social and demographic change in the region in recent decades has brought about an increase in levels of population mobility, the complexity of their spatial patterning and the diversity of the groups involved (Collins et al., 2013; Castles and Miller, 2014). It can be argued that this dynamism is not only a result of uneven development but also contributes to this unevenness with implications across different scales. The trends within these flows point towards labour migration to and within Southeast Asia and, more broadly, offer an important perspective into the geography of production in the global economy. At one level, work

migrants from developed economies are entering the region as highly paid, highly skilled workers, recruited mainly to facilitate knowledge-transfer to local skilled workers (Beaverstock, 2002). At another level, work migrants move from less developed economies with surplus labour to fast-growing, export-oriented economies in the region with labour shortages, particularly taking on jobs in sectors that locals reject. Within this context, Singapore illustrates the case of an aspiring global city with a high dependency on – and an unusually high degree of control over – labour migrants in various sectors of its labour force to maintain its position in the world economy. Indeed, one cannot convincingly discuss the division of labour in Singapore without also discussing its linkages with migrants and migration, given its strong reliance on large numbers of foreign-born workers to do the jobs that locals cannot be persuaded to do.

The corresponding growth of prevalent casualized employment in many post-industrialist societies is associated with changing economic landscapes, intensifying trajectories of neoliberalism, globalization and increased mobility (Peck and Tickell, 1994; Waite, 2009). As the older forms of Fordist work become replaced by a more fragmented employment system made up of highly flexibilized and spatially decentralized forms of deregulated paid labour, questions must not only be asked about how this transformation impacts production but, crucially, how it impacts the different groups of workers within the division of labour. The labour market conditions specific to the contexts within these advanced capitalist economies are arguably "producing more precarious work that is characterized by instability, lack of protection, insecurity and social or economic vulnerability" (Waite, 2009: 416).

Advanced, knowledge-based capitalist economies such as Singapore are strategically built upon a segmented labour force. Its division of labour creates a mobile, cosmopolitan labour force of highly skilled, individualized workers who are able to take risks, willing and able to embrace social and career mobilities while less skilled workers become increasingly exchangeable, replaceable and, most vitally, cheapened (McDowell, 2003; Yeoh, 2006). These international movements result in particular groups at the forefront of those experiencing precarious lives as a consequence of their labour conditions. Existing employment conditions reinforce greater degrees of precarity for some workers than others in Singapore. Indeed, these processes

place the worker at the centre of the contemporary labour process. This is a process that sets up a graduated continuum, where some workers, in particular some migrant workers, are made more vulnerable to exploitation, risk and uncertainty than others. The reality of uncertainty, however, extends beyond low-waged migrant workers. I show that even those workers who are typically considered "included" in the rhetoric of cosmopolitanism are subjected to various forms of identity-based exclusions and careful navigation in the financial workplace.

The official rhetoric and policies I examine here are not exclusively Singaporean in origin. Rather, the contemporary challenges brought about by current economic and urban change manifest in a highly globalized labour market such as Singapore's. In this regard, the puzzles presented in the Singapore case expand the ways in which we understand migration and work in the global economy through the intertwined notions of aspirations, class and cosmopolitanism. As with other places, the size of the transmigrant worker population grows alongside neoliberal restructuring processes designed to render labour more flexible in relation to capital. The deliberate and strategic reliance on foreign manpower is central to the nation-state's economic prosperity plans, as is the deregulation of various economic sectors (Coe and Kelly, 2002). At the same time though, as Peck observes, geography matters in the construction of a local labour market that is also characterized by a unique set of processes of labour production, reproduction and regulation (Peck, 1996; Coe and Kelly, 2002). Local labour policies in Singapore are organized upon selectively inclusionist and exclusionist measures to keep Singapore in the global race.

This book is about the reproduction of class inequality within the realm of economic production and social reproduction. I analyse how class is accounted for through global development processes that not only contour people's mobilities and work lives within a strategic division of labour but, further, profoundly shape their aspirations as individuals negotiating multiple subjectivities. Specifically, I look at workers from different positions within the segmented labour force: Bangladeshi migrants who had been working in either construction or marine industries until employment disputes rendered them effectively jobless and homeless; Johorean commuters who work in low-paid service sector work and who cross the international border

between Singapore and Malaysia daily; and finally, middle-class financial workers who are often seen as the skilled, cosmopolitan faces of Singapore's economy.

Underpinning this examination of class is an integrated reading of Marxist and Bourdieusian notions of class. I take a step back from these classificatory systems and examine the mechanisms that maintain and reproduce such class differences. Indeed, an argument for the continued importance of class as an analytical tool and as a lived reality would remain limited at best, and obsolete at worst, should it only be framed in terms of economic production. Class is expressed through other concepts – in particular, "the self" – and it is crucial to consider how certain concepts of personhood and subjectivity intersect with and constitute class. While much about class identity remains tied to the division of labour, it is also generated through processes by which some individuals are denied access to economic and cultural resources because they are not recognized as being worthy recipients. These material and symbolic processes become more complex when they become intimately linked to aspiration, creating much indeterminacy, ambiguity and ambivalence along the way. It is my aim here to capture and unpack the ambiguities produced through this struggle of classed bodies – desires, hopes, choices and values alongside hyper-exploitative work conditions and symbolic violence – through which identities are formed in the larger social world. Class reproduction is dynamic and conflictual, with some people bearing its wrath more than others. Keeping this last point in mind, I would argue that no matter how ambivalent it appears, class and its reproduction are never free from power-laden processes. Class is also a relational concept. Classifications and positionings of class are understood and lived through the division of labour, which is in a constant state of reproduction and reconfiguration because it represents the interests of particular groups in their relation with others. Much of this class relationality is expressed through aspiration and intersects with gender, race, nationality and sexuality.

Situated within the context of the changing and highly uneven terrain of global political economy are two processes that are deeply intertwined in the assembling of this labour force. These are the processes that form the local labour structure in Singapore, comprising state measures that frame the policies which organize and manage its workforce as well as the migration processes that are experienced by

workers. To ground and territorialize the transnationalization of the labour force, I maintain that we need to pay attention to local labour policies, which are part of state power; that is, the exertion of control, surveillance and regulation over its working bodies. While I do not wish to reconstruct a state-centric understanding of migration processes, I would argue that the power of the Singapore state bears attention, with emphasis on its labour market restructuring measures. Its inclinations towards developmentalist policies and capacities not only inform the context of my analysis but, conceptually, also suggest a state with particular aspirations.

At the same time, the migration process driving economic production and social reproduction also differs greatly for different workers – motivations, desires, pre-existing social relations and current working conditions vary. Low wages, long commutes, dangerous working conditions, inadequate legal protection and arbitrary forms of labour discipline are lived realities for many of the city's migrant workers. Singapore is a much more hospitable place, however, to a smaller, but no less important group of workers who are often exhorted to be its face of cosmopolitanism (Ye and Kelly, 2011). It is worth repeating that these categories are neither ready-made nor static but require ongoing maintenance. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 also empirically illustrate that these categories are not stable. I problematize each group of workers by analysing the process by which they "come to be", both at the policy level and at the individual level. Further, I demonstrate the relationality of these categories by showing that they are not discrete and one shapes the other.

Also crucial to understanding the creation of this transnational labour force is the recruitment processes of different workers. The labour recruitment process reproduces divisions amongst different groups of workers. I illustrate that workers are already subjected to work segmentation through the different practices that connect workers to jobs. At the higher end of the labour market, there are agencies and HR departments of companies that operate across a wide spatial scale, connecting potential workers and vacancies, and engaging in activities such as going to both local and foreign universities to set up job fair booths. As McDowell demonstrated in the UK, for example, short term vacancies in high-status law firms are filled via professional recruitment agencies at an international scale (2008). At the lower end of the labour market where workers are

increasingly cheapened, much of the transnational work brokerage is based on local relations, often where workers are recruited by agents working on an individual, private basis (Wright, 1997; McDowell, 2008). In Singapore, foreign workers who are work permit holders, aside from Malaysians, are eligible only for specific positions within the job market and must return to their home country once their permits expire. Thus, although the segment of low-paid work in the global city is more stringently constituted by localized labour policies as transient, the people working in these jobs are assembled across a wide spatial scale and form a key part of Singapore's transnational labour force. Given the enforced repatriation, existing policies also position them globally. Through my ethnography of migrant workers, I address this form of institutionalized circular migration which constitutes them as vulnerable, precarious labour.

I also examine the evolving identities of workers themselves vis-à-vis their aspirations as intimately tied to their movements and experiences occupying particular positions within the division of labour in Singapore. Labour migration, however, cannot simply be explained as an economic response to uneven development across and within national boundaries, although this is not an irrelevant factor. For many of these migrant workers, their mobility is also a powerful vehicle and expression of profound social and personal agencies. These are, just as importantly, dynamic fields of social practice and cultural production through which people realize, rework and in many cases, reinforce pre-existing aspirations for themselves, their relationships with others and their places in the wider world (Mills, 1999). In Appadurai's view, it is this capacity to aspire that intimately bridges culture and development. It allows us to critically engage with the human driving force of urban change and continuity. Yet, the capacity to aspire is not a romantic one. Indeed, as much as the desire for and the practice of mobility can free people from previous class, gender and ethnic moorings, it can also further reinforce these subjectivities. It is precisely the confluences and conflicts of aspirations which I will discuss through the lens of cosmopolitanism and class.

Even though economic diversification is an important aspect of labour mobility, it is by no means the only, or even the key, consideration. Labour mobility at different scales – from peri-urban Johor to its industrial core and/or from Dhaka to Singapore – also reflects

people's desires for acquiring the personal status associated with the lifestyles on display in "modern" centres. As Mills illustrated with her ethnography of Thai women who move to Bangkok for work, cash wages and social opportunities allow migrants to participate in new experiences and to acquire commodity emblems that represent claims to modernity and sophistication (1999). Hence, there are very complex social goals, needs and wants which migrant workers hold and that cannot be explained solely by the larger processes in the global economy driving these structural changes. These structural changes, moreover, are often accompanied by the reconfiguration of complex cultural politics upon the migrants' return home, including reconfigurations of gender which may produce household tensions. As Elmhirst demonstrates, young Indonesian women returning to their village after their sojourn in the city for work exhibit certain attributes that transform their identities in the eyes of fellow villagers, including new clothes, some savings and above all "a body politics (speech and disposition) that speaks of experience of modernity and a shrugging off of the label *orang kampung*" (2007: 232). It is through examining such cultural nuances lived through the aspirational that we can begin to make sense of why Johoreans endure long, stressful commutes; why Bangladeshi male migrants pay hefty agent fees and why middle-class Singaporeans put up with salient discrimination at the financial workplace.

Aspirations can also be shaped and appropriated by the powerful, such as policy makers, planners, developers and recruitment agencies, as much as it enables people to pursue (Bunnell and Goh, 2012). The Singaporean state, in its adherence to the developmental state model, has played a strong role in the cultivation and management of aspirations through its urban and economic restructuring. There are a plethora of state-directed institutions, policies, programmes and projects that have emerged to spur outward investment. The Economic Development Board (EDB) was created to harness developmental resources along with the Development Bank of Singapore, a government-linked company that provides loans with lower interest rates for particular types of companies that are in line with the EDB's policies. In 1968, the government also created INTRACO (which took over the export wing of the EDB) as a public limited company, to develop overseas markets for Singapore-made products and to source cheaper raw materials for local industries through bulk

buying (Perry et al., 1997). Jurong Town Corporation was created in 1968 under the Ministry of Finance to take over responsibilities for industrial land use and estates – something previously under the EDB. Other statutory boards created were the National Productivity Center and the Singapore Institute for Standards and Industrial Research in 1969 (Perry et al., 1997). Arguably, even the provision of near universal housing in Singapore through the Housing Development Board (HDB) is in line with both developmentalism and actually existing neoliberalism. Whereas subsidized housing in some countries is a form of welfare for those who cannot afford shelter otherwise, public housing in Singapore is a key source of middle-class aspirations. This approach to housing precludes the need to deal with homelessness amongst its citizenry and the associated welfare provisions, all of which have little place in the city-state, where the ideology of meritocracy and pragmatism is deeply entrenched. Instead, policies and discourses surrounding state-subsidized housing in Singapore encourage citizenship-based home-ownership. Migrant workers are not allowed to purchase flats from the HDB – a policy which serves to disenfranchise migrants. A new quota was also introduced in early 2014 to cap the subletting of HDB flats to non-citizens (HDB website[5]). In line with my findings, the politics of inclusion and exclusion in Singapore continues to be embedded within its national development strategies as channelled through the (non)provision of the basic necessity of housing.

Singapore has the power to control immigration and its borders to facilitate its own labour-market restructuring with a capacity unlike that of any other global city (Olds and Yeung, 2004). As Singapore strives towards becoming a high-technology, highly skilled global node in the world economy, collective bargaining for workers remains weak – a trend since independence. Indeed, the incorporation of the National Trade Union Council (NTUC) into the state apparatus further reinforces the power and cohesion of the state. This is also how neoliberalism operates – couched within the developmental state model in Singapore. The state is increasingly incorporating free market forces for urban and economic renewal. The size of the transmigrant worker population grows in tandem with neoliberal restructuring processes designed to render labour more "flexible" in relation to capital. The developmental state model – this well-integrated web of political and bureaucratic influences that

structure economic life in much of Asia – illustrates how states continue to play a key role in directing their economic developments. It is within this macro-context then that we can make sense of how the Singaporean state has the power and capacity to structure and flexibilize its transnational labour market to fit and transform the direction of its economic development, the result of which is a deeply entrenched institutionalization of class difference amongst different working bodies.

My objective is to explain class-based inequalities that emerge from processes that drive change in the labour market in a global city that has cosmopolitan aspirations. My ethnography of workers in a labour market that relies heavily and strategically on migrants underscores these inequalities. I analyse how class and cosmopolitanism are mutually constituted in Singapore's development model by addressing both the material realities and the aspirational dimensions of class and cosmopolitanism in the work lives of three different groups of workers. By developing an integrated reading of Marx's and Bourdieu's notions of class, I draw out the differentiated positions, dispositions and challenges that different groups of workers experience materially and culturally. What are the motivations for these three groups of workers to work in their respective jobs? How are their different class experiences generated and maintained through work in Singapore? In other words, what are the mechanisms involved that explain the persistence of these class differences within and across different groups of workers? How do the connections between class and other forms of identity politics unfold?

The following chapter discusses my research methodology, beginning with a brief discussion of the global city. To demonstrate the fragmentation of class in the global city, I chose to focus on three distinct groups of workers. Data collection was primarily through participant-observation and semi-structured interview techniques with all three groups of workers over 14 months in Singapore and Southern Malaysia. Cosmopolitanism in the global city with a strong labour migrant presence is not only based upon class stratification in the realm of work but also within social reproduction. Furthermore, I demonstrate that the dynamics of social reproduction are animated by the realization of and limitations to class-based aspirations, which are experienced differently for these three different groups of workers. The latter point also illustrates the relationality of

class. Critically, this research design is also a strategic way to question the liberal construct of cosmopolitanism, which obscures the pervasive and persistent reproductions of class stratification through gendered, racialized and citizenship lenses.

Chapter 2 discusses Singapore's development pathway towards becoming a global city. It shows that Singapore is an appropriate field site given its state-led globalization projects, the prominence of a transnational workforce, the discursive salience of meritocracy and the importance of its international division of labour for its economic growth. It is not, however, the only place where these processes can be witnessed. Rather, it is a case study where broader themes of class, cosmopolitanism and identities can be understood in contemporary socio-economic geography. Here I trace the post-colonial development of Singapore's economy, which closely follows the developmental state model. I argue that the lack of farmland in Singapore and its historical position as an urban centre were crucial to its post-independence development. Without a peasant population, the state already had a population that could be part of its rapidly growing urban labour force. The purpose of this chapter is to show how Singapore situates itself within unequal global economic development. I also demonstrate that the Singaporean state itself takes on cosmopolitan aspirations that are based upon and reproduce class differences through its configuration of labour divisions and migration policies.

Chapter 3 contributes to the understanding of social class reproduction through the division of labour in Singapore by analysing the class situations of low-paid, low-status Bangladeshi male migrants who entered the city-state on temporary employment visas. My research respondents in this group are men who have already fallen out of work. This demonstrates just how precarious their livelihoods were. On the one hand, the Bangladeshi men's labour migration highlights the powerful and complex structures of inequality in global capitalism and in Singapore's labour market through the various policies and practices that maintain their economic exploitation and subordination. On the other hand, as workers negotiate livelihood made precarious through the recruitment process, low wages, close regulation of their (re)productive bodies, enforced transience and the sheer physical dangers of their jobs, it becomes clear that their work lives are not merely economic in the narrow sense,

but are deeply entrenched with complex social goals and cultural discourses that linger even after they fall out of work. Through the Bourdieusian notion of habitus, it is clear that these are individuals who operate as actors engaging with social constructs such as class and gender.

In Chapter 4, I reinforce the argument that workers not only enter circuits of economic production and exchange but also participate in socio-cultural reproduction and consumption that point to their changing class identities. Through discussing the distinctive border relationship between Singapore and Malaysia, I demonstrate how these workers' other social identities, like race and citizenship, are embedded within their aspirations, limitations and class subjectivities. I also illustrate how these are renegotiated through their commute between Singapore and Malaysia. The experience of these commuters is different from the Bangladeshi workers as a result of their work conditions – much of which can be explained by their recruitment process, their lower dependency on their employers and the larger variety of jobs they are allowed to access as Malaysians. Their structural positions in Singapore's labour market also grants them access to lifestyles that are distinct from other groups of workers examined in this study, illustrating the cultural logic of capitalism. This chapter also shows how commuter workers attempt to circumscribe immobility in Malaysia perpetuated through race-based state policies and the high cost of living in Singapore by creating "mobile selves". Compared to the other two groups of workers, their spatial mobility as commuters is also more intense in terms of frequency. This daily crossing of international borders positions them distinctly as workers who chose this mobility as a compromise.

By analysing middle-class financial professionals and their workplace – actors who are the sector of the workforce that is most readily thought of as global and open in their outlook, Chapter 5 crystallizes the filters of cosmopolitanism. The careful framing of "cosmopolitanism" as the legitimate culture at work is evident through the introduction of different programmes and policies as well as the promotion criteria for workers. Cosmopolitanism is more than a social identity and/or a culturally open disposition – it is also a powerful filter that limits access to certain performative kinds of work in the financial workplace. While this group of workers is not vulnerable to exploitation in the same way as the Bangladeshi male migrants,

class continues to be reproduced through its intersections with race, ethnicity, nationality and gender in the diverse workplace.

The concluding chapter evaluates how cosmopolitanism in the global city is based upon and perpetuates inequality that stretches across space and manifests through class processes. Structurally, class inequality is strongly tied to the division of labour and is embedded within the state's imagination and practices of development. Furthermore, inequalities within this process of cosmopolitanization are recreated through discursive practices where some people are denied access to economic and cultural resources because they are not recognized as being worthy recipients. By conceptualizing cosmopolitanism, migration and class as processes of selfhood-formation, I demonstrate how deeply people's private lives can be linked to broader social structures. Furthermore, by illustrating the classed reality of cosmopolitanism in Singapore through these divisions of labour, I not only question the liberal construct of cosmopolitanism, I also draw out the pervasive, reproductive and intersecting forms of identity politics through racialized, nationalized and gendered stratifications in the global city.

I recenter the entangled nature of inequalities embedded within the development of the global city by decentering its geography. My analysis interrogates the interactions of the global economy, migration and local labour markets that are animated through and profoundly impact the lives and aspirations of workers. It is my aim to convey some of the complex and rich experiences, the poignant contexts and multilayered conversations that shaped my interactions with the people who responded to my research. This monograph is part of my obligation to them – the scholars, staff and volunteers of the NGOs and all three groups of workers – without whose patience and generosity this study could not have been possible. The stories within this work speak to the sharpness, poignance and resilience of people trying to make sense of circumstances, some harsher than others, that are both changing and continuing.

1
Researching Inequality in the Global City

When the ground beneath us is always shaking, we need a crutch.
(Burawoy, 1998: 4)

Social and economic polarization, rather than inequality, is featured in Sassen's original thesis of the global city (1991). The broad conceptual contours of this thesis are now well known. Within the cities that have emerged as key command and control centres of the global economy, the shift from manufacturing to financial and business services employment is argued to have led to marked income and occupational polarization, with absolute growth at both the top and bottom end of the labour market and a "falling out" of the middle (Sassen, 1991; 2001). These transformations demonstrate the new strategic roles of cities, created through a complex duality of a "spatially dispersed, yet globally integrated organization of economic activity" (Sassen, 1991: 3). Economic production remains a key part of the structure of a global city. The "stuff" that a global city makes is primarily services and financial goods. This restructuring of economic activity in the global economy is manifested most clearly in the global city in the corresponding changes in the organization of work. Migrant labour, in the global city thesis, features as a key component of these reorganizations. In Singapore, as with other global cities, low-paid jobs are increasingly taken on by migrants The divisions I trace, and in particular the growing role of low-paid migrant workers in servicing and building the global city, reflect Sassen's global cities hypothesis. For Sassen, however, inequality is folded into class polarization within the social order of such cities. The weakness

of this conceptualization of inequality through polarization has been discussed widely (see for example Samers, 2002; Hamnett, 1994b). As will be seen later in this book, this polarization is not entirely or even mainly driven by the rise of producer services or the needs of high-earning managerial and professional elites, as the global cities hypothesis suggests. Nor can it be sufficiently explained with reference only to processes of economic restructuring and networking in terms of law, accountancy, consultancy and other financial areas, as Sassen has continued to propose (Sassen, 1991; 2001). Indeed, as May et al. have demonstrated in their study based in London, workers play a far broader social role in keeping Singapore (and other global cities) working, and the state plays a far more active role in shaping these divides than either Sassen or others acknowledge (May et al., 2007; Wills et al., 2010). Nonetheless, it has been noted that the global city hypothesis still retains analytical purchase, particularly when reframed to interrogate inequality. Two main weaknesses which I aim to address are the shrouding of the role of the state in perpetuating inequality and the shape and form of inequality more specifically through the analysis of Singapore's labour force. Furthermore, I argue that understanding labour market changes through class aspirations and inequalities is crucial to the analysis of cosmopolitanism in Singapore. The geography of these aspirations and inequalities unfolds at the level of the state, where discourses and policies actively shape a particular kind of cosmopolitanism. At the same time, this geography is also stretched across national borders, as migrants develop their motivations in relation to their identities. As such, studying the processes of class-making should not be limited to an analysis of labour market dynamics but should also take seriously the issues of social reproduction, much of which is deeply relational. In considering migration to a global city that, like so many others, is itself in pursuit of particular cosmopolitan ideals, it is worth thinking about the ways in which these human mobilities interact with various elements of statecraft vis-à-vis the broader contours of the global economy.

In discussing my data collection methods, I also address the development of "new geographies of theory" by conceptualizing class and cosmopolitanism from the non-West (Roy, 2009). The methods and theoretical framework I use are designed to directly address the research questions I outlined in the introductory chapter.

In highlighting my interview design, recruitment strategies and locations of interviews, I discuss the ways in which I operationalized and interpreted my data collection among the three different groups of workers. I will also address some of the difficulties and tensions I encountered while in the field. I attend to positionality issues that could have been a result of my own identity and my own social geography, hence pointing out the limitations of my research. I also discuss how I negotiated potential ethical issues while working with different groups of workers, in particular the Bangladeshi workers. Finally, I discuss how I reconcile my "ethnographic condition" – the execution of my methods, the analysis of my empirical findings and weaving these with pre-existing theories – by drawing upon Burawoy's work on the extended case method (Burawoy, 1998: 5).

Research design

Preliminary fieldwork in Singapore was conducted from June–August in 2005 and the majority of fieldwork was conducted from October 2008 to December 2009. Singapore was chosen for its distinctiveness. It is a developmental city-state which artfully executes neoliberal strategies in the shaping of its labour market with a capacity that no other global city has – as this book will go on to show. As I illustrated in the previous chapter, this case study of Singapore also contributes to existing debates on class in the global city. I had originally planned to examine the reproduction of social class in Singapore only amongst financial professionals and Johorean commuters. These two groups of workers were chosen primarily because of the theoretical possibilities that could emerge through comparatively analysing these two groups. Their work experiences have also not been well-documented in the Singaporean context. After I started volunteering regularly with a Singapore-based NGO for migrant workers, Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2), however, I came into contact with the Bangladeshi migrants who had previously been on work permits until various employment disputes rendered them jobless and homeless. It became clear to me that the narrative of class in Singapore could not be told without also addressing their class situations. I am encouraged by the work of Brenda Yeoh and Shirlena Huang, whose writings on female live-in domestic workers on work permits in Singapore illustrate how certain groups of workers, specifically Third World women, are systematically marginalized

and disempowered as (re)productive bodies in the labour market. The gendering of work, however, must necessarily include men. Third World men are also vulnerable to the precarities of the work permit system and those who have fallen through the cracks of this system are evidence of this. I shall discuss the ethical concerns relating to the ways in which I recruited this group of respondents later on in this section.

As Yeung pointed out, "choosing the right kind of data required is perhaps the most crucial moment in any methodological framework" (2003: 447). How does one go about understanding and illustrating the reproduction of class within a division of labour that is comprised significantly of different migrants? Yeung argues that much of neoclassical economic geography was concerned with what Philo succinctly termed "things that count" (Philo, 1998; cited in Yeung, 2003: 447). Some of my data is quantitative, such as data on wages and statistics on foreign employees in Singapore that I collected from government websites. Yet, it is through the immeasurables that I constitute my key arguments. As a result, I rely on qualitative techniques such as interviews and participant observation.

I interrogate (dis)connections and (im)mobilities generated by the crossing of national borders, examining workers whose lives are lived and whose identities are constituted with ties across global, local and bodily scales and boundaries. While multi-sited ethnography holds much potential in the study of borderlands, migration and cultural differences, I am not simply examining the people in different locales. Rather than showing how people's lives change across sites, I seek to show how difference among groups of workers in Singapore is reproduced. To further situate these differences, we have to look beyond the national borders of Singapore to consider the workers' social connections with their areas of origin. In other words, I examine social linkages to different sites (Singapore, Bangladesh and Malaysia) to understand and account for the differences amongst the groups while critically considering the connections amongst them. It was this focus on difference that highlighted for me the discrepancies between empirical reality and theoretical prescription. I argue that it is through the understanding of how difference is constructed in this labour force that we can gain greater analytical purchase on the concept of cosmopolitanism. Through the analysis of three different groups of workers, I illustrate the inequalities that take on, primarily, a class dimension that underlies development through

cosmopolitanism. I argue that to address these discrepancies, a self-reflexive extension of theory is required. I shall return to this point towards the end of this chapter.

I used a variety of methods to collect my field data, which differed according to the group of workers with whom I was speaking. I chose the interview method over participant observation when I was speaking with the middle-class financial professionals – that is, managers, executives, traders, vice-presidents, and so on – for a number of reasons. My previous research experience from speaking with this group taught me that employees do not feel and behave neutrally knowing that their exchanges with one another could very well be documented in my research. My earlier experience also showed that middle-class financial workers are comfortable articulating to me their work experience in a private interview setting. Individual, private interviews were chosen over group interviews so respondents did not have to worry about elaborating their opinions on social relations in the workplace in front of others in the industry, or even the same company. Individual interviews also had the added advantage over focus group interviews by allowing more in-depth questions and responses. The diversity of people recruited for this research is meant to reflect the diversity of class and cosmopolitanism. I interviewed 20 financial professionals of diverse social positions representing both genders and various ethnicities, races and nationalities. Several of them were people I had interviewed for an earlier project. I also recruited respondents through snowball sampling and through my own social networks. I was consciously recruiting people who held a variety of positions in the bank so as to demonstrate how particular identity performances at work may or may not vary across different departments. Out of the 20 financial professionals, 15 were employees of various departments in the financial institutions, while five were HR personnel.

Primary research with the financial professionals was carried out through semi-structured, private, in-person interviews that took place over lunch or coffee at a location of the interviewee's choice. I decided to let the respondents choose the interview location mostly for convenience in terms of proximity to their workplace. The decision had the added advantage of enabling the respondents to be more candid and at ease with providing information on potentially sensitive issues such as ethnic relations at the multicultural workplace.

I also decided to use a semi-structured format for the interview so that prepared questions served as a guide to lead the interview, yet, it could still take on a conversational flow. Often, the respondents' eloquence on some topics led to questions that were not planned. Rather than taking notes during the interview, I decided to concentrate on the conversation and relied solely on a tape recorder.

Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted with the Johorean commuters as well, using a mixture of English, Mandarin and Cantonese. Aside from the interview method, I was also able to conduct participant observation with the Johorean commuters for my primary data. I interviewed 15 Johorean commuters in total, all of whom were on work-permits, meaning that none of them earned more than SGD $2,200 a month.[1] This group of respondents was again comprised of a mixture of genders, vocations and ethnicities. A number of them were recruited at the causeway while I was making the commute on the bus either by myself or with another respondent. These interviews were conducted during the commuting journey while waiting in line for the bus and on the bus itself. I recruited the rest through my own social network and snowball sampling. A personal friend of mine knew two Johorean commuters working at City Plaza as hairdressers, a shopping mall in the eastern part of Singapore. Through this connection, I was able to recruit other commuters, some of whom worked in City Plaza. I was able to interview these ten commuters at their workplaces, mostly during their breaks or when it was less crowded in the shop. While this was at times difficult, especially if the employer was around, being in their workplace also allowed me to observe them at work. I obtained their full consent to note down my observations while at their workplaces. Some of the Johoreans were also curious about my own trajectory, asking me questions about how I decided to study at UBC, if the fees were expensive, if it was difficult to be a Chinese person living in Canada and so on. One of them also arranged for me to meet his teenage daughter. He was keen to send her overseas for her university education and wanted me to speak with her about my experiences living abroad. This clearly reflected my status as a Singaporean-Chinese woman who has been educated in two Canadian cities. I could have been a living representation of the prestige and possibilities that working in Singapore could entail.

There was a different set of challenges when I conducted fieldwork with the 25 Bangladeshi male migrants who became my respondents. The interview method was less effective with this group of workers for a number of reasons, although I still conducted semi-structured interviews with those who were comfortable enough with the tape recorder. While I picked up basic Bengali during the first three months of my volunteering with them and while many of them are able to speak simple English, there were still some language barriers during interviews. I engaged the help of a native Bengali speaker for two interviews but quickly abandoned this technique as the respondents seemed uncomfortable having an "insider" between myself and them. While this highlighted to me the advantages of my positionality, there were also times my identity posed discomfort. Occasionally, my gender became a sort of barrier. For example, there were times the men would speak amongst themselves and when I tried asking them what they were talking about, I was met with "You are a lady. We cannot tell you." My initial anger at these sentiments was driven by my own habitus, yet this eventually highlighted to me the forms of masculinity that are dominant in the men's social contexts. Fieldwork, therefore, as Mills says, "engages people in the construction and interpretation of their own and others' identities" (Mills, 1999: 23). There were also two instances when my identity led to solicitations and invitations to semi-official events. The Bangladeshi High Commission learnt about my research and my volunteering and invited me to two Eid celebrations. Upon arrival, I was immediately ushered past the several 100 men – who must have stood in line for a few hours – to a front row seat. I was not sure if these invitations were entirely without strings attached. My presence at these events may have been used to increase the status of the officials who invited me.

It was also difficult for these men to speak about their suffering in a coherent manner. It was participant observation and informal conversations with them that yielded the richest fieldwork data, rather than the interviews. They would often invite me on walks around Singapore's Little India, showing me their daily geographies: where they were sleeping, their lawyers' offices, where they liked to eat or simply socialize with other Bangladeshis. I was also invited to eat with them and to participate in festivities such as Bengali New Year and Eid. It was during these times that our conversations flowed most

easily. I spoke with 23 Bangladeshi male migrants, all of whom are currently on a special pass[2] and used to be on work permits. I met all of them through the meals programme[3] organized by TWC2, for which I was volunteering.

I engaged the help of some native Bengali speakers who had a good command of English when communication might otherwise have been difficult. There were also thorny ethical issues surrounding my recruitment method – I was at first a volunteer and later on a researcher as well. I felt that the first three months of volunteering helped me build an invaluable rapport with this group of workers, even though I did not start volunteering with the intention of including this group in my research. Also, while being a volunteer may have caused some men to feel obligated to respond to me as a researcher, I felt that my position as a volunteer meant that I would be able to point them in a useful direction should they require help, even if I was not able to help them myself. I was also wary of further "exploiting" them as they were still giving me their time, even though they were no longer employed. To compensate them for their time and help, I launched a photo exhibition in Little India, featuring portraits of the men, whom I had photographed over an eight-month period. The men decided which photographs they wanted displayed at the exhibit. To get their input on the content and flow of the narratives I would present alongside their photographs, they also edited the captions. Aside from raising public awareness of the problems these men were facing, all the funds from the entrance fees of the photo exhibit also went towards the meals programme to pay for the men's daily breakfasts and dinners.

Further, I was also aware of the potential symbolic violence exerted through the relationship between researcher and respondent. As Bourdieu argues, it should not be thought that "simply by virtue of reflexivity, the sociologist can ever completely control the multiple and complex effects of the interview relationship . . . this is a situation in which in evoking, as the research invites them to do, 'what's wrong' with their lives, they expose themselves to all the negative assumptions that burden these problems and misfortunes" (1999: 615). This potentially becomes a subtle form of objectification, particularly where the researcher assists the respondents in disclosing painful details of their experiences. Social agents, as Bourdieu says, do not "innately possess a science of what they are and what they

do. More precisely, they do not necessarily have access to the core principles of their discontent or their malaise" (1999: 620). Through my interactions with them, then, no matter how aware or careful I may have been about reducing the power asymmetry between the respondent and myself, the very reason for and the structure of the interaction already compounds a particular form reinforcing the power difference. The theories I brought to the field – my preconceptions – also affected the way I framed my interaction with them. The acts of transcribing and writing could also further exemplify the ambiguity or even confusion in symbolic effects (Bourdieu, 1999: 623). For example, I often present my "case studies" verbatim – that is, letting the quotes speak for themselves. While I hope that this technique conveys the emotional force behind much of the data, it is also worth considering if the remarks I have presented – sometimes racist, sometimes patriarchal – are simply reinforcing racism or sexism. In Burawoy's terms, was I reproducing the colour bar? (1998). I do not have a simple answer to this but I hope that in owning up to my struggle with this, I am claiming responsibility for my research actions.

These three groups of workers, while connected through the division of labour in Singapore's development, were also occupying different positions within this division and, hence, faced very different problems of class in their everyday work lives. Before I left for the field, I was predisposed to rely on Bourdieu's notions of class to understand the processes of class reproduction in Singapore. This assumption, while not entirely without merit, quickly collided with the dangers and exploitation that I learnt were the realities of some workers. It was in working with this group of Bangladeshi male migrants that I learnt how urgently their situations must be understood in terms of exploitation – a point which Marx's arguments on class could illuminate. It also became clear that Marx could not provide the nuances of class reproduction in ways that Bourdieu could with his more culturally inflected notions of class. This does not mean that Bourdieu's notions of class no longer held validity when discussing the Bangladeshi male migrants nor Marx's notions of class in discussing the financial professionals but, rather, that these theories required an extension because of the continued relevance they could provide together. As Mann argues, "although history forever challenges theory, it does not render it redundant" (2007: 10). It was

through the extended case method that I was able to reconcile the discrepancies between theoretical prescriptions and my empirical data. There were also "context effects" which I could not and did not want to ignore. As Burawoy argues (1998: 7),

> We can either live with the gap between positive principles and practice, all the while trying to close it. OR formulate an alternative model of science that takes context as its point of departure that thematizes our presence in the world we study. That alternative . . . when applied to the technique of participant observation, gives rise to the extended case method.

I find his emphasis on taking context into serious consideration while (re)working with theory very useful. Indeed, if methodology is not "theoretically innocent", then for it to become an asset rather than impediment, one needs to be theoretically self-conscious along the way (Burawoy, 2009: 248). Aside from being reflexive about my own positionality as a researcher, it is this form of reflexivity about theory and the empirical world it tries to analyse that lends a sense of credibility to narrative-driven research. After all, the France that Bourdieu was writing about is a significantly different context from the one on which I am working. This method of research, a sort of "empirical theorizing", provided me with a sense of liberation from and also a sense of heightened awareness of theoretical prescription and normativity. It is this uncovering of local processes, this situating of knowledges that can deepen pre-existing theory such that it continues to be useful in spite of the different space/time dimensions (Burawoy, 1998: 21).

More urgently, as Jennifer Robinson (2002) and Ananya Roy (2009) argue, there is the need to rethink the location of theorizing. This book is an attempt to move beyond the imagination of Euro-American cities as the taken-for-granted First World global city, by situating nuanced expressions of identity, forms of exploitation and practices of aspirations through Singapore's global connections. It is the subtle tightrope of combining specificity and generality that animates this attempt. While I may be calling into question the success of the Singaporean model of development, it is precisely the critique of the global city presented here which might have a portability in thinking about parallel processes elsewhere (indeed, the West!).

I do not suggest that this is necessarily a model to be replicated in other places but rather that its examination allows a re-imagination of active geographies of knowledge, of the theorizing capacities of the non-West. Each group examined in this study draws out different subtleties of the politics of cosmopolitanism. Rather than to simply point out the similarities or differences between groups of workers, the comparisons drawn here across groups aim to demonstrate the complexities of these human processes of movement, distance and urbanization. The distinctiveness of the Singaporean case serves less as an example of area studies than as a resource for theoretical vibrancy.

2
Situating Class in Singapore: State Development and Labour

While Singapore is itself becoming transformed, migration is also shaping the nature of Singapore's engagement with the global South and within the Southeast Asian region. Many of these transformations, connections and mobilities can be seen through Singapore's development strategies, which are the focus of this chapter. Much has been written about the dominance of the single-party state in celebrating the success of Singapore's development model. I address how this model is premised upon the assembly of a segmented labour force that is heavily dependent on migrant workers. As Peck argues, all labour markets are "locally constituted" (1996: 95). Each local labour market is unique in that it reflects a unique intersection of its driving processes. Although every single labour market has its own entrenched gender and ethnic stratification, these do not have universal outcomes. Indeed, these processes are not operating across a *tabula rasa*; their realizations are very much a result of inherited social, economic and institutional geographies of the labour market. Prior forms of geographically uneven development always recreate or at least shape emergent geographies of work (Peck, 1996). This chapter demonstrates that while Singapore is an appropriate field site given its state-led globalization projects, the prominence of a transnational workforce and the importance of its international division of labour for its economic growth, it is not the only place where these processes can be witnessed. Rather, it is a case study where universal themes of class, cosmopolitanism and aspirational identities can be understood in contemporary human geography. The function of economic institutions and processes of social regulation is, I would

argue, a useful starting point for situating the ways in which institutions matter to the operation of the economy as well as the ways in which people are positioned in the division of labour, which eventually shapes the ways in which they lead their lives. My objective here is to lay the contextual groundwork for understanding the aspirational cosmopolitanism underlying the construction of Singapore's labour force in terms of state discourses and practices, rather than to elaborate at length about the historical development of Singapore's economic growth.

I start by tracing the post-colonial development of Singapore's economy, which closely follows the developmental state model. I will then discuss the state's involvement in the management of ethnic relations to provide the context for multiculturalism as part of its national development. With reference to ministerial speeches and statements on government websites and documents, I highlight the official discourses that promote and handle the introduction of foreign workers into the Singaporean economy, particularly those who are seen as providing "unskilled" labour. Finally, I illustrate the materiality of these discursive reproductions with reference to corresponding policies on foreign workers in Singapore.

Connecting Singapore to the world

Singapore was already a trade centre with extra-territorial linkages to the region by the time Raffles landed on the island in 1819. Indeed, from its pre-colonial history, Singapore was already a multicultural entrepôt aided by its natural deep harbour. In becoming a British colony, Singapore's economy and labour supply reached further and in greater volumes (Chew and Lee, 1991). Yet, in spite of the deep harbour and strategic location along major trading routes, it is interesting to note that Singapore was chosen by circumstance, rather than by choice, because the Dutch already had control over much of the surrounding region at the time. This move by the British was to prevent the Dutch from having a monopoly in the Malay Archipelago. An early event that proved key to Singapore's commercial history was the Anglo-Dutch treaty in 1824, which ensured that Singapore would be kept as a British colony. This assurance made Singapore an attractive focal point in Southeast Asia for British commercial investment and Chinese immigration. The British

brought in labour from neighbouring countries as well to expand the island's workforce. Trade surged but even by this time, Singapore was already a bustling multicultural entrepôt, a status premised upon its extra-territorial linkages, with international trade valued at $11.4 million (Chew and Lee, 1991). From its very founding, thus, modern Singapore was already administered and developed as an international and regional economic hub, peopled by workers from beyond its national borders.

Singapore's free port status was not the only factor in its success – as shown by failed free ports like Riau, Pontianak and Sambas (its Dutch rivals) (Huff, 1994). The success of Singapore was to an extent serendipitous. Its colonial significance was established by being at the right time and the right place, answering a need for a port where Asian and Western merchants could meet for trade (Huff, 1994). By the time Singapore achieved self-governance from Britain in 1959, it was already an important and vibrant port – entrepôt trade had laid the foundation for its future capitalist economy (Chew and Lee, 1991). Prior to self-governance, Singapore's "endowment of immigrants", paired with its comparative advantage in geographic location along the trade routes, provided the means for material ambitions to be fulfilled (Huff, 1994: 3). During the colonial period, it was this combination of immigration and geographical advantage that shaped the economic development of Singapore and this remains one of the features of Singapore's economic development today.

As entrepôt trade, which had been relied on heavily by Singapore and the British, began to lose steam in the 1950s, it was no longer seen as reliable for providing employment to a growing young population and for generating economic growth (Chew and Lee, 1991; Huff, 1994). Industrialization was rationalized as the next logical phase for the development of Singapore. Attention focused on developing other sectors of the economy, especially manufacturing, which could also generate growth in sectors such as transport, finance, banking and construction. It has been argued that the absence of an industrial bourgeoisie was a constraint, in that it would require a concerted nurturance of the domestic population for Singapore to embark on its industrialization project (Huff, 1994). Yet, I would point out that the lack of an agricultural population meant that people were already part of an urban working class. In any regard, the

state would in all likelihood have an important role to play in any strategy for industrialization (Huff, 1994).

The local governing body that came into power was the People's Action Party (PAP), which was formally established in 1954 and won electoral success in 1959 when Singapore gained self-governance status from the British. The PAP was mainly comprised of English-educated upper-class nationalists, headed by Lee Kuan Yew, himself a graduate of Cambridge University (Tremewan, 1994). The PAP leaders strongly believed that Singapore could only survive the new challenges that independence brought through a merger with Malaya (Hill and Lian, 1995). Aside from economic imperatives, there was also a very specific political reason behind this merger with Malaya: complete independence from colonial rule would be possible.

An economic strategy was proposed for implementation following the merger: import substitution industrialization (ISI) – this would become the second stage of Singapore's political economy. This economic strategy could only succeed with the common market and political union with Malaya. In other words, ISI became the economic justification for the larger political intention. It was precisely on this political-economic platform that the PAP campaigned in the 1959 elections, after achieving self-governance (Tremewan, 1994). The PAP's battle for merger succeeded on 16 September 1963, and, along with Sabah and Sarawak, Malaya and Singapore made up the federation of Malaysia. *Merdeka*[1] through the merger was, however, short-lived (Chew and Lee, 1991).

Singapore's abrupt independence from the Malaysian federation came on 9 August 1965 and was the culmination of intense political and ethnic tensions between Malaysia and Singapore. This separation from the Malaysian federation immediately placed Singapore in a precarious position, economically, politically and socially: an island-state with a largely Chinese population surrounded by large Muslim states, namely, Malaysia and Indonesia. It was also politically significant that the Malays were the minority in Singapore, a point which remains relevant when discussing contemporary politics. There were also socio-cultural issues that had to be addressed in the quest for industrialization and nation-building. As an immigrant, multi-ethnic community, Singapore had no common ethnic or linguistic identity binding its nation together. While the framework of a state was available, there was no common sense of national belonging that

made people feel "Singaporean", as opposed to feeling "Chinese" or "Malay". Therefore, there was a degree of desperation felt by the PAP leaders, given the ethnic divisions of its people, the lack of resources and the precarious geo-politics of Singapore's location. The city-state also had few natural resources and had just lost its most important hinterland, Malaysia. ISI was no longer a workable economic strategy. This political turmoil conditioned and delayed the question of industrialization in Singapore since it meant there was the need to reorganize the relationship between the state and its citizen-subjects in a capitalist economic formation (Rodan, 1989: 45). The PAP was also faced with another dilemma: prior to the merger, it had gone to great lengths to demonstrate that an independent Singapore was not viable. Now, ironically, it had to prove that earlier analysis wrong (Chew and Lee, 1991).

Contextualizing class: regulating the labour regime by the Singapore state through export-oriented industrialization

Following the short-lived merger with the Federation of Malaya, the PAP quickly adopted the export-oriented industrialization (EOI) strategy for rapid industrialization through manufacturing, solving urgent problems of mass unemployment. Arguably then, Singapore has extended its territorial reach for economic development from the time of its independence. To do so, the PAP went on to comprehensively promote all the elements needed for EOI to succeed. It went about harnessing its ideological power by sponsoring a set of values and social attitudes – largely through the "ideology of survival" – that enhanced the political legitimacy of its will to rule exclusively and without serious opposition. The so-called "Asian values" of thrift and self-discipline in the PAP-defined "national interest" were promoted to curb all effective constitutional opposition and gain citizen acceptance of its authority; thus the PAP furthered its already extensive social control. The party also firmly established the ideas of meritocracy and elitism, which further rationalized its structures of political control. The primacy of English was rationalized entirely on the basis of its utility for science, technology and commerce; that is, it was essential for economic development both for its multicultural, multilingual population as well as for involvement in the global economy. The yearning to be competitive in the world export markets also led

to the suppression of collective labour movements – reducing the bargaining power of unions, lowering wages and expanding the prerogatives of management. As Rodan argues, with labour costs and compliance now crucial to the industrial strategy, the political defeat of labour was considered essential (1989: 91). The creation of the NTUC by the PAP curbed militant unionism and brought labour into the corporate structure of the Singapore state (Rodan, 1989). The provision of cheap and docile labour was not the only element of the government's strategy. The PAP also went on to add to Singapore's competitiveness by investing heavily in infrastructure and providing a range of direct and indirect subsidies of private firms' establishment and operating costs. In that sense, Singapore's aspirations to tap into the world economy have motivated dramatic changes within the city-state itself.

With the stress on exports, the government turned increasingly to foreign investors, for it was evident that only the well-established Western and Japanese firms and, to a lesser extent, other Asian firms could compete outside the region, where advanced technology, management, expertise, access to capital and efficient marketing as well as established markets gave them a decided edge. Foreign investors – extra-territorial capital mainly from the US, the UK and Japan – responded to government encouragement and economic opportunities. From 1965 to 1976, the value of foreign asset holdings in manufacturing increased 24 times (Rodan, 1989). Much of this resulted from the aforementioned state-directed infrastructure development and labour policies. The investment climate was also friendly to foreign companies, exempting them from import duties. Promotion centres were set up in financial centres in foreign countries to promote Singapore as an offshore manufacturing base (Rodan, 1989).

Corrective wage policy

Towards the mid-to-late 1970s, Singapore started facing labour shortages. Until then it was believed that the city-state could offer both low and mid-technology labour side by side. This appeared less true by the 1970s. The government's desire to increase the amount of higher-value-added production was conditioned primarily by the increasing value of the Singapore dollar, which had raised production

costs. Furthermore, Singapore would soon lose its "developing country" status at the World Bank, which would mean giving up its General System of Preferences trade benefits on labour intensive products (Rodan, 1989). As the international investment climate picked up in 1978, Singapore policy makers adopted new strategies to move Singapore towards a more sophisticated technological base, thereby taking it out of competition with lower wage countries and lessening the pressure on labour expansion for economic growth. Singapore turned to join the New International Division of Labour (NIDL) by re-positioning itself and moving the economy into higher levels of productivity and value-addition. To push for Singapore's upward mobility in the NIDL, the state adopted the Corrective Wage Policy (CWP) in 1979 to raise wage costs and increase higher valued productivity (Rodan, 1989). Generous tax and fiscal incentives were also provided for appropriate new investments and the social and physical infrastructure was expanded to encourage the use of more capital in production. It had previously been assumed that the state's holding down of wages had distorted the actual market value of Singapore's scarce labour; production now increased in low to middle technology industries in which Singapore no longer held comparative advantage (Rodan, 1989). While it may appear ironic that the state was looking to be more integrated within the NIDL by playing such a strong role again in determining wages, I would argue that this puzzle must be understood in the context of the developmental model as previously discussed. Indeed, a less cohesive, less powerful state would not have held the same capacity to carry out this measure. Manpower development was also supported by the government through various schemes administered by the state. To generate a more skilled local labour force, the government expanded education at all levels, especially at the tertiary level, with a whole range of new research and development institutions established to meet the specific demands of this new phase of industrial development (Rodan, 1989). In spite of the CWP and all its measures to shift the workforce towards higher productivity and increased wage levels, however, there has never been a minimum wage enforced upon employers in Singapore. Alongside the CWP, there is also a flexible wage system in place – a policy that shows the calculated steps taken to ensure that the labour force remains in a state of productivity and competitiveness for developmental purposes. There remain laws and

regulations today regarding the payment of salaries but, "there is no minimum wage requirement in Singapore. [Employers] are free to negotiate salaries and salary increases with [their] employee[s]".[2] In line with the developmental state characterization of Singapore, the CWP and its legacy, in effect, required the disciplining of *capital*. More recently, the National Wage Council (NWC) has suggested that "employers, unions and the government press on with concerted actions recommended in the January 2009 guidelines to cut costs, save jobs and enhance competitiveness" in the economic recession.[3]

Trade unions

It has been noted that the heavy government involvement in the provision and promotion of export incentives and comparative advantages has been accompanied by a truncated labour movement throughout Southeast Asia (Kelly, 2002). While there is a general lack of active labour collectives in the region – for example, in Penang unions are banned in the electronic sector, and in Cavite/Laguna in the Philippines less than 10% of the labour force is organized – I would argue that this is not the case in Singapore (Kelly, 2002). The labour movement in Singapore is thriving institutionally, yet, almost ironically, it has been subverted by the state to suit its developmental needs and as a mechanism of labour control.

Although the PAP had, in the 1960s, emphasized the necessity of a trade union movement that was responsive to government policy, new measures were being taken up in the 1970s to ensure that the NTUC and the government were aligned in their policies. The state was keenly aware that this new economic restructuring could only work with a cooperative union movement and an acquiescent labour force (Rodan, 1989). As Lee Kwan Yew, then prime minister of Singapore, said, "only the overriding authority of political leadership saves the country from unnecessary conflict; for if challenged, the union leadership knows it must face the consequence of a collision of wills; few union leaders can doubt the outcome of such a clash" (quoted in Rodan, 1989: 156). Through the subsequent restructuring of trade unions, the government ensured – using measures such as arresting the leader of the grassroots union organizations, Phey Yew Kok – that there would not be any remote possibility of power bases within organized labour that could challenge the PAP's hegemony in

general or, especially, its economic plans (Rodan, 1989). The state also encouraged the creation of various in-house unions as an extension of industry-based unions. This move further weakened the organizational capacity of cross-industry labour and made it possible for company-specific needs to be more easily realized. This also served to let workers identify easily with the company and to make the ties between individual and corporate success less abstract while at the same time making it more difficult for labour activism to demand broader improvements (Rodan, 1989; Kelly, 2002). As Marx argues, the continued production of commodities and capital accumulation can only be possible through the disciplining of labour. To banish any doubts about this social contract, the restructuring of the economy was aided by the fracturing of collective bargaining power as well as through the ideological disciplining of workers.

Controlling the social organization of workers for the success of the economic restructuring process was also legally reinforced through the legislative changes made to the Trade Unions Act in December 1982 (Rodan, 1989). The objectives, which still stand today, were:

- *to promote good industrial relations between workmen and employer;*
- *to improve the working conditions of workmen or enhance their economic and social status;*
- *to achieve the raising of productivity for the benefit of workmen, employers and the economy of Singapore*.[4]

Under the Trade Disputes Act, labour actions such as picketing, strikes and lockouts are also rendered illegal – a move which has left Singapore strike-free since 1978.[5] Marx asked if capitalists can create consent among workers under hierarchical and coercive conditions (Burawoy, 1984). It appears here that these legislative changes that enforced consent were intended to maximize the cooperation of unions in the restructuring process not just by reducing labour autonomy but also by helping to create ideological sympathy towards the government's objectives. This is rationalized through the discourses of "productivity" and "upgrading". In August 2009, at NTUC's Employment and Employability Institute, the issue of reducing reliance on foreign workers cropped up, with the main argument being that easy access to foreigners may be the reason workplace

productivity is slipping. In an official press release two days later, Manpower Minister Gan Kim Yong reinforced the logic behind the government's continued incorporation of foreign workers, saying that measures to restrict this practice may "create rigidity and distortion in the labour market, add costs to businesses and undermine their competitiveness" (*Straits Times*, 1 April 2009). Since April 2009, the NTUC, together with the Singapore National Employers Federation and with funding from the Ministry of Manpower started an NGO called the Migrant Workers Center (MWC). The MWC positions itself as a "bridge between NGO, MOM [Ministry of Manpower] and employers in aiding foreign workers [that is, migrant workers on work permits] with salary disputes, injury compensation claims and food and shelter needs" (*Straits Times*, 15 January 2010). In conjunction with the institutional and legislative changes to trade unions then, the state saw the need to instil amongst workers an ideological acceptance for the incorporation of foreigners into the local labour market. At a speech in 2010, Minister Mentor Lee Kwan Yew said,

> Without them, the two IRs would not be built, all the schools, buildings would not be there . . . So when you grumble [about them] – Serangoon estate[6] grumbles about the workers near the neighbourhood – please remember they're human beings. They come here to earn a living and do the heavy work for us. Without whom, you'll not be here.

Lee went on to say that if Singaporeans are disgruntled about having foreigners living and working in their midst, they must be prepared to upgrade their skills and productivity levels to keep the economy competitive. To achieve this, Lee urged unions to encourage their members to take up state-subsidized re-training programmes (*Today Online*, 19 February 2010).[7]

When the NWC issued its guidelines in January 2009, the Ministry of Trade and Industry forecasted that Singapore's GDP for 2009 would drop between 2% and 5%. In agreeing to the guidelines, the trade union responded,

> In this situation, it is right to be cautious. We must stay the course to save jobs for workers and prepare for the economic upturn. The Labour Movement believes that if we stop cutting costs to save jobs

> now, retrenchments will go up. And if we stop retraining workers and placing them into jobs, unemployment will rise . . . Companies should make judicious use of the flexible wage system and variable wage components to manage wage costs and match rewards to performance in a sustainable way.[8]

Since 2004, the Singaporean state's WoW! Fund programme has been providing subsidies of up to SGD$20,000 for company employees to have an "improved work–life balance" through the training of HR managers, improved infrastructure for remote access to work from home, adding nursing rooms to workplaces for back-to-work mothers and so on (Ministry of Manpower website).[9] These measures form a more elaborate network of social control and regulation to manufacture consent from workers. It is through consent that labour can be more readily extracted from working bodies, creating a complex form of capitalism where labour is rendered unfree not only through coercive means but through the calculated means of drawing ideological consent from labour and its representing organizations. This is further reinforced by "caring and fun" union measures such as providing discounts at supermarkets and leisure chalets for NTUC members.[10]

The global pursuit of flexible, docile, low-cost labour has encouraged industrial enterprises everywhere to reduce their fixed wage labour force, making payment systems more flexible and truncating labour collectivities. I hope it is clear from this section that the labour movement is not absent in Singapore. On the contrary, it is very much thriving through its co-optation by the state, which closely regulates the developmental model. This has led to the genesis of a particular type of institutionalized social contract between capital and labour collectives – one that aligns the latter with the purposes of the former. On a smaller, more intensive scale, these measures produce the competitive, enterprising working self in Singapore that is acquiescent to the capital demands of the developmental state. As with all developmental policies, the ways in which they are meant to be put into effect – that is, *how* they are governed – is different from the idealized representation, and the ways they affect individual lived experiences are always graduated (Ong, 2000). I will now go on to discuss how the different segments of the labour pool are institutionalized as Singapore continues to globalize its workforce.

Managing difference: Imagining a multiracial city-state

With independence, there was also a shift in the way the governing body related to its people. The governing body had to face the challenge of imagining a common objective as a nucleus of nationhood. Socially and politically, the need to build a nation-state out of an ethnically diverse population with a complex background of economic, political, social and cultural differences has resulted in the PAP's attempt to produce an overarching national identity and an ideology of "multiracialism" (Lai, 1995: 17). This ideology officially gives separate but equal status to the Chinese, Malays, Indians and "Others"[11] (or CMIO, for short) and informs official policies on various issues related to the economy, language, culture, religion and community life (Lai, 1995; Perry et al., 1997). This ideology became part of the national ideology, so that Singaporeans of various backgrounds can imagine themselves as a multiracial people. English was adopted as a convenient language of trade and is the first language of Singapore, tying the different ethnic groups together.

As mentioned earlier, the insecurity of Singapore's regional geopolitics is another dimension affecting ethnic relations and management in the city-state. Situated in the Malay Archipelago, which has a large "indigenous" Malay population and an "immigrant" Chinese minority, Singapore's ethnic composition created an arguably disadvantageous fit to its surrounding region. It was because of its ethnic differentiation and the dominance of its Chinese people that many viewed Singapore as a Chinese place, or even state (Lai, 1995). The ethnic identities of the Chinese and Malays in Singapore are, to an extent, shaped by the comparison of their economic and political positions with those of the Chinese and Malays in Malaysia. Further, the position of Chinese people in Singapore is structured by the historical experiences of the Chinese immigrant minorities in Southeast Asia; conversely, however, some view the Malays' social position in Singapore as a that of a disadvantaged indigenous minority (Lai, 1995). Finally, the ethnically differentiated development during the colonial period has resulted in limited interaction, the maintenance of rigid ethnic boundaries, strong stereotyping and an underlying sense of insecurity and mutual fear of dominance. These fears culminated in three violent riots prior to Singapore's independence (Lai, 1995).

The construction of the local multi-ethnic community must be understood against this background. Until the 1960s, Singapore's population mostly lived in separate ethnic settlements established by the colonial administration. Large-scale resettlement into self-contained public housing estates, implemented through the HDB was one of the ways in which the ideology of multiracialism materialized spatially. Through the construction of publicly administered, largely ownership-based housing projects, the HDB has been able to provide Singaporeans with affordable shelter and spaces to facilitate interaction among different ethnicities – for example, neighbourhood schools, markets, community centres, playgrounds, walkways that link one block of flats to another and so on (Lai, 1995; Perry et al., 1997; see also Chua, 1997). There are also ethnic quotas to ensure each housing block reflects Singapore's ethnic composition. From a strategic level, then, public housing in Singapore is a powerful tool in managing ethnic diversity and relations – a crucial issue that must be addressed in the creation of a national identity. Singapore's planners also saw the HDB as an efficient way of providing the improved living conditions that are necessary for the city-state's economic success (Perry et al., 1997). The state manages ethnic relations via the school curriculum, where the ethnicity of the student determines his or her "mother tongue" – for example, a Malay student must study Malay, an Indian student must study Tamil. Ethnic identity also continues to be clearly denoted on every Singaporean's identity card. The notion of multiracialism, hence, is conveyed and experienced in the everyday living spaces of Singaporeans.

Developmentalism in Singapore

Processes of labour control in Asia are facilitated by the strong capacity states continue to display in shaping their economies (Kelly, 2002). These processes are often presented as the responses of governments pursuing export-oriented and foreign investment driven developmental strategies perceived as attracting desirable "global capital". The Singaporean state, in particular, as a city-state that has few natural resources within its national boundaries and no sources of multilateral aid, uses the powers and capacities of the nation-state to transform society and space and to embed itself within the world economy. As a city-state, Singapore holds greater capacity than

any other to control its borders; it uses this to structure its labour force in such a way as to address the perceived needs of its economy (Olds and Yeung, 2004). The critical role the state continues to play in Asia could be succinctly understood as following the model of the developmental state, which is typical of East Asian states as well as Singapore (Woo-Cummings, 1999). The exact configuration of social power, ideological predisposition in capitalist societies and the nature of political and economic regimes depends a lot on their specific historical circumstances – this is what largely gives rise to differences among these states. It is not my aim here to provide a comprehensive reading of the uniqueness of Asian states nor their similarities and differences within. I would argue that Singapore's model of development corresponds with that of the developmental state in many ways.

Without many natural resources and with a diverse ethno-cultural population, the economic sphere emerged strategically as a site to which national interests could be directed (Hill and Lian, 1995). A developmental state is distinguished from a neoliberal state through the willingness of the former to discipline capital – especially financial capital – to force it into producing goods for global export markets (Johnson, 1982; Woo-Cummings, 1999). Singapore, to a large extent, resembles the developmental state model in that its industrialization became necessarily driven by the state's will to discipline financial capital. During the pre-war years, the role of the colonial government was confined to providing and maintaining the legal framework for private enterprise and building the infrastructure of Singapore's port (Chew and Lee, 1991). After 1959, however, the state also became pivotal in promoting development and it was strong and selective in intervention strategies. Singapore is "prominent as a country where planning has succeeded", such as with the CWP, as discussed earlier (Huff, 1994: 4). In short, far from being a free-market economy, Singapore's economy during this time and after World War II was largely orchestrated by the state (Rodan, 1989).

Finance is the key motivating force behind state action in a developmental state. It is the tie that links the state to the industrialists (Woo-Cummings, 1999). Developmental states buttress their legitimacy by creating institutions that can be moulded into a "developmental coalition" (Woo-Cummings, 1999: 13). In other words, to be "developmental" the bureaucracy must be effectively "embedded

in society, through a concrete set of connections that link the state intimately and aggressively to particular social groups with whom the state shares a joint project of transformation" (Woo-Cummings, 1999: 15). These connections between state and business must be refined and perfected over time, through a long process of institutional adaptation. In this regard, connections with society are also connections with industrial capital for developmental states. In this model of governance, the commitment to collective goals is not always expressed directly through economic policies and operations but is also exercised through "promotion of national ideologies and sentiments [often demanding sacrifices in immediate economic welfare] (Woo-Cummings, 1999: 27). Through institutional adaptation and innovation, "the state accommodates itself to the changing requirements for remaining competitive in the global marketplace and to provide support for educational infrastructure" (Woo-Cummings, 1999: 27). I will illustrate this point later on with reference to ministerial speeches and government documents.

The political power and control of the Singaporean developmental state bypasses the federal/provincial/municipal politics typical in other global cities (Olds and Yeung, 2004). For example, immigration policies and borders can be tightly managed to facilitate labour market restructuring, a capacity that no other global city has (Yeoh and Chang, 2001). On land-use planning matters, the statutory board responsible for urban planning, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), answers directly to the Ministry of National Development. In turn, the key agent of national development in Singapore is the EDB, which has almost a monopoly in determining the strategic direction of the economy (Olds and Yeung, 2004). Thus, the EDB formulates and carries out national economic development policy, followed by the URA taking over to ensure land-use planning supports the EDB's directives; as a result, the politics of urban change is extremely hierarchical in nature, with few complications from citizen participation. Given this role of the state and its strong hold over development, Singapore's structural promotion of its global reach has been rapid and unique (Olds and Yeung, 2004).

Indeed, a large portion of the causes and consequences of policies in Singapore result from this close-knit relationship between political and economic processes. From this perspective, there was no "miracle" that caused Singapore's economy to flourish nor is it an "accident

in history" (Huff, 1994: 3). It is from recognizing this strong integration of state and economy that we can develop a comprehensive understanding and analysis of the importance of the economy within nation building in Singapore.

By the mid-1970s, foreign firms already accounted for four-fifths of manufactured exports. Singapore, even in 1986, was still predominantly a manufacturing economy (Huff, 1994: 35). By this time, the Singaporean state had already begun to consolidate its role as an international financial centre (Perry et al., 1997). Rather than the domestic market organizing Singapore's international exchange, its "economy is dominated by multinational companies facilitating external cooperation . . . Singapore took in its entirety the [multinational enterprise] 'package' of capital, technology, entrepreneurship, management and marketing" (Huff, 1994: 36).

After the regional recession in the mid-1980s, however, Singapore began to shift its economic emphasis away from manufacturing and towards higher skills and growth in the service and financial sectors (Yeoh, 2006). Indeed by the 1990s, Singapore's economy was led by manufacturing and services as "the twin engines of growth" (Committee on Singapore's Competitiveness, 1998: 7).[12] The state in Singapore has enthusiastically created policies and institutions that are favourable to the growth of multinational corporations. In other words, multinationals are sought after as a substitute for local entrepreneurship in the development of Singapore's national economy, which is not much different from the historical development path of Singapore: "a willingness to accept foreign enterprise from the late 1960s continued its . . . cooperation and compromise with them, [together with] Singapore's strong locational advantage" (Huff, 1994: 36).

Fuelled by the increasing emphasis on the service industry – and within this industry, the financial sector specifically – the period from the 1990s up to the present saw the rise of foreign labour, both skilled and unskilled, in all sectors of the economy (Yeoh, 2006: 5). By this time, the state was keen on developing an "entrepreneurial culture" and "attracting global talent" so as to thrive in the increasingly competitive new global economy (Wong and Bunnell, 2006). Cost-cutting policies were also implemented to encourage foreign investment and to boost Singapore's competitiveness, resulting in rising retrenchment and unemployment rates. These were rationalized by the state

as an inevitable consequence of the move towards the new economy (Bunnell and Wong, 2006). The Economic Review Committee, a statutory board under the Ministry of Trade and Industry, exhorted Singaporeans to "understand the changing employment scene and its impact and implications and to adjust their mindsets and expectations" (Wong and Bunnell, 2006: 73). In May 2009, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced the formation of the Economic Strategies Committee (ESC) in Parliament. The ESC, it is claimed, will "develop strategies for Singapore to build capabilities and maximise opportunities as a global city". One of its objectives is to "provide opportunities for all by (c)reating quality jobs and real wage growth for the broad majority [and] making continued social investments for an inclusive, upwardly mobile society" (ESC website).[13]

"In particular, we should develop financial services to position Singapore as Asia's premier center for management and distribution of financial services" (Committee on Singapore's Competitiveness, 1998: 7). As this quote suggests, the financial sector has been designated as one of the key areas through which Singapore can extend its economic reach beyond its shores. In the Annual National Budget Report for 2005, it was stated,

> To enhance our status as an international financial center, we have taken major steps to open up the industry to greater competition, adopt a risk-focused regulatory regime, deepen the talent pool, strengthen the market infrastructure, and encourage leading financial players to hub their regional operations here . . . we have a sound and dynamic banking system, a quiet reputation for wealth management, and liquid and efficient capital markets.
>
> (Ministry of Finance website)[14]

The financial sector in Singapore also asserts itself as strong, dynamic and globalized in its promotion of "a pro-business environment, excellent infrastructure, cost-competitiveness, a highly skilled and cosmopolitan labour force" (Monetary Authority of Singapore website).[15] The quantitative results of this state-led project have been significant. The financial sector made up 12% of the GDP in 2013, was the fasting growing sector in the last quarter of 2014 (Ministry of Trade and Industry website).[16] There are 700 local and foreign financial institutions in Singapore, of which 200 are banks that hold

an asset size of about US$2trillion in 2013 (Monetary Authority of Singapore website).[17]

Assembling a cosmopolitan Singapore through the division of labour

While the above-mentioned measures formed a robust apparatus that strengthen its economy and labour force over time, Singapore has not, by any means, reduced its extra-territorial reach either outwardly or inwardly. The restructuring measures implemented since the early 1970s illustrate configurations of state, capital, labour and commodity production within a changing international division of labour. As part of the state's development desires to remain a part of this global economy, it was perhaps increasingly complex in its tapping of foreign peoples, ideas and resources, through the upgrading of its services sector within its city-state boundaries and the offshoring of the more low-productivity manufacturing industries for which it had been known (Rodan, 1989). As the economy moved "upscale" in the 1980s to produce for markets of the advanced capitalist countries, certain activities became increasingly marginalized in the city-state's spatial boundaries; but because they were still important to the economy as a whole, they were no longer located in the city itself but in its new hinterland. As a result, Singapore's higher-end services grew by 14.6% in 1989 (McGee, 1991). The spatialization of the Singaporean economy, thus, extended outward. This spatial dispersal of Singapore's economic activity and its measures to integrate into the global economy speak not only to the strategic role of the city-state but also to its aspirations as a global city.

Lower technology industries, like textiles and electronics manufacturing were offshored to Johor and then, later on, to the Riau Islands as the SIJORI[18] Growth Triangle developed in the 1980s. As Guinness observed, much of Johor's industrial development was a result of direct capital investment from Singapore (Guinness, 1994). The population in Johor's Mukim Plentong grew because many of these workers were discriminated against in attempts to find employment in Singapore. Much of Batam's labour was brought in from other parts of Indonesia. It can thus be said that Singapore's economic restructuring in the 1970s, as discussed earlier, had repercussions beyond its national boundaries, including the creation of new labour markets.

Through this Growth Triangle, we see, among other things, the immediate hinterland of Singapore spanning interstate boundaries. Scholars have argued that the Growth Triangle would not exist were it not for Singapore's strategic niche in the global flow of commerce (Sparke et al., 2004; Bunnell et al., 2006). Within this cooperative group, Singapore would provide the skilled labour, business services and capital, Johor would provide the skilled and semi-skilled labour and recreation land, while Batam and the rest of the Riaus would provide low-cost labour and some natural amenities, like beaches. I would argue then that the Growth Triangle is premised upon uneven development, which is often glossed over as "comparative advantage", where Singapore taps into and fuels extra-territorial flows of people, capital, commodities, regulations and resources.

Contemporary incorporations of foreign labour as development practice

The incorporation of foreign labour into Singaporean space in recent years is fundamentally based on class. The turn of the century saw an increasing proportion of non-citizen population – a direct consequence of the city-state's restructuring policies, which aimed at attracting foreign labour and were reliant on it (Yeoh, 2004). The deliberate and strategic reliance on "foreign manpower" is part and parcel of the dominant neoliberal discourse of globalization as an "inevitable and virtuous growth dynamic" (Coe and Kelly, 2002: 348). As elsewhere, the transmigrant population growth corresponds with restructuring processes to strategically render labour more "flexible" in relation to capital (May et al., 2007). As briefly mentioned above, the workforce was deliberately and rigorously configured to incorporate a significantly large foreign labour pool which can be broadly divided into two strands: foreign talent and foreign workers. Both strands of workers are brought into Singaporean space strategically and they are administered very differently (Yeoh, 2006). The state's management of its migrant populations requires different modalities of governance, employing various mechanisms of calculation, surveillance, control and regulation to create a graduated system into which different migrants are incorporated (Ong, 2000). The measures of public administration of foreigners in Singapore set in place mechanisms for extracting different forms of labour from different

bodies, dividing labour in a way that reproduces socio-economic inequalities in Singapore. Arguably then, this is a bourgeoisie state model, one which seeks to appropriate profit from differentiated workers.

Foreigners' access to rights and privileges is mainly differentiated by skills status and by the perceived desirability of these skills in terms of the achievement of national goals. Differentiated access is institutionalized by the issuance of a range of work passes and permits that fall broadly into the employment pass and the work permit categories (Yeoh, 2004). Building a nation in the image of an outward-looking metropolis requires selectively inclusionary projects to entice "foreign talent" – highly skilled professional workers, entrepreneurs and investors who are part of the face of cosmopolitanism in Singapore (Ye and Kelly, 2011). This group of migrants hold a form of employment pass[19] that enables them to apply for dependents' passes and gives them access to greater job mobility. Far greater in number, however, are the work permit holders, most of whom are concentrated in the manufacturing, construction, shipbuilding and domestic industries. This pool is also broken down further by nationalities, with rules and regulations set by the Ministry of Manpower, permitting only certain nationalities to access work in particular industries – a point which I will elaborate later. This high demand for foreign workers reflects the low wages accepted by these workers, the low risk of them quitting and their skill sets – all of which are conditions already set in place by the work permit regulations (*Straits Times*, 9 December 2009). Another restriction, regulated by the work permit and emphasized in official discourse, is that "foreign workers" have no opportunities for social advancement within Singapore.

An article in Singapore's *Business Times* postulates that the total increase in foreign labour between 2004 and 2005 is approximately 80% of the total increase in Singapore's population (9 February 2006). As it now stands, there are about 1.5 million foreigners working in Singapore, making up approximately 25% of the 5.5 million people within Singapore's borders (Population.sg website).[20] With more immigrants being given citizenship and permanent residence, the proportion of the population who were born in Singapore has fallen to under 82%, a level lower than in 1980 (Yeoh, 2004: 2435; Thompson, 2009; *Straits Times*, 7 August 2009). Quantifying the breakdown of foreigners working in Singapore by nationality,

gender and race/ethnicity is, however, very difficult because of the confidentiality surrounding official data.[21]

There are two main flows of transnational foreigners who are administered into the labour force in a bifurcated way: the skilled professional and managerial workers in high-end positions and the low-waged contract labourers. Far larger in number is this second group of workers, who enter with work permits. The number of contract workers was estimated to be about half a million in 2000; by December 2009 the official figure reached 870,000 (Yeoh, 2006: 29; *Straits Times*, 7 August 2009). The first group, higher skilled and better educated foreigners who enter Singapore on an employment pass, has been growing rapidly as a result of intensive recruitment and liberalized eligibility criteria. These foreigners are found working in financial institutions, universities, biomedical labs and other "knowledge-based" sectors (Thompson, 2009). In 1997, employment pass holders numbered approximately 55,000 – about 12% of the total foreign workforce. This number rose to 175,200 although it remains at 12%, given the overall population increase (Population.sg website).[22] More specifically, the foreign employees on the employment pass programmes were eligible for long-term social passes and dependants' passes.[23] Recently, the pass categories were revised to create greater flexibility for foreign employees seeking work as professionals in Singapore (Ministry of Manpower website, date accessed 10 July 2009). For example, on 1 January 2007, the Ministry of Manpower introduced the personalized employment pass (PEP), which frees employment pass holders and non-permanent residents from working for a specific employer. PEP holders can generally take on employment in any sector, although there may be some jobs where prior permission is required. They do not need to re-apply for a new pass when changing jobs and they are also given the flexibility of staying for up to six months without a job to evaluate employment or work opportunities. They will not be required to leave Singapore during this time and dependents may still join them while their pass is valid.[24]

The government's principal rationale for encouraging foreign talent is to drive its economic regionalization in competition with other top cities because it was perceived that its own talent base was too small to provide the core pool of talent needed. On this basis, the government has followed a policy of "gathering global talent" and "making Singapore a cosmopolitan city" since the late

1990s (former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, quoted in Yeoh and Chang, 2001). Apart from policies to encourage investment and trade and strengthen high-technology capabilities, a key plank of the attempt to globalize the city-state is to "build a talent capital", mainly through "augmenting Singapore's talent pool through attraction and management of international talent" (Ministry of Manpower, cited in Yeoh, 2006). In 2009, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said, "Singapore does not exist in isolation. We live in a globalised world. People move from one country to another, and talent is especially mobile" (Prime Minister's Office website).[25] Apart from investing heavily in the city-state's quality of human capital within its borders, navigating the globalized world requires even more rapid augmentation achievable only by importing from outside the nation's borders "so that when the tide comes in again, we will have that thick layer of entrepreneurs and foreign talent to take our economy even further into the next century" (Former Minister of Trade and Industry, George Yeo, 1998, quoted in Yeoh, 2004: 2435). Although skilled transnational workers are wooed by the state, mainly to fuel economic activities, they are not only situated as economic actors for the new economy in the official discourse – indeed, "international talent infuse [Singaporean] society as they bring a spirit and vigour which will motivate Singaporeans to scale even greater heights" (Manpower 21, 1999: 34). Their presence is also, hence, constructed as bringing a desirable joie de vivre to Singapore.

In the context of Singapore, then, the state "plays a necessary role in shaping both the real and discursive contours of the labour regime" (Coe and Kelly, 2002: 347). Such discursive constructions situate Singapore as home to a polyglot population. Arguably, this is a version of cosmopolitanism that is close to the well-entrenched view of Singapore as a multiracial, multilingual, multicultural and multi-religious society (Yeoh, 2004). As part of the material basis for this social reproduction of Singapore's cosmopolitan identity, the state has emphasized massive infrastructural development, including "The Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay" that comprises several theatres and performance spaces costing an estimated S$400 million (Yeoh and Chang, 2001: 1037). Additions to the waterfront[26] entertainment landscape included a Crazy Horse franchise from Paris and a nightclub from the UK-based company Ministry of Sound, paid for out of the $60 million budget to "fill the gap in premium night

entertainment for a niche group of well-heeled business travelers and regional visitors" (Minister for Trade and Industry, Lim Hng Kiang, 5 December 2005, Singapore government press release).

In its bid to attract "global talent", the state is hence also fostering a geography within its national boundaries conducive to a vibrant cultural scene. Spaces such as pubs, clubs, restaurants and coffeehouses are imagined as crucial for facilitating networking among artists, designers, entrepreneurs, scientists and venture capitalists to enhance the "milieu of innovation" deemed vital to the new economy. It is also hoped that through such networking practices, an "entrepreneurial culture" can be fostered in Singapore, with both Singaporeans and "global talent" performing in line with appropriate cultural values such as "creativity", "flexibility" and "entrepreneurship" (Wong and Bunnell, 2006: 72).

The Ministry of Manpower formulated "Manpower 21" – an initiative to "create a blueprint which would represent the vision of future Singapore, from the manpower point of view" (Manpower 21, 1999). The formal vision is for Singapore to transform into a talent capital by developing a "systematic framework for a globally competitive workforce". For this framework to succeed, one of the recommendations that Manpower 21 stresses is:

> [to] actively augment our manpower pool at the higher end and be prepared to lower our dependency on low skilled workers . . . for high end international talent, we should establish a strategic marketing plan that captures the new spirit of Singapore, and expand the international operations of Contact Singapore[27] . . . we should also establish an internet-based international talent recruitment website, develop programmes to enable talents to work in overseas operations of Singapore companies and cultivate wide networks of "Friends of Singapore".
>
> (1999: 3)

It should be noted that this so-called intention to "lower dependency on low skilled workers" has not been realized. As noted earlier, the number of employees on work permits has almost doubled in the past decade. This rhetoric continues to crops up in official discourse and, as I elaborate later, it is accompanied by certain policies to render individual "unskilled" bodies transient in Singapore, while figures

to date show that the reliance on foreign labourers appears to be increasing.

The creation of a "cosmopolis" is understood in official discourse as both an enhanced version of the older philosophy of multiculturalism as well as a new, desirable vision of an open, creative, vibrant, world-class city (Yeoh, 2004). Indeed, as former Prime Minister Goh said during the 1997 National Day Rally,

> Singapore must become a global, cosmopolitan city, an open society where people from many lands can feel at home.[28]

Former Minister for Trade and Industry George Yeo, also said,

> We must make sure that we're getting our fair share of the weird and wonderful from China, India, the West and the rest of the world. If we can do that, then we are in the running.
>
> (*Business Times*, 22 May 2002, quoted in Yeoh, 2004)

The coinage of a "cosmopolitan Singapore and Singaporeans" is hence part of a state-driven, state-engineered globalization project reflecting the city-state's aspirations (Yeoh and Chang, 2001; Yeoh, 2004: 2436). Indeed, the increasing proportion of non-residents/non-citizens in the population at the millennial turn is a direct consequence of the city-state's policies to attract and rely on "foreign manpower" to create a global talent capital. This has led to the re-imagination of Singapore as a place for cosmopolitans – the group of elite transnational workers who are eligible to enjoy the its porous borders and who, in this case, are interpreted as symbolizing globalization, diversity, urbanization, industrialization, modernity, efficiency, accessibility and high-speed connections to all parts of the globe. The above-mentioned policies and infrastructural developments cater to the group of "foreign talent", who are valorized as crucial to fulfilling Singapore's cosmopolitan dream. Rather than being open to difference, cosmopolitanism at the level of national policies in Singapore is already an exclusive idea that is accessible to a select group of people of particular backgrounds. In short, the cosmopolitan aspirations of Singapore are realized through attracting and retaining foreign talent. This particular deployment of cosmopolitanism is, hence, one that flattens diversity in order to manage and manipulate national development.

It is clear that this is a brand of cosmopolitanism with discursive and material limits, where, consequently, some groups of people are constructed as much more important for Singapore's success than others. In this way, the Singaporean state promotes its own class project, one that is not only shrouded in the discourse and strategic policy applications of cosmopolitanism but one that is *realized through it*. Within this class-based imagination of cosmopolitanism, it is often glossed over that Singapore – or any other global city, for that matter – owes its success not only to the presence of multinational corporate headquarters and the transnational elites of the professional classes but also has to be sustained by an underbelly of lowly paid, low-status employees. Crucial to the actualization of national development, and at a larger scale, global capitalism, is the creation and mobilization of a cheap labour force. The expansion of low-wage jobs as a function of economic growth in the global city implies a reorganization of the capital–labour relation (Sassen, 1991). Similarly to London, these low-wage jobs in Singapore are increasingly filled by new arrivals on short-term work contracts (May et al., 2007). This glossing over of large numbers of migrant others in the cosmopolis is not an accidental nor ignorant act but one which is a structural necessity to spearhead the state's cosmopolitan project, reproducing class divisions amongst groups of workers. In other words, development in Singapore functions on a very carefully calibrated cosmopolitanism, peopled by a highly differentiated labour force, where certain groups are privileged over others and where different sectors are subjected to different regulations, sometimes even before they arrive in Singapore to work. And in the process, these regulations assign different social fates to different people. We must then ask what are the consequences of these policies for the low-status workers? What are the opportunities that are open to them? How are these workers brought in? How do they live in the Singapore described above, amongst Singaporeans? What is their economy of needs that motivated them to seek work in Singapore? It is the official situation of this strand of low-paid, low-status workers to which we now turn.

Foreign workers

The high demand for this category of workers illustrates not only the low wages but also what is deemed acceptable by these low-status workers, and consequently, what is unacceptable for Singaporean

workers. They mostly take on jobs that require manual labour or shift work, in sectors such as manufacturing, construction, shipbuilding and personal services, as well as domestic work (Yeoh, 2006; *Straits Times,* 9 December 2009). The sort of work that is accessible to work permit holders are organized according to their gender, nationality and ethnicity. The ways these factors affect female migrant domestic workers in Singapore has been well-documented by Brenda Yeoh and Shirlena Huang (see, for example, Yeoh and Huang, 1998; Yeoh et al., 1999). Indicative of the feminization of international labour migration, domestic workers are exclusively female and come from five approved countries – the Philippines, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand (Thompson, 2009). The vast majority of domestic workers in Singapore are from the first two countries with approximately 70,000 Filipinas and 60,000 Indonesians working as domestic help (Yeoh et al., 2004: 11, quoted in Thompson, 2009). Hard physical labour such as construction and shipbuilding is largely performed by foreign males, with Bangladeshis and Chinese nationals among the most visible, though a large number of Thais, Burmese and others also work in these sectors. In construction, 70% of the labour force are foreigners, far higher than the national 37.6% reliance rate. Foreigners, mostly men and women from Malaysia and China, hold 51% of jobs in the manufacturing sector and low-paying service sectors jobs (*Straits Times,* 9 December 2009). The construction sector is expected to remain a significant driver of foreign employment growth in 2015 (Ministry of Manpower website).[29] To understand this particular composition and assemblage of foreign labour in Singapore, it is necessary to first examine the variety of measures employed by the state to ensure that, in structural contrast to foreign "talent", these workers remain acquiescent, temporary and controlled. The main measures used to create this form of labour force are the work permit system, the approved source countries system, the dependency ceiling and the foreign worker levy. It is through these measures that we start to see how these workers are brought into being – how they are valued through their lack of value or, as Wright puts it, how their worth is based on their worthlessness (2006: 2).

All foreign workers on the work permit earn SGD$2,200 or less a month. As mentioned earlier, this is in accordance with the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act guidelines set by the Ministry of

Manpower to ensure that these migrant workers keep their transient status. Work permits are valid for either one or two years and are subject to renewal by employers. Economic downturns always affect those living on the margins of the economy the hardest. In times of economic recession, the restrictions ensure that these are also the workers who are most vulnerable to becoming unemployed and/or repatriated. For example, during the recession in the late 1990s, 7,000 foreign workers had their work permits cancelled in the first five months of 1998 as compared to 6,000 cancellations in the whole of 1997 (Rahman, 2000). My own ethnographic data also reveals that during the economic downturn in 2009, a large number of foreign workers were brought into Singapore on an In-principle Approval, only to be repatriated after a month without working because the company that officially hired them had gone out of business – a point which I will elaborate in a later chapter. The open borders of Singapore, therefore, strategically allow this group of workers to be rendered flexible enough to be legally removed from within its boundaries.

Work permit holders face various restrictions that local employees and some foreign employees on employment passes do not – most notably, not being eligible to bring dependants (spouses and children) over to Singapore or to change employers while on the work permit, which forms a barrier of entry into the local labour market. There are also thorough health checkups, chest X-rays and a test for HIV/AIDS (Yeoh, 2004). Work permit holders are also ineligible for residency – another measure to ensure they remain a flexible, transient and acquiescent group that has no claim to citizenship. Marriage to Singaporeans, while not outrightly disallowed, is subject to approval by the Ministry of Manpower. While foreign workers are a "strategic asset" to Singapore's labour force, they are not seen as desirable future citizens, unlike foreign talent. As the then Acting Minister of Manpower Ng Eng Hen said in a 2007 Parliament address,[30]

> On the continuing need for the Marriage Restriction Policy for Work Permit holders, may I remind members, that at this point in time we have more than 500,000 WP holders in Singapore, mainly less-skilled or unskilled workers. Quite clearly, we need to ensure that they do not sink roots in Singapore.

Another measure for monitoring the use of foreign labour is the foreign worker levy, which seeks to limit demand for migrant workers. Official discourse argues that this "is a pricing control mechanism to regulate the demand for foreign workers in Singapore".[31] This is applied in close conjunction with the dependency ceiling quotas which vary across job sectors. The monthly levy is lowest for "skilled" workers and where the dependency ratio is less than 30% (that is, less than 30% of the firm is peopled by foreigners). These are periodically adjusted with shifts in the economic cycle to protect jobs for local workers.[32] For example, the current official dependency ceiling for the marine industry is one local full-time worker to five foreign workers. Companies that stay within this guideline then pay $295 per month for each "unskilled" foreign worker. The government, under advice from its Economic Strategies Committee, has recently announced that levies imposed on work permit holders will increase by 20% over the next three years, with the first of these increments starting in July 2010, with the construction industry bearing the largest levy increase.[33] This levy increase was introduced to rectify a perceived over-dependence on foreign labour and in the attempt raise productivity of workers. As Minister of Manpower Gan Kim Yong says,

> This way, we allow market forces to operate so that we can efficiently allocate foreign manpower resources, give enterprises some flexibility while motivating them to improve productivity and minimise reliance on foreign workers. It is not a perfect system but it is a practical system.[34]

On top of this levy, employers of non-Malaysian foreign workers are required to post a SGD$5,000 security bond in the form of a banker's guarantee to the government as a form of insurance that hired foreign workers will not run away. This bond is reclaimed by the employer upon the eventual repatriation of the foreign worker, after the termination of his or her work permit. While this bond officially ensures that the employer repatriates the worker after his or her contract ends rather than allowing the unemployed alien to remain, it also motivates the employer to keep the workers under strict surveillance to prevent a "runaway" case. Indeed, the high costs of hiring foreign labour for these jobs sets up the potential for employers to download

the burden to workers – a problem which is realized even before the workers arrive in Singapore, as I will discuss in depth later on. Most migrant workers on work permits are in very low-paid jobs – the cheapness of their labour, combined with their institutionalized temporality in Singapore, ensures that the riches they generate for their employers overwhelms the costs of their hire, as is evident from the increasing numbers of foreigners in these physically demanding jobs. Through these policies and discourses, the existing system of labour control produces a type of disposability or at least interchangeability for each foreign body labouring in jobs that are "unskilled", such that each worker does not have anything special to offer than another cannot; this enables a quick turnover of individual working bodies for employers, while maintaining a steady inflow of low-paid, low-status workers as a group.

A measure for regulating foreign workers and the division of labour that has not received much scholarly attention lies in the system of approved source countries, which varies according to job sector (Ye, 2013a; 2013b). These are divided into "traditional source countries" (TSC), "non-traditional source countries" (NTSC), North Asian countries (NAS) and China. Employers of each sector are instructed by the state to recruit only from the approved sources. For example, in the manufacturing industry, only workers from Malaysia (TSC), NAS and China can be recruited, migrants from NTSC are excluded. In the marine and construction industries, however, workers can be recruited from all the source countries. This accounts for the concentration of migrants from India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Philippines and Pakistan – their exclusion from the services and manufacturing sectors channels them towards construction and shipbuilding/repairing within the Singaporean labour market. The enforced division of labour, this structural unequal access to work in Singapore explains why the greatest number of workers from these particular sending countries is in these sectors. Malaysians, on the other hand, have fewer barriers to entry into the Singaporean labour market, which accounts for their presence in other sectors of the economy. It can be seen clearly from this policy of approved source countries that workers' race/ethnicity and nationality are tightly woven with their positions in the division of labour. It has been difficult to get an explanation from the ministry for this policy of selective hiring based on nationality. The information is not made

publicly available and my emails to the ministry have gone unanswered. Barr's work, however, reveals more of the racial consciousness within Singaporean policies, specifically, under the leadership of Lee (Barr, 1999). As Lee said,

> I started off believing all men were equal. I now know that's the most unlikely thing to ever have been, because millions of years have passed over evolution, people have scattered across the face of this earth, been isolated from each other, developed independently, had different intermixtures between races, peoples, climates, soils . . . I didn't start off with that knowledge . . . we were faced with the reality that equal opportunities did not bring about more equal results.
>
> (Barr, 1999: 150–151)

While having particularly racially based assumptions hardly makes Lee unique in Asia or anywhere else, it must be emphasized that he has created a regime where racial categorization has been accentuated. These beliefs about racially based difference is worth noting, especially in a city that brands itself as a cosmopolitan global-city with a particular historical emphasis on multiculturalism. These assumptions form the foundation for the development of a complex, stratified labour force, one in which the rhetoric of cosmopolitanism is to some extent given the lie by the reality of a racialized labour market segmentation, while taking into account Singapore's unique international circumstances and ability to regulate and modulate the flow of immigrant labour.

This chapter has explored how development in Singapore has been configured through its global linkages, notably since pre-colonial times. The more recent forms of migration to Singapore of men and women from different parts of the world, especially from the surrounding region, is not only reconfiguring Singapore's relations with the world from which these migrants come, but is also creating a segmented labour market. The global city is therefore one where state governance continues to play a strong role in directing development. Economic, political and social inequality emerges through the intertwined dialectic of cosmopolitanism and skills differentials, where workers are incorporated and valued differently via state policies and programmes. Within the realization of a global Singapore

there are workers, increasingly migrants, who are situated as peripheral labouring bodies within the economy as well as those who are seen as the cosmopolitan face of the city-state. It is through the investigation of their work and living experience in the city-state that we can understand what the global city means to these different actors. Paradoxically their participation as workers is crucial to the success of this model of development, yet their autonomy over where and how they choose to apply their labour is managed by various mechanisms of control and regulation. These make up the state apparatus which forms what Burawoy calls the "politics of production" – the institutions that regulate and shape struggles in the workplace, enabling the domination of certain groups over others (1984: 87). The official rhetoric, laws and policies governing foreign working bodies, aside from generating economic consequences perceived to be desirable for Singapore's growth, also form the ideology and politics surrounding economic production in Singapore, so much so that they shape not only the movements and situations of the foreign workers themselves but how locals understand themselves in relation to these workers. The following chapters will go on to show how class is reproduced through a graduated system where further up the hierarchy workplace regimes become less rigid, as reflected in higher wages, more skilled workers and less dependency on the employer by the worker. Crucially, this is not to say that there is no experience of inequality within each group. I will discuss the different ways in which inequalities are generated, experienced and sometimes disguised in different workplaces. As a distinctive kind of global city(-state), Singapore's labour market and immigration policies reinforce particular forms of inequalities that cause greater material harm and precariousness to some more than others.

3
Migrating to Singapore: Bangladeshi Men

Karim, 29

A person from his village came up to Karim[1] one day and asked him how much he made a day as the owner of a vegetable shop in Dhaka. This person eventually became Karim's agent and persuaded him to work in Singapore. He sold his vegetable shop, used up all his savings and, moving his wife and daughter into his brother-in-law's house, sold his own house to pay the agent SGD$10,000 for a work-permit job in Singapore. His agent promised that this job would fetch SGD$2,000 a month – much more, Karim was led to believe, than he was earning selling vegetables, even though he was able to save about SGD$100 a month. Karim hoped that this new income would bring about a much better life for his young daughter and wife – a life that he would not be able to afford working in Bangladesh. He had never worked in Singapore before but he told me, "I come Singapore because I thinking very nice country. Tourists go Singapore, come back to Bangladesh, many good things to say . . . Agent also tell me Singapore [has] very good job for me". He was then enrolled in a three-month training programme in Dhaka for ship-repairing – something he had never done before.

While he was working, Karim told me, his employer rarely paid the workers on time, if at all; over-time wages were often only paid to the workers who were the employers' relatives. One time, Karim, along with a few of his co-workers confronted their employer regarding their wages – they had not been paid for three months. The workers told the boss, "no money, no work". The employer, along with the managers of the shipyard rounded the men into a corner at the worksite and physically assaulted them. He fell from a ladder one day

while repairing a ship. "Now no job because come here seven months working, accident happen. I [cried many days] after ". The accident left him with two broken bones in his left hand. The employer sent him to the company's doctor who issued him a one-day medical leave – a single day's leave for a broken hand. His employer threatened to repatriate him if he could not perform on the job as usual. "I would die if I go back to Bangladesh", Karim told me. He revealed that he still owed some debts and he had no more savings to fall back on – everything had gone to paying his agent.

Karim knew about the "security companies" that employers often hire to keep workers in check – he feared they would forcibly repatriate him while he was at work one day. Encouraged by his social network of Bangladeshi friends, who are themselves shipyard workers, he left his employer's dormitory and went to lodge a report at the Ministry of Manpower. The ministry then cancelled his work permit and issued him a special pass that allowed him to stay in Singapore, but disallowed him to work while investigations on his "workman's compensation case" proceeded. Karim frequently slept at a car park – he did not feel safe living in his company's dormitory after he reported his case to the Ministry of Manpower, even though his employer is legally bound to house him. He once told me that sleeping at the car park was "no problem" for him. He said all he had to do was to move to a more sheltered area when it rained. He ate his dinners at Sutha's – the restaurant on Cuff Road in Little India where I met him.

Karim was repatriated on 7 July 2009 with his workmen's compensation case still pending – he had taken the case to a common law court as he felt the amount of compensation money the insurance company initially offered him was too low. He still does not know when his compensation money will arrive. He told me before he left that he would return to Singapore if his compensation money was enough to pay for his agent fees again and if he gets the chance to work for a "good boss". In spite of the challenges he has had to face, Karim says Singapore is safe and "very good". He tells me that in Bangladesh there is no constant electricity, hot running water or paved roads. He told me that he would use the advances his lawyer issued him to buy some shampoo and makeup for his wife. I asked him if those items would not be cheaper in Bangladesh. Karim agreed but then explained that, "Go back to Bangladesh, must buy Singapore things because people think they are better".

Babu, 26

"I come to Singapore so that my family can be happy. We are poor but I want them to be happy. Now no work, no money", Babu told me the first day I met him in Singapore's Little India. He was one of 14 men brought over to Singapore from Bangladesh after each paying $10, 000 to an agent in Bangladesh; none of them had been given a single day's work. The men were all stranded here for a month before being sent back home. Like most others, Babu had sold his house to pay part of his agent fees, which amounted to around SGD$10,000. The rest of the fees had been paid by borrowing from his friends and relatives. I asked him if he would come back to Singapore again after being stuck here with no work for a whole month. He quipped with a big smile and a shrug of his shoulders, "why not!". Puzzled, I asked him how and why. He told me he looked forward to returning to Singapore again – his agent had promised to relocate him to another company. This would give him the chance to earn enough to pay off the sum he borrowed for his agent's fees. Babu's agent in Bangladesh stayed true to his word – a rarity! – and brought him, along with three other men out of the original 14, back to Singapore to work with another employer a month later. The rest of the men were not as lucky. They remain in Bangladesh.

Babu went on to work in construction on a work permit, where he manually carries 50 kg bags of cement around the worksite. He works about ten hours a day and is paid about $18 – a rate typical for Bangladeshi and Indian construction workers. Babu, like other migrants I have spoken to, tells me that workers of other nationalities – Malaysian, Singaporean, Thai and so on – are generally paid more, even if they do the exact same job as the Bangladeshis. It was difficult for him to sleep at night at first – he never had to share a room in Bangladesh but he now shares his partitioned dorm room with 30 other men. When I asked him to describe his dorm conditions, he said, "many people in one place, very hot. One fan is not enough because the air ventilation is no good. But boss doesn't care. He only wants 'cheap' ". Every month, his employer deducts $20 and $125 from his wages for "electricity bill" and "food" respectively. This is in spite of – or perhaps precisely because of[2] – Ministry of Manpower guidelines to provide maintenance for foreign workers. I asked Babu if he had ever tried to negotiate for better living

conditions and higher wages. He told me he had thought about it but ultimately, "what can we do? If I ask my boss anything, he will ask me to go back to Bangladesh. So no matter how hard the job, I just do". Babu gets paid about $800 a month before the monthly deductions by his employer. This is a wage that matches the national average for labourers in this line of work (*Straits Times,* 28 July 2007). He told me he would send about $600 back to Bangladesh and keep $50 as his "pocket money for phone card, drinking Coca Cola and Sprite and maybe go out". His family uses the remitted income to pay off the debts incurred from paying Babu's agent – debts that can only be cleared in about a year, if his income remains stable. He said he would go back to Bangladesh after this debt is cleared and pay his agent again in hopes of getting another job because the current one is not paying him enough. Babu expects to pay at least $3,000 to his agent for his next job but "if [he] want[s] a good company", he says the fees will be $5,000.

The Labour of Migration and Cosmopolitanism

Karim and Babu are two members of a low-paid and highly flexibilized sector of the differentiated labour market in Singapore, which has been built upon highly strategic cosmopolitan discourses and practices. These young, able-bodied men have been essential, strategic factors of production in Singapore's pursuit of becoming a world-class city through a highly differentiated workforce. As Harvey points out, a spatially based – that is, one that is grounded – cosmopolitanism fundamentally highlights the exercise of power (2000). One can see how through these discourses of cosmopolitanism and flexibilization (often manifested through policies like those discussed here) and the way that the transnational labour market is socially regulated, dividing and situating workers in different parts of the economy within Singapore, where some workers are exposed to greater harm than others (Peck, 1996; Wright, 2002). The cosmopolitan discourse used in crafting Singapore as a world-city that is open to the "wonderful and weird" fractures when we look at the dynamics of development, not least of which are the processes that create particular kinds of workers within a transnational labour force. While Bangladeshis like Babu and Karim were initially transnational in their work journeys, the low pay, long working hours and longstanding debts force them into being acquiescent while being locked in their

social positions in Singapore. Indeed, Ong argues that migration produces a particularly clear context where uneven power relations and stratification reveal themselves (1999). While her argument reveals exclusionary practices in terms of citizenship, I assert that a parallel argument can be made for the production of classed bodies, by constructing certain people as more suitable for particular types of work through normalized exclusionary practices of the state and companies, and within and across different groups of workers in the globalized labour market. Going a step further, it can be argued that the local labour market is very much premised upon these power differences (Peck, 1996). The social space of the labour market, is, thus, characterized by the unique intersection of processes of labour production, reproduction and regulation (Coe and Kelly, 2002). Although these intertwined processes that hold consequences for understanding cosmopolitanism and class can be observed in many other aspiring Asian cities, I would argue that Singapore makes a particularly robust case study given its state's capacity to govern borders and finely calibrated policies of labour market segmentation.

Bangladeshi male migrants are part of a vast pool of inexpensive and mobile workers which is maintained because of powerful structures of inequality at both the global and local scales that require the extraction of their labour. As McDowell argues in her work on low-status service work, these are "warm bodies", who work on precarious contracts with extremely low rewards (2008). The economic stagnation of Bangladesh and the restructuring of Singapore's economy – discursively constructed as a cosmopolitan one – set up a highly calibrated transnational labour market for migrants from the former to take on certain jobs in the latter. This migration thus emerges from the unequal development of regions and is the concrete effect of larger structural forces of globalization. This phenomenon, which is first and foremost an economic one, also shapes and is shaped by the circumstances, needs, desires and attitudes of individuals, motivating them to continue their arduous labouring in the construction and marine industries. People's economic circumstances condition what they dare to dream is possible; they shape, rather than simply rob people of their agency. I argue that it is the intricate web of structure and agency that reproduces a particular form of class relations within the division of labour in Singapore: exploitation, unequal treatment, unequal pay and status differences are met with

migrants' own enactment of their identities as they become part of a transnational labour force. It is these intertwined processes that reinforce the class project in Singapore, that construct differentiated bodies so that capital can extract labour that is qualitatively different from different groups of workers.

The Bangladeshi male migrant worker, the focus of this chapter, essentially embodies cheapness rather than skill for the employers and, at a larger scale, for Singapore's overall development. Bangladeshi male migrants occupy a particular location within the segmented labour market in Singapore – one that is embedded with delineations of class, gender, ethnicity and race. The following data and analysis illustrates how this segment of the labour force is maintained as such by connections between the actions of states, recruitment agents, practices of employers and the combined actions of the thousands of migrants who leave Bangladesh for various reasons.

I will first investigate the policies and practices that shape the migrants experience within economic production, leading them towards a particular labour regime: state policies, recruiting agents, low wages, unhealthy living and working conditions, arbitrary forms of labour discipline and regulations – all of which form and are formed by a hierarchically structured labour process, that in turn constitutes an exploitative relationship in which these labour migrants are subordinated (Burawoy, 1985). Through the discussion of processes of (hyper)exploitation and subordination, I want to reveal the precariousness and instability which make these male workers vulnerable. All of the Bangladeshis I interviewed are, or like Babu have been, at some point rendered jobless and homeless. The following demonstrates that there is a systemic process which situates these workers in a particularly vulnerable position within the labour hierarchy in Singapore.

These structures, however, are met with the active agency of the workers themselves. Indeed, the sense of loss and frustration I felt in the migrants also collided with their own purposes for taking on the precarious, unstable work that seems to ultimately marginalize them to the peripheries of the economy. Underlying this contradiction is the ongoing construction of gender subjectivities that is always tied with waged labour. It is also this subjectivity, which, when mobilized through their agency, that often masks the difficulties and stresses that are encountered by these workers on a

daily basis. In other words, the migrants are themselves engaging in this exploitative process, reproducing certain patterns of subordination and appropriation of their labour (Burawoy, 1985). Marx argues that the labour process generates a certain complicity from workers in their own subordination such that they can keep up with their own exploitation within the production process – a sort of ideological conditioning inherent within capitalism that draws workers in (Burawoy, 1985). Bourdieu, however, expounds on this notion of ideological conditioning amongst the working classes that is manifested through their consumption of goods, where economic dispossession is combined with cultural dispossession (1984). Social formations and differentiations are necessarily conditioned by economic bases; the *habitus* – that pre-reflexive mechanism that orients an individual's tastes, bodily movements and senses – is inherently a product of the various economic resources differently available to individuals in a given field. Nowhere is this more clearly theorized than in Bourdieu's notion of the "necessity of taste". The working class habitus manifesting as the "necessity of taste": clarifies the direct relationship between income and consumption which conditions the workers' acceptance of their working and living circumstances (1984). Discussion of people's social class position as culturally reproduced through their consumption practices, lifestyles, bodily practices and attitudes must therefore always be linked to their economic capital, broadening and deepening the ways in which people's class positions can be read and recreated. In other words, people's class location is defined by their consumption as much as by their positions in economic production even if it is true that the latter governs the former. Through the consumption of certain material goods and the cultivation of particular attitudes that are often marked as "different" or "lacking" in Bangladesh, these migrants also adopt a particular normative idea of what it means to be going global, crafting a particular type of cosmopolitan modernity into their everyday lives in Singapore within their economic means. I hope it becomes clear by the end of the chapter that distilled from the broader trends of "flexible accumulation", there is also the proliferation of actual work experiences lived by the migrants themselves which cannot be sustained unless they internalize and realize their consumption and production agencies as shaped by the larger forces of political economy.

Bangladeshis in Singapore

There are an estimated 120,000 Bangladeshi nationals working in Singapore, an increase of some 20,000 since the year 2000 (*Straits Times*, 2010[3]). This is likely to be a conservative estimate as the actual numbers are not released to the public and also do not include undocumented Bangladeshis taking on spontaneous work under tourist visas. Of this number, 90% are on work permits in the construction and marine industries.[4] Work permits are valid for either one or two years and, depending on the availability of work, are eligible for renewal for up to two years (Rahman, 2000). In addition to the various Singaporean state mechanisms regulating and classifying these migrant bodies by creating a differentiated division of labour, as discussed in the previous chapter, I argue that the making of a cheap and available worker is a multi-scale process which transcends national boundaries.

All of the 25 Bangladeshis I spoke with are, or have been at some point during their work journey, in Singapore on a special pass.[5] This is a permit issued to work-permit holders who have become unemployed as a result of a work dispute because of salary or illegal deployment (work-permit holders are only allowed to work for their specified employer) or due to a workmen's compensation case (for illnesses and injuries incurred during work). Most of the men I spoke with – 15 of them – were receiving workmen's compensation. Indeed, most of the men who turn to NGOs for help are injured which highlights not only the dangers these migrants are exposed to on the job but also how atomized they are as individual workers. Special passes are issued by the Ministry of Manpower for foreign workers to legally stay in Singapore while their cases are being investigated. During investigations, however, special pass holders are not eligible for work unless they are on the Temporary Job Scheme (TJS), which is only available to migrants engaged in salary disputes. Applying for the TJS does not guarantee a job and all schemes are only valid for six months. NGO directors say that while the pass is a useful step for providing some recourse for workers who run into employment disputes, they note that the Ministry of Manpower seems to have taken a more stringent approach in deciding which cases are eligible during economic recessions. Also, the workers I spoke with did not live with their employers during investigations, in particular those claiming

workmen's compensation – even though employers are legally bound to provide them with shelter. Most fear the forceful repatriation carried out by "security companies" that employers sometimes hire to keep workers in check. In essence then, the Bangladeshis I spoke with are homeless and jobless workers who came into Singapore under the work-permit system, only to have fallen through its cracks. After the investigation is over, the pass is cancelled by the Ministry of Manpower and the worker is repatriated within a week. The Bangladeshis I spoke with, therefore, were not interviewed while in productive circumstances – that is, they were officially not working. They had been rendered jobless and effectively homeless as a result of their enforced transience through processes that I will examine in the sections that follow. In other words, the situation of special pass holders is a result of the processes that exploit and subordinate them within the division of labour in Singapore and lead many of them to become ultimately marginalized from economic production. More than half of the Bangladeshis I spoke with wanted to return to Singapore, in spite of the severe challenges they have had to face – a puzzle that I will examine later in this chapter.

Bangladesh and the global economy

At one level, the mobility of Bangladeshi men represents another example of how the current global economy consistently relies on migrants from developing countries as a cheap and compliant workforce. As capital gets more and more mobile, its drive to increase productivity while driving down production costs leads firms further and further afield. One result has been to shift labour-intensive industries to highly dispersed sites around the globe (Mills, 1999; Kelly, 2002; Dicken, 2003). Another, is the incorporation of different migrant bodies into low-wage, low-status work within global cities. There has been a change in the demography of construction and marine workers in Singapore. The preferred group in the 1980s were male Thai workers, but since 2000, , the number of Bangladeshi workers has increased as capital seeks to pay even less for labour (personal interview with the president of an NGO in Singapore). I am encouraged by scholars who have done extensive work on the feminization of cheap labouring bodies on the global assembly line to serve international capital; they have persuasively shown that women from

developing economies are consistently constructed as attractive to employers for jobs in the textile, electronics and care industries because of persistent assumptions about obedience, patience and dexterity, and as a result are being paid low wages, denied job security and provided limited benefits (Ong, 1987; Wright, 1997, 2008; Mills, 1999). Gender, nationality and race are intimately embedded within class. I would argue that, just as Third World women are being constructed as more suitable for particular types of work, men from these countries are also being situated as more capable of certain types of work (Jackson, 1991; McDowell, 2003; Ye, 2013). This chapter demonstrates that while women take on devalued work and many men take on the most prestigious and fulfilling jobs at the top of the occupational and class hierarchy, it should not be ignored that Third World men by virtue of their masculinity, nationality and race are led to dangerous and dirty work as well.

In 2015, Bangladesh has a population of about 160 million with a labour force of 60 million. Agriculture provides employment to 62.3% of its working population, with most farmers taking on non-farm work during the off-season to supplement their household incomes (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS);[6] BBS Labor Force Supply survey 2010[7]).[8] Most farmers live on farms of less than 2.5 acres and, despite rich soils, ideal growing conditions and an abundant supply of labour, agricultural yields are extremely low in comparison with Malaysia and Sri Lanka. The combination of geopolitical location, ecological conditions and historical circumstances has turned Bangladesh into an exporter of cheap labour (Rahman, 2000). Bangladesh's success in increasing school enrolment has been one of the most notable achievements of the last 25 years, although there still remains a significant disparity between rural and urban areas. The unemployment rate however remains high.[9] Without employment security in Bangladesh, workers seek transnational forms of employment in spite of, or perhaps precisely because of, the tyranny of the global political economy. Work migration has therefore become a means of relieving the domestic market of unemployed or underemployed persons as well as a source of foreign exchange earnings. The amount of money earned in Singapore and sent back to Bangladesh supports the pattern of temporary migration: between 2010 and 2011, Bangladeshis remitted some US$202.32 million.[10] At one level, then, participation in the global economy through the

export of cheap labour does seem to benefit the Bangladesh economy, perhaps explaining what motivates individuals to continue to take up these temporary permits, in spite of the high agent fees and the hyper-exploitative work conditions. Research however has shown that the distribution of these remittances in the home country are far from even (Rahman, 2000). My focus is not the distribution of migrant income in Bangladesh but in the reproduction of class through the division of labour in Singapore as a recipient country. This section has thus far highlighted the reasons Bangladesh has become a resource for cheap labour as a combined result of global political economy and its local conditions. I now turn to the ways in which Bangladeshi men are manoeuvred into forming a cheap, acquiescent workforce by illustrating how exploitation and subordination are being maintained, resulting in much precariousness through their work lives in Singapore.

Agencies and agents

Recruitment is a useful starting point for investigating how people are brought into jobs that form the underbelly of the global marketplace, even if it is not necessarily a causal mechanism for the reproduction of divisions of labour. By tracing how these men are recruited, I illustrate that, even at the initial stage, Bangladeshi migrant workers are in a severely disenfranchised position. As McDowell points out, there is an important connection between the global growth of labour markets and the mobility of workers. Further, this correlates with the rise of various forms of temporary, precarious or insecure work, of which agency work is an important element (2008). In her work on the export of Filipino labour migrants, Rodriguez argues that state-led labour brokerage is a neoliberal strategy that is comprised of institutional and discursive practices through which the Philippine state mobilizes its citizens and sends them abroad to work for employers throughout the world while generating a 'profit' from the remittances that migrants send back to their families. (2010). While Bangladesh does not have a state-based, centralized overseas employment institution such as the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, its neoliberal strategy in sending labour migrants abroad is arguably characterized precisely by its lack of state-based labour brokerage. This strategy continues to be legitimized by the remittances that are

sent back from its overseas migrants. Aside from being the source of a significant remittance flow, Bangladeshi migrants are also lauded as playing an "important role in national development" (Bangladesh High Commission, Singapore website).[11]

On the labour-receiving end, the growth of Singapore's migrant work force, through the low wages paid to these workers, is possibly a way in which its economy has managed to maintain growth while preventing inflation. To mobilize a ready pool of cheap labour to take on jobs that Singaporeans reject, firms turn to recruitment agencies in Singapore with connections in Bangladesh. This transnational assemblage of workers through agents not only reproduces the divisions of labour by reinforcing state policies on labour restrictions for Bangladeshi men in Singapore, but also, through its lack of accountability to its recruits and heavy fees, becomes an active process of engulfing migrants and their households in financial turmoil.

There are labour suppliers in Singapore that work as agencies, such as FirstCare, which acts as a direct recruiter of foreign workers to companies in Singapore and as an administrator (i.e. a middle party).[12] Employers pay a fee for the agency to carry out the necessary paperwork required to administer workers. Some of these services are straightforward, such as applying for In-principal Approval,[13] arranging transportation of the worker from Changi Airport to company dorms and arranging for a medical check-up for the workers. There are also murkier services, such as "[assisting] in repatriation of workers upon expiry or termination of the employment agreement, [arranging] for free replacement of workers if required" (FirstCare website). From the website, it appears there are no additional fees that the employer needs to pay should they require the agency to source workers on their behalf. It also becomes evident from the information provided on the website that employers have little or no contact with the individuals before they become hired as workers. In other words, it appears that the agency provides convenient access to a ready labour pool – this orchestration by specialized labour providers enhances the separation of relations *of* production from relations *in* production, obscuring the former while effectively subordinating workers to the latter (Burawoy, 1985). On the side of relations of production, the Bangladeshi is related to his agent as an individual, even though in principle, he is free to choose between different agencies. As Lindquist's work on labour recruitment in Lombok, Indonesia

shows migrants almost never approach any agencies directly (2010). Instead, an informal labour recruiter approaches – and to a lesser extent, is approached by – migrants directly, either in the area where the migrant lives or through other forms of social relations such as friends, family or local figure of authority (Lindquist, 2010). It is common for agents in Bangladesh to operate individually and proactively in the search for men to work in Singapore. The data reveals just how opaque the process of recruiting becomes the closer it is to the source of labour. There is no information on the FirstCare website regarding the recruitment process in Bangladesh. My interviews with NGO directors also shed little light on the actual steps taken to source workers. There does appear, however, to be a process of social networking for agents to get in touch with potential clients. Like Karim and Babu, the other Bangladeshis I interviewed all told me that they knew the agents who first approached them about work in Singapore. For most of the men, these recruiters are other men they knew from their village. This transnational recruiting process hence takes on a very local dimension and depends on social relationships. As Alamgir, a Bangladeshi worker, told me,

> Agent say Singapore many money can make. No need to sell chickens anymore in my life after I go work in Singapore. Salary from Singapore can support my whole family – agent tell me like this.

This was also reflected in another Bangladeshi respondent, Ismail's decision to come to Singapore to work in a shipyard,

> My agent [told] me many of his relatives go to Singapore to work. He also knows that my brother-in-law also go for many years and he send money back. Agent [told] me that I can be like that also. I can make money and have good job.

This promise of a good job in Singapore does not come cheap. Each worker pays between SGD$7,000 to SGD$10,000 to their agents for a work-permit job, even before they leave Bangladesh. The round-trip air tickets cost about $700, passport fees cost $100 and job training usually costs about $1,500 (director of HOME[14] – the remaining balance is unaccounted for. The NGO personnel I interviewed believe

the rest of the money goes to the employer, to offset government-imposed levies and pay for the upkeep of the worker, and to the agent, as their personal profit. If it is true that part of the "agent fees" goes towards paying for the workers' levies and maintenance, this serves the employer by cheapening labour costs while at the same time creating an atomized and vulnerable worker who, in order to access work, is already in debt even before earning any wages. In this way, the worker is pulled into exploitative social relations by material circumstances. Almost all the Bangladeshis I interviewed had sold off various assets – land, homes, jewellery, savings – and had taken out loans from banks, relatives and/or loan sharks to pay agent fees. In Marxian terms, to become workers in the global economy, the men sell off their other means of livelihood, putting up only their labour power for sale in return for wages (Burawoy, 1985). To convert labour power, which is the capacity to work, into labour, which is the application of effort to provide wages and profit, migrants must first pay a large fee. Clearly for these men, their exploitation and subordination had begun even before they started work. I would argue that the precarity in their work lives is exacerbated as a result of having to pay off these loans (Waite, 2008). Aside from the high cost of the fees, I also argue that it is in this very ambiguity, this murkiness shrouding the agent fee, that one can detect a form of worker subordination through the continued lack of accountability on the part of the agents. This then begs the question of why these workers take this risk, since it is clear that most already are in possession of some assets themselves in the form of land, jewellery and so on. Aside from the structural issues inciting them out of Bangladesh, I argue that this is part of the aspirational capacity that makes a worker subordinate to the uncertainties he is literally buying into (Bunnell and Goh, 2012). Alamgir's belief in the promise of a job was a driving force in his motivation to become a labour migrant, which transpired to be a life of fragility and precariousness.

The individualistic operations taken on by the agents serve to individualize the worker – they only meet their co-workers when they start their training, which takes place after the agent fees have been paid. My interview data reveals that workers who keep their jobs have a typical debt-repayment period of about one year. The debts incurred from paying the agent also serve to keep a lot of workers in their jobs,

no matter how dissatisfied they are with the work. As Shaiful, who paid $10,000 to his agent, tells me,

> Some money I borrow from my relatives, some money my parents give me – all bank money they give me so I can give agent. Very hard job now but I do. I cannot work some months and go back – my family [has] no more money.

At present, although the Singaporean state provides some guidelines for employers to hire foreign workers from licensed agencies in Singapore, it does not impose laws on labour recruitment methods in Bangladesh as long as workers enter Singapore on valid IPAs, as with the case of Babu (Ministry of Manpower website[15]).

> My view is that we should only be recruiting workers who go through the approved channels in their countries so in that way we can minimize human trafficking – because a lot of times that is what its become! Right now, [the government] is approving work permits left, right and centre. There should at least be that mechanism in place where [workers] can seek redress should there be a problem. Now it's a free for all! At least we should have some structure to the labour recruitment process.
>
> (Interview with director of NGO in Singapore)

Workers also have no clear documentation on what to expect out of their jobs – another way in which labour continues to be disenfranchised.

> The workers are disempowered in the sense of not being given the right information . . . they sometimes have written documents but these don't often tell the all that they need to know. Even at the level of work-permit conditions and contracts in Singapore, we know how vague they can be.
>
> (Interview with director of NGO in Singapore)

This lack of labour regulation, which characterizes both home and recipient countries, becomes part of the process of labour reproduction within a flexibilized labour market. It recreates a type of external "mystification", with individuals taking on significant financial risks

to become workers in jobs where the boundaries and conditions of their work are not clearly stated and where the balance of power is overwhelmingly in favour of employers.

Dependency on employers

Housing

The degree of precariousness workers are vulnerable to is heightened given their high dependency on their employers. There is a high degree of containment in the daily lives of the Bangladeshi workers that is clearly seen in their living spaces. Aside from their wages, workers also rely on their employers for housing, daily meals, transportation to and from the worksite, medical insurance and also eventual repatriation. These are institutionalized within the Ministry of Manpower's guidelines for employers who are hiring foreign workers. Bangladeshi workers in Singapore are supposedly housed in state-approved, employer-provided accommodation – a formalized practice usually for workers from "abroad" (i.e. non-Johorean commuters, not local Singaporean workers). Under the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act, employers must provide "acceptable accommodations" for work-permit-holding workers. For these men, their housing comes in the form of purpose-built dormitories, which are commercially run, industrial and/or warehouse premises that have been partly converted to house workers; temporary quarters on worksites; or harbour crafts (such as ships and marine vessels). A smaller number of workers are also housed in HDB flats.[16]

Off-site dormitories, such as Simpang Lodge in the northern part of Singapore and Singapore Contractors Association Limited (SCAL) located in the far western part, are often "self-contained" and include amenities, such as provisions and barber shops as well as recreational facilities like basketball courts, canteens, television rooms and gymnasiums (SCAL website[17]). A converted old school compound that houses workers in Serangoon Gardens, an upper-middle class neighbourhood, gained a high profile in the Singaporean media. This conversion was hotly debated mainly amongst neighbourhood residents, grassroots leaders and the member of parliament for the area. While there is no space here to discuss the Nimby sentiments, it must be highlighted that the dormitory operators were instructed to install surveillance cameras and implement rules on noise levels. The

facility was also required to provide adequate amenities, including provision shops, so workers would have "little reason to leave it". The fence around the dormitory is covered with blue tarpaulin so that local residents and dormitory residents do not see each other (AsiaOne website[18]). Finally, the site area was reduced, setting it further back from homes along certain roads and creating a "buffer zone" between residents of the Gardens and the foreign workers (*Straits Times,* 4 October 2008[19]). The dormitory was opened in 2009. These measures serve to contain and regulate workers by creating an enclave that is quite different from its surroundings. Aside from eliminating the chances of interaction with people who are not in the same work as they are, the installation of CCTV cameras and increased police patrols around the dormitories also extends control over the workforce of the presumed heterosexual, single, foreign male workers on a day-to-day basis. As the marketing director of Simpang Lodge says,

> I want to make the police presence felt to keep the residents on their toes … In other dorms, they can't cook, so they'll go out and explore … They may not approach girls, but girls may approach them … We have two guards, one going around, one just outside checking people. No girls can go in … Sex [work] in workers' dormitory happens infrequently, but this could be because of the workers' physical needs. This must be properly managed within the law instead of allowing them to prowl in our neighbourhood residences. The dormitories' security system [CCTV, entry passes], guards, patrolling, strict discipline enforcement and working with neighbourhood police to deter such cases would help to prevent such things from happening.
>
> (*The New Paper*, January 2009)[20]

This quote illustrates that while there continues to be a stigmatization of female sex workers, it is the closely regulated masculinity of the foreign worker whose sexuality must be kept in check, to be "deterred" especially since he could easily fall prey to feminine lures, even if he does not proactively solicit for sex. His intrinsic "physical needs" as a foreign, heterosexual male appear normalized yet under the gloss of this rhetoric, these qualities pathologize him as a subject for close surveillance (Ye, 2013). This spatial containment

of workers within the company's dormitory allows for policing and remote supervision through the CCTV to prevent "unlawful" acts. These regulations of the dormitory therefore recreate the low-status male foreign worker as a person that needs to be disciplined, controlled and kept subordinate, reaffirming unequal relations of power and hierarchy embedded within the intersections of an individual's citizenship, gender, sexuality and class.

Wages

A not insignificant number of special pass holders are on "salary claims", although the exact numbers are not available. These claims are usually lodged by workers who have not been paid for work they have done and can include both regular and overtime work hours. All of the Bangladeshis I spoke with, including those who are not on salary claims, however, have also been subjected to deductions from their already low wages for these "accommodation provisions" – a problem reinforced by the continued lack of a minimum wage in Singapore. Worker's dependency on employers for their basic daily needs also further skews power in favour of the capitalists, who can threaten to withhold or exert their control over these needs. Md Moinul, a special pass holder who used to work in a shipyard tells me,

> Many months, work don't have so I only get $450 before cutting. House-money cutting $150 so maybe after, I get $300 every month.

As the economist Maurice Dobb pointed out, the "disagreeableness" of a job, which should decrease its desirability, has not produced the correspondingly higher wages that supply and demand economics would lead us to expect (quoted in Mann, 2007: 109). Dobb goes on to elaborate that there is the tendency in classed societies for occupations which have "traditionally been poorly paid to be considered disagreeable, and for those carrying a higher income to be considered more socially respectable" (quoted in Mann, 2007: 110). Md Moinul's monthly salary, post-deductions is not uncommon amongst workers in this sector of the economy. This is a wage that is far below the official national average for construction and maritime labourers. In 1996, the average starting wage for workers in these sectors was $860. This figure fell to $600 by 2006, a decrease of 30%. This trend

of driving down production costs by suppressing wage increases for this particular group of workers is likely to continue. Indeed, Labour Chief Lim Swee Say says, "The downward pressure on the wages of low-wage workers will continue to be there for some time as there is no shortage of low-cost, low-skilled workers in the world" (*Straits Times,* 28 July 2007). As illustrated in Babu's story at the beginning of the chapter, a monthly salary of $600 after deductions is considered the industry norm at this time. It must be understood, however, that this is in contrast to "semi-skilled" and "professional" workers – all of whom had wage increases ranging between 8 and 49% within the same decade. Lim elaborated during an interview with a national radio station, "the cheaper are getting better, the better are getting cheaper. So what option do we have? And the way to go ahead is to be cheaper, better and faster, no other option" (2010).[21] This discourse advocating improving and cheapening labour continues in a context of increasing productivity where workers are exhorted to upgrade their skills for better pay (*Straits Times,* 28 July 2007; 8 August 2009).

While Dobb's analysis of the structural features of the labour market that I mentioned earlier is sound, it does not contribute to the understanding of *value* in a broader sense. My data reveals a reality that is far more complex than rationalized productivity for better wages. Hossein, another former shipyard worker who is awaiting workmen's compensation, tells me,

> Every month my boss cuts my salary. But I cannot say anything. I [tried] to ask him two times and he said to me, "if you are not happy, you can go back to Bangladesh". Then after that, he said it is "agent money" because when I come to Singapore the second time, I paid less agent money. So I said, "Why last time you didn't inform me what you want to cut?" He always said if I am not happy, I can go back. So I let him cut. Sometimes he cut $100 for two months, other months if I work a lot, he cuts $300 or $400 like this. One time he said "this monthly [deduction] very slow. You give me two months salary at one go – $2,500. He wanted me to work for free! Then how I send back money to Bangladesh? You think I don't have family? Then I told him cannot. So he cut half my salary – $400 I give my boss. After my accident happen[ed], boss said want to send me back to Bangladesh. My boss [knew] how much it would cost to give me proper treatment – MRI costs

> at least $3,000. The job my boss let me do is something he already [taught] other men so he said I can just go back to Bangladesh – he can pay other men less because they are newer workers. He said he will go and buy my ticket to Bangladesh.

As the narratives at the beginning of this chapter show, these deductions are rationalized as covering housing, food and electricity bills for the worker. In spite of Ministry of Manpower regulations requiring employers to provide for the worker, these arbitrary deductions show that the worker actually pays his employer for his upkeep out of his monthly wages. These men become not only a lucrative labour pool in terms of generating profit for employers but, further, the elasticity of their wages contributes to their cheapness as workers, a combined result of their availability as workers because of uneven development at the global scale, the lack of a minimum wage requirement in Singapore, their high dependency on their employers and the capacity of the employers to cut costs. These measures animate the processes of exploitation and subordination where the men have little course of redress, given their atomization. Hossein's rhetorical question "you think I don't have family?" alludes to his sending remittances back to Bangladesh. The practice of remitting among migrant labourers exacerbates workplace exploitation by enhancing the workers' own precarious positions.

In contrast to Wright's work on masculinities in Mexico's *maquiladoras*, men here are not seen as workers who can be trained and promoted to eventually become supervisors (2006). Rather, at marine and construction sites in Singapore, the worker's lack of skill is his worth and should skills be learnt over time, they are not correspondingly acknowledged through wages and job security. As with the Mexican women workers documented in Wright's research, this exposes the tragic logic of capitalist value production in Marx's argument that the more profit a worker produces, the poorer they become (Wright, 2006). The reality of the worker's situation as told here is in stark contrast to official discourses of a direct relationship between productivity and wage increases. We see that while the value created by his labour remains constant or increases, Hossein's labour is cheapened or is threatened to be rendered irrelevant. This profit increase is thus built upon the vulnerability of the worker. This further reinforces Mann's argument that the wage is a vital part of social life

under capitalism. Income can "never be contained within the 'economic', neither in its pecuniary nor its symbolic dimensions . . . It is an economic and cultural medium of value [of production, exchange, distribution and consumption] at the same time" (Mann, 2007: 169). As in the case of these migrant workers in Singapore, the "cultural medium" of their wages is facilitated and reproduced by their racialization and citizenship.

As an interview I conducted with a site-engineer (who is a Singaporean-Chinese man) reveals,

> Of course Singaporeans don't want to do construction. Hot sun all day, carry things that are so bloody heavy so we get foreigner workers to do . . . Banglas are paid less because they cannot do the work as well as workers from China! Sure, China workers can talk back to their foreman but they can at least do the job in less time. Sometimes I have to tell the Bangla three, four times before he understands what I want him to do. And sometimes they pretend to do work! I know they only work when they see me or their foreman approaching. And they are very fragile people, I think. Sometimes I scold them a little bit only and they will give me attitude. Chinese workers are tougher.

Thus, the work that the Bangladeshis are doing is not only too dangerous for Singaporeans but the wages they are paid for doing undesirable and dangerous work are lower than other foreign workers doing the same job. In this quote, Bangladeshis are constructed as less skilled, more deceitful and weaker than workers from China, which is supposedly reflected in their wages. Blatant racism is embedded within this discourse, intermixed with concerns about workplace productivity. Clearly from this justification of the wage, and the wage itself, what it means to be a skilled and significant worker is not to be Bangladeshi. In other words, Bangladeshis are ideologically and materially slotted into the bottom rung of production value, as evidenced by their wage.

Repatriation

The precariousness Hossein faces comes through clearly in the above quote; he, like many others in his class situation, as a result of their location in the division of labour, is exposed to vulnerabilities, which

aside from wage deductions includes the larger threat of repatriation. Their transience, as recreated through their position within a flexibilized labour market, exposes them to losing their jobs. As the state enforces policy making employers *responsible for* repatriation of workers, it also creates conditions where the power *to* repatriate workers lies with employers. Indeed, the notion of transience must be tied intimately with the idea of subordination here; not only is transience part of subordination but Bangladeshi workers also have to be subordinate to prevent their transience in the Singaporean workplace from being enforced. As well as state policies that render them as transient workers through the work-permit system, their transience is also reinforced by their high dependency on their employers as well as their "unskilled" status at work.

To return to Hossein's story, he injured his head and his back at work one day when he tried to carry a heavy piece of metal. As he says in the earlier quote, his employer was not going to pay for his medical fees. I verified this myself when I accompanied him to the hospital one afternoon. It was his third appointment and also the third one he was going to miss because his employer would not show up to pay for his doctor's appointments. I called his employer who said that Hossein was lying about his accident; later on he told me he was "busy". I later found out through the NGO that his employer had not reported his workplace accident – which goes against Ministry of Manpower guidelines for employers.[22] Hossein eventually went to the Ministry of Manpower under the advice of his representing lawyer to file a workmen's compensation claim. In the meantime, he put up at the men's shelter run by a local NGO. I asked if he could return to his company's dormitory – it is Ministry of Manpower policy that the employer must continue to provide accommodation to their workers if workplace accidents render them unable to work. But Hossein told me that he was afraid to do so because, like other workers, the threat of repatriation by the employer could be realized at any time by the hiring of repatriation companies. As the director of an NGO told me,

> Repatriation companies are businesses that are set up specifically to help employers manage "troublesome" foreign workers by roughing them up and sending them back to their home countries forcefully. Many employers are more than happy to pay someone to do this since they find it difficult to handle work place disputes

> and get rid of foreign workers who do not toe the line . . . What this entails is not described at all. One such company is RTU Services which [advertises as a] "manpower repatriation and related services" [company]. It is obviously not just an escort service that ferries workers to the airport. Its methods, which include the wrongful restraint of people, are clearly illegal.

This form of (en)forcible repatriation is yet another way in which the transience of this group of foreign workers is ensured. Employers who are worried about losing their $5,000 security bond should a worker go missing for three months or more often hire these "repatriation companies" for a fee of a few hundred dollars (*Straits Times,* 26 September 2009). While these companies thrive on the business of employers' fears, this also sets up a system of labour control through intimidation that employers can wield against workers, particularly if labour can no longer be extracted from the worker, for example, due to injury, as in Hossein's and Karim's cases. Again, the capacity to use these means of removing workers is created because the responsibility of repatriating workers lies solely with the employer, regardless of whether or not the worker has worked and paid enough to recover the fees he paid his agent.

Hossein's and Karim's stories are also examples of the physical dangers inherent in their jobs. Seventy workers died from work-related injuries in 2009, up from 67 in 2008.[23] Common work injuries include back fractures, knee injuries and heart attacks, with many medical bills exceeding the current insurance coverage of $5,000 (*Straits Times,* 26 September 2009). Injuries and accidents often happen during the transportation of workers to and from worksites as they travel on the backs of lorries and trucks. These are also officially covered under workmen's compensation claims in Singapore. Although the policy change by the Ministry of Manpower which has increased mandatory medical insurance from $5,000 to $15,000 is a significant improvement, it continues to be this particular segment of the working population, which is exposed to greater dangers at work than say the middle-class Singaporean, that indicates the need for greater insurance coverage. These measures highlight the precarious conditions inherent in the work that is done by Bangladeshi male migrants. Their foreignness allows for the rapid turnover of individual bodies through eventual repatriation via the terms of the special

pass and the possibility of forcible repatriation through repatriation companies. In short, workers are made to leave when their value as economically productive labouring bodies is spent. The worker's production of profit for his employer – his labour – is worth more than his value as a labourer. Rather than increasing in his value as a worker as he learns more skills over time, one Bangladeshi is interchangeable with the next because of his "unskilled" status. As Marx argues, "the value of labour power varies not only because it produces value . . . [but] also because it produces waste" (quoted in Wright, 2006: 78). The exploited value of the Bangladeshi worker – indeed the attraction of capital to this form of labour – comes not only through his cheapness but also through his "wasting", that is, his "non-skills", which render him easily replaced.

Migrant selves

The economic lives of the Bangladeshi male migrants in Singapore reflect profound structural disparities and uneven development that in many ways render them more vulnerable than other workers to processes and practices of exploitation and subordination, as I have elaborated above. As they enter these circuits of production, however, they also traverse critical realms of cultural and social reproduction. The politics of class go beyond these exploitative, structural limitations within the workers' lives. In the choices the workers make, the values they share and the identities they pursue, male migrants from Bangladesh (and elsewhere) are neither passive victims of domination nor simple pawns of structures and processes beyond their control (Mills, 1999). Through their own notions of desire, fulfilment and self-expression, Bangladeshi male migrants also engage powerful meanings about what it means to be a man working in a globalized labour force. Waged work for them is, thus, a channel that expresses their desires and, as discussed below, is intricately refracted through their gender and citizenship, even during the time they are on special passes.

Gender and mobility

Gender relations are often important factors in explaining and legitimizing the movement of young men to work in Singapore.

Whenever the men I interviewed spoke of their decision to come to Singapore, it was almost always in relation to their roles as men in their households. Karim, whose narrative is quoted at the beginning of this chapter, went on to reveal,

> Bangladesh no good job for me, so I come to Singapore. I cannot ask my wife to go and work. Because it is not good! Ladies in Bangladeshi don't work – not like in Singapore. If she work, who can take care of my family? I am a man so I must take care of my family. No matter how hard the job, never mind. I do because I know I must support my father and mother, also my wife and small daughter.

Mannaf, previously a shipyard worker, who has been sleeping at a parking lot intermittently for three months while awaiting his workmen's compensation claim tells me,

> last time when I [had] a job, I [sent] maybe 80% of my salary to Bangladesh. Cannot keep so much salary for myself. My family will be happy if they know I give them my salary. It is my job to my family because I am a man . . . Now I cannot tell my family my situation! Sometimes they ask me why I don't send money back but I just say I give money to my friend to start a business here. If they understand my condition in Singapore, my mother and father will get heart attack and my wife will cry everyday. So I one person "tahan"[24] no problem . . . If my wife knows, then she go work in a factory – [there are] many men working in factory! What if she sees, and she [thinks], "my husband no use, not sending money back, I want to go and marry another man", then what will happen?

This suggests that even after migrating, masculinity for these Bangladeshi workers continues to be readily accommodated within existing patriarchal structures, confirming their resilience and versatility across space rather than signalling any major shift in the sexual balance of power. As Bourdieu argues in *Masculine Domination*, "gender asymmetries continue to be thrown into visible relief" where gender continues to have a pronounced autonomy vis-à-vis economic relations (2001). Karim's emphatic claim that it is "not

good" for a woman to be working continues to reinforce the standard of a man's role as the economic provider while a woman's role is to take on unpaid, socially reproductive labour within the household. Indeed, many of the men have told me that the reason they take on work overseas is because they are men and getting used to unfamiliar territory is easier "for a man". This is, as Bourdieu argued, where "social positions themselves [[are]] sexually characterized and characterizing . . . in defending their jobs against feminization, men are trying to protect . . . themselves as men, such as manual workers . . . which [positions] owe much, if not all of their value, even in their [own] eyes, to their image of manliness" (2001: 96). Consequently, a gendered moral framework is reproduced, where good men continue to take on paid work and virtuous women work within the house. Traditional patterns of masculinity and femininity may be more stretched across space, borders and scales but there remains a persistent asymmetry of power between men and women (Jackson, 1991).

The loss of paid employment, then, is often experienced as a threat not only to the livelihoods of the workers and their households but also to their manhood. Bearing the responsibility of remitting money as well as having the capacity and desire to do so is tied to Mannaf's gender identity. In believing in the primacy granted to masculinity, Mannaf, like many other migrants, is further entrenched within masculine domination himself. Limited by the lack of secure employment and exposed to certain vulnerabilities because of his job, he experiences challenges to his values and goals as a Bangladeshi male, as a son and as a husband. As with the female migrants in Mill's study of Bangkok's rural migrant workers, these tensions that underlie the men's labour migration also prompt them to negotiate a series of linked, fragile compromises – balancing personal consumption to remit most of their money to Bangladesh, having to keep their homeless and jobless situations from their families and wanting to maintain a particular form of masculine construction in relation to their wives (1999). The cultural dominance of gender structures illustrates that the experience of class cannot be fully understood without also understanding the permanence of other social collectivities, even in times of vulnerability (Bourdieu, 2001). It also demonstrates the power of aspirations in the expression of these men's agency. This further shows the oppressive aspect of masculinity is not just towards

females, but is experienced closely by men as well, as they grapple with precarious lives without becoming redundant. Maintaining these delicate roles is possible because of pre-existing gender politics, and also a strategy that responds to political-economic conditions and inequalities that restrict workers' access to material resources and opportunities in Singapore. As these men try to balance structural fractures within dominant cultural discourses and personal values, they experience these disjunctures most sharply as personal misfortune and hardship. Their silence becomes part of their dominated habitus. Their hardship in Singapore cannot be seen as sheer passivity but, rather, actively contributes to the symbolic violence that renders them unable to speak of these hardships in the first place. As Bourdieu argues (2001: 38),

> the practical knowledge and recognition of the magical frontier between the dominant and the dominated that are triggered by the magic of symbolic power and through which the dominated, often unwittingly, sometimes unwillingly, contribute to their own domination by tacitly accepting the limits imposed, often take the form of bodily emotions – shame, humiliation, timidity, anxiety, guilt.

In this regard, I would argue that these dominant discourses of gender, couched within the pursuit of happiness through waged labour, motivated them to come to Singapore in the first place, while also obscuring how their hardship is rooted within the exploitative relations of the paid work they can access. These discourses become embodied by the migrants over time, indeed, *become historicized,* through their experiences, informed by, and engaging with, structures of gender and economic domination (Bourdieu, 2001).

Overall, the Bangladeshi workers I spoke with were striking in their determination and commitment to the labour market in Singapore. Indeed, I found it particularly remarkable that most of the men I interviewed, like Babu and Karim, look forward to returning to Singapore to work, in spite of having experienced the hardship of being jobless and homeless. Even with the bleak job market in Bangladesh as a strong motivator, the very notion of a singular and general factor accounting for this movement is inadequate to reflect a set of relational, and often economically irrational, processes

between variable structural circumstances in different places and the active agency of these young men. Aside from wanting to provide a more stable livelihood for their families, many of them also felt that Singapore was a "good place" to work in spite of the difficulties they have to face. Hossein elaborates,

> I like Singapore law. It is good. Singapore police don't take money from people. There are a lot of laws here – good! Not like that in Bangladesh [where there are] many gangsters. If you earn $10,000, maybe you have to give $1,000 to gangsters for protection money. It is not like that in Singapore! My friend also wants to come to Singapore to work. He says he wants me to arrange for him. Even though Singapore is a small country, it [has] very nice roads, very good mass rapid transit (MRT), many gardens – in front of HDBs or condominiums, there are always gardens! Also have electricity 24 hours a day. Singapore is also very multicultural – many things have, many things can see! I like this. In Bangladesh not like this – I think it is called "monoculture" . . . It is better if I can stay in Singapore with a good job.

Md Ishaak, previously a shipyard worker, who is awaiting workmen's compensation and who has been sleeping on the corridor outside of his lawyer's office, also echoes this sanguine attitude about Singapore,

> I [went] to MOM [Ministry of Manpower] today, the train [was] full and people stand very close to me but no pushing. Singapore people are gentlemen. Singapore law also very good. Police very good. Bangladesh law and political situation no good. Singapore very good. I think my back "spoil" already – fractured. I cannot do hard work now – my luck is bad – so I think I cannot come to Singapore again. I want but I have no more chance to come again.

Such yearning to become part of a Singaporean modernity explains the motivation for Bangladeshi male migrants to continue making this labour migration in spite of their subordination as waged workers in low-skilled, low-paid jobs. This is arguably part of the terrain of aspirations that creates an almost hegemonic effect, where workers accept the exploitative conditions, blurring the lines between structural impositions and active agency (Bunnell and Goh, 2011).

Discourses of modernity and gender serve to capitalize on these migrant dreams – reinforcing the status of these workers as a subordinate social group to help reproduce existing structures of power. The workers' own goals and desires propel them towards becoming labour migrants who see these obstacles as something individualized (e.g. "bad luck" and "responsibility as a man") rather than collectively as workers subjected to hyper-exploitative conditions. The poignance of their class situation comes through when we see that they are valued precisely because of their disposability and their precarious position in the division of labour in Singapore. Their hopes of working in Singapore in temporary, low-paid, low-status work only fuels these unequal power relations that expose them to more harm than other groups of workers.

Class tastes

These attitudes and dispositions are manifested – whether consciously or not – through their consumption patterns, further complicating their class subjectivities. This does not merely entail an examination of the things they buy but also what orients their taste towards specific goods. Through these consumption choices and orientations, indeed through their very symbolic power, Bourdieu argues, social collectivities are formed (Weininger, 2005). Indeed, all of the men with whom I spoke indicated the desire to purchase "Singaporean" goods and bring them back to Bangladesh. As Ishaak explained to me,

> Ishaak: I think I will buy some makeup for my wife and shampoo for other ladies in my house and village. For my father, I will buy torchlight.
>
> Y: Why can't you buy it back in Bangladesh? I think it would be cheaper there, right?
>
> Ishaak: Yes, of course cheaper in Bangladesh! Even buying it at Dhaka airport will be cheaper. But no problem. People will see that I buy Singapore shampoo and Singapore torchlight. My father will be happy, my wife also happy and my villagers will also think "He had good job in Singapore that's why can buy Singapore things".
>
> Y: And why torchlight for your father?

> Ishaak: Because my village [doesn't] have electricity 24 hours a day. Sometimes at night, he want to go somewhere, he [needs] a torchlight. Bangladesh [has] torchlight also! But Singapore's torchlight is better I think. All Bangla men buy torchlight for their fathers and brothers when they go back . . . my villagers will say I am a good son.

As this conversation shows, there is an "economy of cultural goods, but it has a specific logic" (Bourdieu, 1984: 1). That Ishaak would rather buy apparently mundane items such as shampoo and torchlights in Singapore in spite of them costing more suggests the symbolic significance of being able to purchase these goods as well as his cultural competence. Ishaak's taste for these items, while not economically rational even if it is embedded with a clear gendered rationale, is a result of his pre-existing cultural knowledge about which items to get and how to expend his wealth to get symbolic mileage. Through these items, people from Ishaak's village can infer his position in the division of labour (regardless of whether or not it is true). The symbolic properties of these items, indeed their *value*, lies within their ability to illustrate conditions of acquisition and are regarded as "attributes of excellence, [constituting] one of the key markers of class and also the ideal weapon in strategies of distinction, that is ... the infinitely varied art of marking distances" (Bourdieu, 1984: 66). This illustrates the power relations that create social reproduction in a place (Bangladesh) outside of Ishaak's economic production (Singapore). While it is not my intention to discuss the reproduction of social classes in migrants' home countries, this nonetheless illustrates the spatiality of class via the global city. As much as work migrants' class trajectories on the production side stretch from Bangladesh as a result of the global assemblage of Singapore's labour market, so do their class subjectivities in terms of their consumption desires. This further shows how in analysing local encounters with global capitalism we must look beyond the imposition of new demands and power relations from the outside and see this process in light of how it is reproduced by workers on the ground, who are themselves also occupying different positions in different cultural fields. This suggest that in understanding the social reproduction of workers and of cosmopolitanism and class, it bears noting how borders are reproduced as well, which are intimately reinventing Asian identities in ambivalent ways.

Consumption choices are formed by people's economic and cultural capital – resources upon which individuals draw to exercise their class identities. People's class habitus – within which are couched gender subjectivities as well – then orients the expenditure of their economic and cultural capital in practical ways that give coherence to a lifestyle, most visibly seen through the notion of taste. A cultural product – the torchlight, shampoo – is a constituted taste, constituted through the process of objectification by the social field in which the agent (in this case, the Bangladeshi worker) occupies a position. Through his consumption of these products, he further legitimizes its objectification, assigning the product and its consumer a prestige, realizing its own as well as its consumer's class identity (Bourdieu, 1984). In other words, Bourdieusian discussions of class move beyond ideas of exploitation within capitalist production and engage with social reproduction through consumption *without neglecting people's positions in the realm of material production.* Habitus organizes how people perceive the social world but, at the same time, this perception is also a result of how people are themselves produced in the division of classes. Habitus is an internalization of one's conditions of existence and is "converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions". This explains why an agent's "whole set of practices (or those of agents produced by similar conditions) are both systematic, inasmuch as they are the product of the application of identical (or interchangeable) schemes and systematically distinct from the practices constituting another lifestyle" (Bourdieu, 1984: 170). Simply put, different conditions create different habitus. Through this concept of habitus, Bourdieu bridges the often (mis)used dichotomy between agency and structure within class practice. It must be kept in mind, however, that the ways in which people consume commodities and ideas reflect more than just the economic. The acquisition of, or at least yearning to acquire, certain goods serves as a symbolic measure of success.

Theoretically, this also intertwines Marx's analysis of class with Bourdieu's – an idea most clearly distilled through Bourdieu's articulation of the "taste of necessity" (1979; 1984). It is through this notion that we can see how class as reproduced through people's daily lives is not only always embedded with symbolic interests but, further, these interests are always shaped by economic calculation. The various moments of daily life provide many occasions for an

expression of habitus, with each comprising an opportunity for the subordination of function to form. It must be emphasized, however, that the choosing of form over function varies in nature, depending on people's economic conditions – as can be seen through the comparative reading of the Bangladeshi migrant workers against the Johorean commuters and Singaporean financial workers. Bourdieu argues that the "taste for necessity" inclines the working class habitus to assign "absolute priority to function over form, to insist that art carry a moral message" (Weininger, 2005). The petite bourgeoisie, however, exhibits a lifestyle born of the combination of an aspiration to the bourgeois lifestyle on the one hand and insufficient economic and/or cultural capital to attain it on the other (Bourdieu, 1984). While my data on the Johorean commuters revealed this – indeed, by jobs and income, they would fit more readily into the petite bourgeoisie class – these constraints were more clearly felt amongst the Bangladeshi migrants, precisely because of their lower incomes and social status. As a former shipyard worker, Farouk, told me,

> I like to go to Sentosa with my friends . . . very beautiful place. We take the train from Vivocity[25] and sometimes we eat something there. But I don't know why some of the Bangladeshis like to go into the shops. You have no money to buy the clothes inside so why you go inside for? It is not important. Just look from outside, eat and then go to the seaside!

Khairul, another former shipyard worker, also told me,

> Last time when I go out with my friends, sometimes we drink Coca Cola or we buy something small to eat in Little India. But we never drink alcohol because it is not good for [our] body. Sometimes we buy cigarettes but very expensive in Singapore! In Bangladesh, I think can buy one whole carton [for the same price] as in Singapore. Last time, after boss cut my salary, I have about $300 left so I can go and enjoy. This $300 very fast finish, you know! After I buy phone cards to call Bangladesh, buy drinks, buy something to eat – very easy to spend this $300 in Singapore. Now I don't have money so I don't spend so much – no problem. I just buy less. $100 is [a lot] to me now. Last time I have salary so $100 or $200 is very small to me. But now, that is a lot!

From Farouk and Khairul's claims that certain things are "not important" and "no problem", it is clear that "practice never ceases to conform to economic calculation even when it gives every appearance of disinterestedness by departing from the logic of interested calculation" (Bourdieu, 1977: 177). Their economic calculations extend to their consumption of all goods. It is therefore possible to argue that domination works through people's consumption as well. Their adaptation to their low incomes becomes another form of domination, where they have internalized their dispossession through their habitus. Farouk's claim of not understanding why his friends want to go into stores selling things they cannot afford suggests a practical orientation towards necessity. His failure to understand makes possible the disappearance of the very political-economic conditions which produced this orientation in the first place, enabling this subtle mode of domination to be maintained. This point is seen in Khairul's claim that it is "no problem" for him to be spending less than when he had a job. As I highlighted in my theoretical arguments, if there is an apparent relationship between income and consumption, this is because taste is almost always the product of economic conditions so that one's wages – or lack thereof, as in the case here – and position within waged labour are always culturally expressed through the habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). This also means that different incomes will generate different tastes – indeed, "one man's extravagance is another man's prime necessity" – a point I will return to in the other chapters.

The Bangladeshis I spoke with also often rationalized their consumption choices and tastes by moralizing their stance against a different group. As Hossein tells me,

> In Bangladesh, ladies cannot wear short pants! Very [conservative]! Maybe only babies can wear but after primary school, people don't wear short pants to go out. At home okay. Here in Singapore, men and women both wear short pants. In Bangladesh cannot like this – women wear like this not good. And here, always see men and women holding hands on the bus, on the MRT, at the shopping centre. In Bangladesh, only in the park at night you can see. But in Singapore, I wear short pants also because I am not happy. In Bangladesh, I will not [dress] like this. Always shirt and long pants.

The above quotes illustrate the dispositions taken on by these male migrants. The moralizing of how women dress in both places is one of the ways in which Bangladeshis form a sense of distinction from another group of which they are not a part. Their distaste, their sense of vulgarization, towards women wearing shorts is very much a symbolic struggle over what it means to be appropriately dressed – a struggle that will become clearer later on, as I show how distinction, and more broadly, class, always exists in relation to the other.

Conclusion

The politics of development through cosmopolitanism can be untangled through analysing the class situations of low-paid, low-status Bangladeshi male migrants. Singapore's aspirations as a cosmopolis, as discussed in the previous chapter, are realized upon the calculated differentiation of workers, the majority of whom are denied citizenship. On the one hand, the Bangladeshi men's labour migration highlights the powerful and complex structures of inequality in global capitalism and in Singapore's labour market through the various policies and practices that maintain their economic exploitation and subordination, as I have examined here. As workers enter these new forms of waged labour, with the precarious conditions of low wages, close regulation of their (re)productive bodies, enforced transience and the sheer physical dangers of their jobs, it becomes clear that their work lives are not merely economic in the narrow sense, but are deeply entrenched with complex social goals and cultural discourses that linger even after they fall out of work. Through the notion of habitus, we see that these are individuals who operate as subjects engaging with, rather than being passive receptors of, social constructs such as class and gender. As Enloe argues, "without women's own needs, values and worries, the global assembly line would grind to a halt" (1989: 16–17, quoted in Mills, 1999). My argument shows that this needs to be extended to include discussions of masculinities and their intersections with class subjectivities as well. Despite, or perhaps precisely because of, their exclusion from the material benefits of paid work and, finally, because of becoming special pass holders, Bangladeshi migrant workers continue to grapple with dominant narratives of gender and modernity as refracted through their aspirations. Much of this manifests through

the necessity of taste – a notion which is experienced by the other groups of workers included here but in ways that differ drastically because of their lack of access to better wages and jobs. Through the conceptual tools with which I examine the lived complexities of social class reproduction, we see that certain groups of workers are exposed to greater danger and harm in their daily lives, *more so than others*. Class is always relational. The following chapters will illustrate how different groups of workers are linked precisely through their class-based differences, both through their work trajectories and their forms of symbolic classification and identity formation.

4
Commuting to Singapore: Johorean Malaysians

Dan, 29

Dan is a machine operator at a Singaporean stationery manufacturing plant. He is originally from Kuching, Sarawak and told me that he was very reluctant to show up for his first day of work after completing his studies because of the low pay. He called up his elder brother, who had already been working in Singapore for a while, who told him to "buy a ticket and come to Singapore immediately". Taking his brother's advice and through that network, Dan got a job, initially planning to only work in Singapore for a year to "gain some experience" and to "see what it was like living in a big city like Singapore". He ended up working in Singapore for ten years.

Until March 2008, Dan was living with his partner in a five-room flat in Seng Kang,[1] paying rent of $800 per month. The landlord suddenly decided to increase his rent to $1,800 – an amount which neither of them could afford. The couple had already bought a house in Johor but it would not be ready until the later part of 2010. They decided to move into a rented house in Johor while still keeping their jobs in Singapore. This, Dan said, made the most financial sense. He said the cost of living and living standards in Johor are much higher than in other parts of Malaysia. At the same time, however, the salaries earned from working in Johor are not much different from the rest of the country. He said it is only possible "to survive" in Johor if you have your own business. By working in Singapore, he said, it is "not so difficult to [maintain his] current lifestyle".

Dan lives with his partner in a gated community that is approximately 25 minutes away from the causeway. From leaving

his home to arriving at his workplace, takes about an hour and a half. I asked him about his consumption habits, to which he quickly replied he has "little left to spend after paying for everything". His current lifestyle expenditure consists of caring for his three dogs and his lawn, paying for cable television and high-speed internet, and maintaining two cars and his split-level townhouse with a garage. His rent, at 850 Ringgit a month is significantly lower than the $1400 he used to pay in Singapore. He also told me he had made a deposit for a specially filtrated water, called "Diamond Water", which is supposedly very good for health, but has since decided that it is beyond his budget and hence has had to forgo the down payment of 300 Ringgit. He also reminded me that parking in Singapore is not cheap, at about SGD$100 a month, excluding the monthly instalment payments for his car and petrol. He also holds a California Fitness gym membership in Singapore. Electricity and water, he says, are "cheap in Malaysia" but it still costs 200 Ringgit a month because they "must have air [conditioning] at home". He says that after all these monthly bills, there is very little left for "frivolous spending". He does not buy brand-name clothing, he says, because there is "no need to" while living in Malaysia. While he was living in Singapore, however, he felt there was pressure to buy "nicer clothes" and more expensive items because that was what most people had. In Malaysia, he says, people are a lot more casual and "don't really care". I asked if he would ever stop commuting to work in Singapore. He says he has a good job in Singapore and the pay is "not bad". He says that "clubbing for gay men" is more accessible in Singapore, as Malaysia is still a very "conservative Muslim country" in many ways. The only thing that would prompt him to stop commuting to work would be if he starts his own business – an idea which he is already considering.

Kelly, 27

Kelly has been commuting to Singapore for the past ten years. Through her elder sister, she found a job at an optical shop, where she still works. She decided to move to Singapore and lived with her elder sister there for a year. During that year, Kelly said, her grandmother missed her very much and also she could not save much because of the high living costs. She moved back to Malaysia and rented a room in Johor Bahru, moving in with her boyfriend, her friends and

grandmother. Kelly told me, however, that her grandmother is not happy living in Johor – "it is not a place for us to live for long. The neighbours are not friendly like in Kuala LumpurL [KL)] and it's a dangerous place, especially because my *popo* is alone during the day". Kelly says that she is saving up to buy a house in KL so that her grandmother can live closer to the rest of her family. Currently, her commute starts at 5am every morning, on the back of her boyfriend's motorcycle, and takes about two hours each way. She arrives home at about 8pm every night.

Kelly says that because of her low education level, she was not able to get a better paying job in Malaysia – she had worked for 800 Ringgit as a clerk in KL. Aside from the higher salary, Kelly also told me that she prefers working in Singapore because she felt that working as a Chinese person in Malaysia was difficult – "Malays are more comfortable in Malaysia. Everything also can get government support. We Chinese and the Indians have to depend on ourselves". She said that she could feel her life change after working in Singapore – being able to purchase brand-name clothing and electrical appliances. This has, however, caused some tension with the rest of her family members who are still working in Malaysia, "Their thinking is different. They think that I am showing off when I say we should eat at a restaurant. But I think I work so hard, what is wrong with spending a bit more on food and clothes that are nicer?". Singaporeans are different, Kelly says. There is little they would not spend their money on, she told me. Malaysians are more prudent – a sentiment reflected in not only Kelly's story but by most of my other Johorean respondents as well. Like other Malaysians I spoke with, Kelly was keen to say that her current job is probably something that Singaporeans would not want to readily take on. As she says, "Malaysians are here because they cannot hire Singaporeans. Singaporeans are asking for more – they want higher salaries, better jobs. Malaysians are more like 'oh ok I can do that for that price'. Maybe because their expectations are lower? So maybe the boss will prefer the Malaysian because they don't ask for as much. Easier to get Malaysians to do what they want."

The commute across the causeway is dangerous, tiring and very stressful. The new Sultan Iskandar Immigration Complex, she feels, has increased the commuting time because of its sheer size, the winding hallways and continued long wait times. In spite of this, Kelly says she will keep commuting until she has the chance to get her

permanent residency (PR) status in Singapore. Her current boss has mentioned that he will help her apply for an S-pass,[2] which will give her a chance at applying for PR.

Similarly to the Bangladeshi workers, the flow of Johorean commuters is also generated by uneven development led largely by expanding processes of economic globalization. Their desire to move to Singapore for work is also fuelled by the racial politics in Malaysia which prioritizes the *bumiputera*.[3] The majority of Malaysian commuters are concentrated in manufacturing and low-paid service industries. Their experience of the structural disparities in the global political economy condition their agency of choice and desires, leading them to make the stressful daily transnational commute: a commute which they sometimes make for up to 20 years. In this chapter I reinforce my thesis that these workers enter not only circuits of economic production and exchange but also participate in socio-cultural reproduction and consumption that point to their changing class identities. I show how these workers' other social identities, like race and citizenship, are embedded within their class subjectivities and how these are renegotiated upon entering different spaces. I highlight how these commuter workers from Southern Malaysia experience a very different livelihood from the Bangladeshi workers through their work conditions. This difference extends beyond their higher wages. The variations in their livelihoods can be explained by changes in the geopolitical economy, their recruitment processes, their lower dependency on their employers and the larger variety of jobs they are allowed to access as Malaysians. Their structural positions within economic production, that is, within the division of labour in Singapore, also provides them access to particular lifestyles that are distinct from other groups of workers examined in this study, illustrating the cultural logic of capitalism. Their experience of this lifestyle is very much expressed in the ways of the petite bourgeoisie as conditioned by their locations within the labour market in Singapore and often expressed in contrast to Malaysians who continue working in Malaysia and other groups of workers in Singapore.

Situating the workers

The movement of workers from Johor to Singapore has increased particularly since the 1980s when the Singapore government sought

formal agreements with Malaysia and Indonesia to develop a Growth Triangle with Riau and Johor. Through this Growth Triangle, we see, among other things, the immediate hinterland of Singapore spanning interstate boundaries. Scholars have argued that the Growth Triangle would not exist were it not for Singapore's strategic niche in the global flow of commerce (Macleod and McGee, 1996). Within this process of cooperation, Singapore would provide the skilled labour, business services and capital, Johor would provide the skilled and semi-skilled labour and recreation land, while Batam and the rest of the Riaus would provide low-cost labour and some natural amenities, like beaches. I would argue then that the Growth Triangle – with Singapore and Johor's inter-related developments being of particular relevance for my research – is premised upon uneven development. This unevenness is often glossed over as "comparative advantage", where Singapore taps into and contributes to extra-territorial flows of people, capital, commodities, regulations and resources: Singapore provides the capital and expertise, while Johor and Riau provide the cheap resources of land and labour (Sparke et al., 2004; Bunnell et al., 2006). The city of Johor Bahru (JB) is a city of half a million that is an industrial and commercial hotspot of the Southern Johor Economic Region. JB is also located between the two powerful regional hubs of KL and Singapore, the former its national capital. The centrality of KL in national policies and the quest to display the modernization of Malaysia has further compounded JB's position as a connected site where networks of local and transnational forces of urbanization emerge.

Towards the mid-to-late 1970s, Singapore started facing labour shortages. Until then it was believed that the city-state could employ both low and mid-technology labour side by side (Perry et al., 1997). This appeared less true by the 1970s. The government's desire to increase the amount of higher-value-added production was primarily driven by the increasing value of the Singapore dollar, which raised production costs. Further, Singapore would soon lose its "developing country" status at the World Bank, which would mean giving up its General System of Preferences trade benefits on labour intensive products (Rodan, 1989). As the international investment climate picked up in 1978, Singapore policy makers took on new strategies to move Singapore towards a more sophisticated technological base, thereby taking it out of competition with lower wage countries

and lessening the pressure on finding more labour for economic growth. Singapore turned to join the NIDL by re-positioning itself and moving the economy into higher levels of productivity and value-addition. As discussed in Chapter 2, the CWP was implemented to raise wage costs to increase productivity – a move, it can be argued, by the Singaporean state to discipline capital (Rodan, 1989; Perry et al., 1997). Further, generous tax and fiscal incentives were provided for appropriate new investments and dramatic expansions to social and physical infrastructures. Singapore was becoming increasingly complex and diverse in its tapping of foreign peoples, ideas and resources, through the upgrading of its services sector within its city-state boundaries and the offshoring of the more low-productivity manufacturing industries that it had been previously been known for. As the economy moved "upscale", certain activities became increasingly marginalized in the city-state's space-economy. As a result, Singapore's higher-end services grew by 14.6% in 1989, peopled largely by skilled migrant workers (Rodan, 1989).

Nonetheless, lower technology industries, like textiles and electronic manufacturing remained important to the economy and were offshored to Johor and then, later on, to the Riau Islands as the SIJORI Growth Triangle developed (Macleod and McGee, 1996; Sparke et al., 2004; Lindquist, 2010). Much of Johor's industrial development was a result of direct capital investment from Singapore. The population also grew in Mukim Plentong because, up until the late 1970s, many of these Johorean workers were discriminated against when they tried to find employment in Singapore (Guinness, 1992). In the late 1970s, Singaporean policy makers decided to tap into Johor's labour pool to aid the growth of Singapore's globalizing economy, boosting a historical corridor of labour movement between Southern Malaysia and Singapore. This mobility of workers between the two countries was hence facilitated by the increased permeability of Singapore's borders and the already existing working population in Southern Johor. Conversely, the borders of the other player in the Growth Triangle, Indonesia, have undergone stricter regulations. While capital and Singaporeans move easily to and from Batam, the transnational mobility of labour from Batam into Singapore has been circumscribed. Since the 1970s, economic growth and higher salaries in Singapore and Malaysia have made it increasingly lucrative for Indonesians to cross the Straits of Malacca

in search of wage labour (Lindquist, 2010). It can thus be said that Singapore's economic restructuring had repercussions beyond its national boundaries, including the transformations of labour markets in its immediate region. Relatedly, the development of Johor also illustrates broader transformations in the global economy. A more specific form of regional integration continues to be the ongoing dynamics of border production between Johor and Singapore. The Johor Bahru–Nusajaya corridor, a coastal highway completed in 2011, is connected via a second bridge to Singapore's industrial areas in Tuas and serves as a further catalyst for urbanisation, with a projected population of 500,000 by 2025 along the route. This is to be complemented by the planned connection of Singapore's Mass Rapid Transit with Malaysia's Light Rail Transit by 2018 to facilitate mutual economic development and attract investors and enterprises (Nasongkhla and Sintusingha, 2013). As elsewhere, such spatial integration is also fraught with tensions, with the most recent being a fivefold increase in the toll charge for Singaporean cars entering Malaysia since August 2014 (*Economist*[4]).

The proximity and porosity of the border between Malaysia and Singapore has led to the rising costs of living in Johor. Indeed, the close proximity to Singapore and inflow of foreign investment has also driven many Malaysians, especially Johoreans to seek higher salaries in Singapore (Guinness, 1992). It has been argued that Malaysia's low wages are a result of the fact that it has been keen to provide cheaper labour to the global economy as part of its export-oriented development platform from the 1970s. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these developments closely relate to Singapore's own economic restructuring. The region's economic restructuring regimes have been closely linked to increased competition in the world economy and the relocation of labour-intensive industries to areas with far lower labour costs. Malaysia became a target for such relocation strategies partly because of its low labour costs, partly because it had an English-educated workforce and also because its government was looking to shift its economy from import-substitution to export-orientation to create employment, especially for Malays, as various policies and practices under the New Economic Policy (NEP) show (Guinness, 1992; Jomo, 1993; Kahn, 1996). The preference for Malay workers in the workforce, while not perceived as an indisputable benefit by the Malays themselves, has led to many Chinese

and Indian workers seeking work in Singapore (Guinness, 1992: 71). Economic development in Malaysia must be understood through a racialized lens, which long pre-dates the emergence of the NEP and is a post-colonial legacy of the British. Colonial administration in Malaya was carried out as an extension of the traditional Malay sultanates. The British policy of conferring legitimacy on the conception of the Malays as the "rightful inhabitants" of the peninsula led to the Malay Reservation Act, which made it illegal for non-Malays to purchase and own land (Bunnell, 2004: 37). The figure of the Malay was constructed as unsuitable for wage labour in tin mines or the plantation network and was seen by the colonial government as under threat from immigrant others – that is, Chinese and Indians (Bunnell, 2004: 39).

While there is little room here to discuss the details of Malaya's post-colonial geography, it can be said that through its commercial exploits the British formed the broad contours of social divisions based on race (Bunnell, 2004; Thompson, 2003). It is upon this foundation that one can start to make sense of the race riots of 13 May 1964 that shattered the post-independence illusion of common citizenship among the various national subjects of Malaysia (Bunnell, 2004). These riots became a powerful symbol of protecting Malay nationalism and have thus been said to have legitimized the exercise of Malay state power to subdue non-Malay assertiveness in the name of "national harmony" (Bunnell, 2004: 42). Against this background, the NEP brought about a new form of societal division, founded on race-based economic development, that favoured *bumiputeras* or "sons of the soil". Although this term and its implications are not unambiguous even amongst the Malay communities, it did come to include ethnic quotas that were Malay-centred in education, employment in the government sector, social services and private corporate enterprises (Bunnell, 2004). The NEP later came to be seen by former Prime Minister Mahathir as a crutch for Malays who were "afflicted by a subsidy mentality", and he called for an overhaul of existing policies to reconstruct Malay identity (Kahn, 1996; Bunnell, 2004: 50). In this context, the Malay identity – like any other identity – is evidently and constantly under transformation and must be understood in relation to economic interests and projects. Despite the 1Malaysia initiative, the historical socio-spatial segregation – exacerbated by NEP – has been sustained, manifested in defined cultural, economic

and religious differences through the implementation of separate schools and curriculums, religious monuments, associations, newspapers, marketplaces and cultural festivals in public spaces (Nasongkhla and Sintusingha, 2013). The rationalized racial tensions that have been historically and geographically institutionalized in Malay(si)a, moreover, have also motivated Indian and Chinese Malaysians to seek work elsewhere. As will be seen later in this chapter, the reality of segregation is deeply felt by many of my respondents who are Indian and Chinese Malaysians. This illustrates the significance of state power in producing and legitimizing racial categories and outcomes as the extra-legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability.

Aside from the commonly known growth model of the "global factory", the 1980s also saw the growth of middle-class professionals as well as the "not quite theres" (NQTs) (Kahn, 1996: 66–67). These NQT professionals are people aspiring towards a lifestyle accessed by professional white-collared workers yet earning a lower income than the upper echelons of the middle-classes. It has been documented that this group of the new rich are actively shaping the urban landscapes of Penang, Johor and Kuala Lumpur, evident in the proliferation of new shopping malls, Western-style fast food outlets, and the expanding demand for a wide range of consumer goods such as clothing, electronic goods and cars (Kahn, 1996). Many of my respondents are also engaging in similar practices of urban change, whether it is through their own consumption choices or their families' through their remittances. Strategically benefiting from Singapore'scentrality in the regional and global economic flows, the state of Johor has been experiencing rapid expansion, with a total population of 3.5 million in 2015 (Department of Statistics Malaysia[5]). The rise in this group's aspirations for an improved standard of living, as noted in Guinness' study of urban change in Southern Malaysia, has often not been matched by actual increases in their wages (1992). In this sense, the benefits of industrialization in Johor's southern tip remain in doubt. The strong, often authoritarian role of the state in ensuring attractive conditions for capital investment has resulted in an exploited workforce: wages remain low partly through employers' preferences for a female, unskilled workforce and the use of casual workers recruited through contractors.

The extensive participation of Malaysians in this national and international economy (as they cross the border to work in Singapore) is hence one of the consequences of the profound transformations in both countries' political-economic conditions. It could be argued then that the commuting of Malaysians is an active reaction to this form of graduated sovereignty in Malaysia, though race reinforces structural inequalities in both Malaysia and Singapore (Chang and Aoki, 1997). The experiences of these commuter workers highlight their incorporation and yet transience within the economic and cultural hierarchies of the Singaporean economy. Many of the workers I have spoken with are keenly aware of their status as temporary labour migrants in Singapore. The uses to which these commuters put their Singapore-earned wages, particularly the acquisition and display of market commodities as emblems of style and status in Malaysia, represent one way in which they challenge their marginal status in Singapore as well as reinforcing the dominant cultural discourses of the NQTs in Malaysia. Their commodity consumption through waged labour in Singapore points to tensions over disparities in wealth and status within their home and work communities. These tensions – a crucial form of social reproduction – in turn shape the complex motivations of labour out-migration and the meanings given to this form of mobility by both the migrants and their households.

Since the 1980s, the number of commuters who cross the border everyday from Johor to Singapore has increased from about 25,000 in 1990 (MacLeod and McGee, 1996) to an estimated 80,000 in 2008 (personal interview with official at the Malaysian High Commission in Singapore). Many of the workers are from other parts of Malaysia – Penang, Selangor – and have migrated to Johor just so they can commute to Singapore each day. Johor is therefore also a mid-point for their work sojourn. Similar to the other node in the Growth Triangle, Batam, where many internal migrants from Indonesia seek work, Johor is a node for many Malaysians (Guinness, 1992; Lindquist, 2010). To a large extent this commuting mobility can be explained by the relative success of Singapore's development model but it is significant to recognize that these mobilities to Singapore emerge from sending areas beyond Southern Malaysia. For the commuters, however, Johor is the gateway to a larger, more lucrative labour market through which they will be able to access higher income and the

lifestyle this transnational livelihood can bring. This suggests that migration and commuting are not alternatives nor necessarily discrete but are part of a work journey that stretches across a larger scale. For the commuter, this suggests that the commute to work in Singapore is preceded by a much more extensive geographical and historical process that is set in motion even before they begin work. While I do not examine the changes in Johor as a result of commuting per se,[6] this does explain why the remittances and income spent by commuters reach beyond Johor and to their original communities. The implications of accessing work through commuting to the global city across the border therefore have a much wider spatial reach than just to Johor itself.

I will show how these Singaporean earnings contribute to the reproduction of social class in the workers' home areas, which are sometimes fraught with tensions. All the Johoreans I interviewed are work-permit or S-pass holders, with the exception of one who recently got her PR status. This means that they earn no more than SGD$2,200 a month. Their monthly wages range from $1,200 to $2,200 – significantly higher than the Bangladeshi migrant workers but still lower than the Singaporean financial professionals discussed in the next chapter. Because of their citizenship status, Johoreans can be found in a variety of workplaces in Singapore but mainly in construction, carpentry, factories, administration and retail.

Contextualizing the commute

The Johoreans' commute to work is distinct from other groups included in this study. They commute on motorcycles or on Singapore public transit buses, company buses and some Johor-based buses. Until the recent opening of the new Customs and Immigration Complex in Johor, commuters were also allowed to walk across the causeway between the Johor and Singapore immigration checkpoints. The daily commute for these workers can begin as early as 4am and some arrive home at about 11pm at night. These times depend on where the commuters live in Johor and where they work in Singapore, as well as the time they start and finish work. The commuting journey itself – that is, the time taken from the house to the checkpoint, waiting at immigration and finally to get to the workplace – can take up to 3.5 hours each way, everyday. A few of the

commuters I interviewed also joked wryly that they really hoped no other terrorists escape, otherwise they will again be stuck at the causeway for 4–5 hours. This is in reference to the incident of the escaped terrorist Mas Selamat in early 2008, resulting in extra-long wait times at the causeway.

Getting to work in Singapore

For this group, the process of recruitment to work in Singapore on a work-permit was not often through an agent, as with the Bangladeshi migrants. All the commuters I spoke with secured employment either through informal but established networks – family members and/or friends already working in Singapore, as with Dan and Kelly – or through direct application to the company. My data also shows that many employers hired new Johoreans by announcing openings to their current workers and encouraging them to spread the word among people from home. This personal and material assistance provided important support for new arriving commuters. While these commuters did not have to get used to living in Singapore since they continued holding residence in Johor, the lack of a middle-person also meant that they did not start their work lives in Singapore in debt, as the Bangladeshis did. Without ignoring their continued exploitation as defined by the nature of capitalism in Marx's terms, their livelihoods in Singapore therefore still appear less precarious, their persons less subordinate to the labour process, than the Bangladeshis who had to pay their agents some $10,000 to access work-permit jobs in Singapore. As Biao's study on Indian body-shops illustrates, informal Indian networks not only enabled swift recruitment but, more importantly, were measures for guaranteeing competence and qualifications (2007). This form of recruitment, however, can also come with its own set of uncertainties, as I discuss further on.

The Johoreans I encountered were drawn from a broader range of work in the lower-paying service sector, such as hairdressing and retail, manufacturing and carpentry. This is in part explained by the social networking that is embedded within practices of recruitment as mentioned above. It is also explained by the labour policies in Singapore on the hiring of Malaysians. Unlike workers from other nationalities, Malaysian workers are eligible for work-permit jobs in

every sector of the economy, hence they have a greater choice of work structurally within the labour market. The employers of Malaysian workers are also exempt from paying the security bond of $5,000, although levies for hiring foreign workers still apply.[7] Even though Ministry of Manpower guidelines state that employers should provide accommodation for their workers, none of the commuting workers I spoke with were living in company-provided housing in Johor. Instead, many of them were able to afford sharing a rented apartment with other commuters, like Kelly, or were even able to buy their own house in Johor, as in the case of Dan. This means that these workers are less dependent on their employers, compared to the Bangladeshis – none of them are subjected to arbitrary wage deductions for room and board. This lower dependency on employers also means that neither are the commuters subjected to forced removal by way of repatriation companies. In short, Johorean commuters are not subordinate to hyper-exploitative work conditions of the sort faced by the Bangladeshi workers. Regardless, commuter workers still have to carefully navigate the various politics of their employment situations.

Due largely to a reliance on personal networks, Johoreans who act as informal recruiters of workers normally only recruit from limited places in Johor. As Biao asked in his study, does this mean that workers could easily form alliances based on their place of common origin? (2007: 92). This was rarely true. The person who brought the worker in – the brother or the aunt of a new commuter – seldom intervened on the worker's behalf. As Hafizah told me, the hair salon at which she is working required her to work longer hours than was originally promised. She told me she felt "embarrassed" and that it was "not very nice" to question her employer too much because it may have made her cousin – who had introduced her to the job and who also worked at the same salon – look bad. She told me she believed that she must "know how to behave" around her cousin because, if not for her, Hafizah would still be working in Malaysia for less than half of what she is paid in Singapore. While without the burden of debt resulting from high agent fees, Hafizah's informal recruitment still brought with it its own set of uncertainties. She found it difficult to delineate between a professional relationship and a more personal one. The flexibility of her work, then, serves to undermine, rather than heighten the autonomy she has over her

labour. This becomes another way she, and many others like her, access and experience work through a recruitment process that is laden with micro-politics of precarity (Elcioglu, 2010).

This evidence also suggests that not all migrant labourers on work permits to Singapore experience the same precarity, neither in the same space nor time. Without undermining the micro-politics of recruited commuters like Hafizah, their migrant status is less precarious than that of the Bangladeshi workers, who have had to take on large loans even before entering Singapore. This different degree of precarity in the lives of Johorean and Bangladeshi workers as a result of the labour market locates them within different social groups. This resonates with Waite's argument – that low-paid migrant labourers cannot be labelled in a singular manner (2009). Waite also reminds us, however, that the neoliberalization of the global economy also leads to the non-standardization of work. As I mentioned in the Introduction, standard work is generally seen as full-time employment with extensive statutory benefits and entitlements (Waite, 2009: 416). While the commuters I spoke with were working on a full-time basis, none of them had extensive statutory benefits such as the Central Provident Fund,[8] in contrast to the local financial workers I interviewed, given the former's employment status as work-permit holders. This means that class differences are linked to the unequal degrees of precarity in a person's life, depending on their position within the division of labour.

Working in Singapore: All about the money?

The Johoreans I met all felt the stresses of the daily commute. The long hours, causeway jams and being exposed to the elements if on a motorbike while waiting in line at customs are all part of the journey they make everyday to work in Singapore. There are reasons, which are clearly material, that explain why these workers choose to commute to Singapore. As Priya, an Indian-Malaysian woman working as an office administrator, and Ah Cai, a Malaysian-Chinese man working as a construction worker, told me,

> Priya: What factored most for me was the salary. I was earning less than 1000 ringgit a month in JB. So when there was this job opening [in Singapore], I saw that the starting pay was already $1,200.

> That was when I decided I would work in Singapore. Exchange rate also good for me.
>
> Ah Cai: Maybe if you can ask people in Singapore to lower the rent, then my family can live here. But salary is still better here, that's why so many of us come . . . Actually I really hope my salary will be enough to cover my medical bills – my lungs have been polluted just by waiting at the causeway everyday on my bike

The economic reasons, shaped by broader processes of development, motivating these workers situate them in a particular form of mobility. The high cost of living in Singapore, the lower salaries in Malaysia and the favourable exchange rate explain these border mobilities for the commuters.

Many of these commuters I interviewed also cited racial relations in Malaysia as a reason for their seeking employment in Singapore. JP, an Indian-Malaysian man who is a supervisor at a printing firm says,

> Working in Singapore is good – at least people of different social backgrounds are treated more or less the same here. In Malaysia, the racial bias very obvious and I, as an Indian, definitely feel it. Chinese and Indians are the hardworking ones there but the Malays get the most benefit just because they are Malays.

These sentiments are also reflected in what Priya tells me,

> If you are an Indian in Malaysia, people sometimes make fun of you. You know there are not that many opportunities for you. You know you cannot qualify for a lot of government benefits. You can see from the racial quota that 80% of subsidized housing is for Malays even though you can see from the types of cars they drive they don't need this subsidy. Working in Singapore is still better that way.

These quotes show that there is some yearning for a more multicultural, more cosmopolitan sort of life, which these respondents associate with living in Singapore – regardless of whether this is true for everyone. Distinctive to this group, this desire is conditioned by their minority status. Their race is therefore embedded within their decision to participate in this particular work journey. This stems

from the *bumiputera* system in Malaysia that was set in place since the 1970s with the NEP, as a result of which Malays enjoy more rights, privileges and claims that non-Malays – pushing many Chinese and Indians, such as the commuters I met, to seek employment elsewhere (Ong, 2000; Thompson, 2003). The data also suggest that it is primarily at the regional and local scale that more nuanced discussions of the relationship between race and class emerge. This shows that race itself is not biologically given but politically produced in different ways in different geographical-historical processes. It is within such contexts of complex and fluid racial hierarchies, produced in historically and geographically specific situations, that we have to understand the configuration of race, class and nationality for these Johoreans (Glassman, 2010: 3). Chinese and Indian-Malaysians seek economic opportunities elsewhere in part because of their racialized positions that work against them within the graduated, Malaysian citizenship. My data also illustrates that they feel they fare better working in Singapore than in Malaysia because of the existing racial hierarchy favouring the *bumiputera*. Malay-Malaysians, to a large extent, continue to be more empowered in the workforce in Malaysia because of the *bumiputera* system. At the same time, as much as their race (Malay), tied to their nationality (Malaysian) serves as an advantage for them in Malaysia, this identity construct appears to disadvantage them across the border in Singapore. They are not on par with Malay-Singaporeans because of their citizenship status. Their ethnicity as Malays within the existing CMIO population composite in Singapore also further disadvantages them. This is reflected in the small number of Malay-Malaysian commuters within my respondent pool. This not only strongly demonstrates the social construction of racial identity, but further, how closely tied it is to the formation of classes and class fractions. This is to say that one's position in a given labour force's racialized social hierarchy is not pre-given by one's biological "race" but, more accurately, is constructed out of the ways through which race is deployed, sometimes among ethnically very similar people, to create labour market segmentation and rationalize uneven social prospects of the sort that are inevitable in a capitalist class structure.

Some, such as Stuart Hall, may argue that this is an example of life being lived through race rather than class. I would argue, instead, that this suggests how intimately race is intertwined with class, much as how gender is also co-constituted alongside class. In this present

example of the racialization of a Malaysian's access to work, race is certainly an important aspect through which class relations are experienced. The political economy that produces surpluses and their differential appropriation in terms of capital and labour, at the same time produces class differentiation that becomes racialized. Taken as a whole, the race–class nexus suggests a wide spectrum of relationships between race and class hierarchies (Mann, 2007). There is no space here for a full review of this but I would argue that these are powerful social structures that become entrenched within one's position in the division of labour, affecting access to resources. In this regard, class acquires theoretical centrality, not because it is inherently more important than race or even distinct from race but precisely because race is deployed in ways that shape people's access to work.

Taste work: The correspondence between goods production and taste production

Given the favourable exchange rate, earning their wages in Singaporean dollars means these commuters have the economic capital to enjoy a certain lifestyle which Malaysians working in Malaysia cannot access. Muthu, an Indian-Malaysian housekeeping supervisor at a hotel, says,

> After working in Singapore, I don't have to watch my budget so much anymore. Anything I want, I can just buy. If my wife and daughter want new clothes, I can straight away buy for them.

Dan, the Chinese-Malaysian man introduced at the beginning of this chapter, says,

> I live in a gated community . . . I have three dogs, cable tv, high speed internet, two cars, a garage, the house is air-conditioned, and weekends at home with my family. I also started buying Diamond Water, which is specially filtered so it's healthier. I also have to pay for my monthly gym membership. No way we can afford this by working in Malaysia.

Within their new economic conditions, it also means these commuters have to traverse different cultural circuits. Their

consumption habits and lifestyle choices are therefore one of the outcomes of their cultural capital, which is in turn shaped by their new economic conditions. Whereas the Bangladeshis often expressed to me their demand for "cleanliness" and "tidiness" in their dress, the desires of the Johoreans, such as Dan, are relatively more free from necessity (Bourdieu, 1984: 247). From the last quote, it becomes clear that this group of workers can afford to look for fashionable garments and comfortable living spaces as opposed to the poorer classes, whose tastes and needs are sometimes reduced to essential goods and virtues. For example, with his financial resources, Dan is able to act on his taste for Diamond Water. In other words, his economic means allow him to consume that which he believes holds more virtue for his health than regular water. Their motivations for commuting to work in Singapore thus extend well beyond narrowly conceived economic reasons. Seran, an Indian-Malaysian man who is working as a dog-trainer tells me,

> My life has changed since I started working in Singapore – I think my dressing is different from other Malaysians . . . When you look at me, do you think I'm Malaysian or Singaporean? A lot of people think I'm Singaporean! Which is good, I guess. I would rather buy clothes in Singapore even though it costs me more. I think I also talk like a Singaporean . . . international movies and Nokia models also come out here first so you know, its very modern and advanced. You can say I feel more confident after I started working in Singapore.

In this quote, mundane goods like international cell phone brands and movies become powerful forms of capital within Seran's identity – they lend him a sense of cosmopolitan distinction from other Malaysians (Bourdieu, 1984). It is precisely the banality of these items which demonstrates the salience of class-based aspirations in his identity. His taste for Singaporean dress and manner of speech is the practical, embodied, quotidian way in which he expresses and negotiates his class identity. The "Singaporean attributes" which Seran has cultivated through his commuting become a type of privilege which is attributed to the holder. This reinforces a certain state of micro-, yet striking, power relations, contributing to the existence and reproduction of classes through cultivated tastes. Working in Singapore is

not only financially significant, it also enables the acquisition of new tastes which signal people's connections to new class identities.

While Bourdieu discusses at length the cultural dimensions of class in relation to the scale of the individual's bodily practices, he does not leave the economy out of it. As suggested by Seran's quote, the social formations and differentiations that make up taste work are necessarily conditioned by economic bases. Habitus is inherently a product of the various economic resources differently available to individuals in a given field. The empirical discussion of people's social class position must therefore always be linked to their economic capital. As Kelly says,

> I don't understand how some people, especially Singaporeans, can spend $2,000 on a handbag! . . . When I first started working, the first thing I bought for my grandma was a good rice cooker and then I finally bought for myself some Converse shoes. It is branded but not too expensive and I have always wanted a pair.

Attitudes of prudence and thrift – or as Bourdieu calls it "the necessity of taste", as explored in the previous chapter – amongst the working class are therefore regulated by their specific positions in the division of labour, by their own economy of means (1984: 372). If Marx was right in saying that economic relations are very much social relations, then the above quote shows that social relations and, more specifically, people's orientation of taste are themselves powerfully conditioned and differentiated by economic relations as well. This quote also shows the correspondence between goods production and taste production (Bourdieu, 1984). Indeed, as Bourdieu argues (1984: 230),

> The field of production, which clearly could not function if it could not count on already existing tastes, more or less strong propensities to consume more or less clearly defined goods, enables tastes to be realized by offering . . . , at each moment, the universe of cultural goods as a system of stylistic possibles from which it can select the system of stylistic features constituting a lifestyle.

One could argue then that to some extent, one's class identity, as situated by one's taste for certain goods, was already set in motion even

before one was able to afford those goods. An individual's taste orientation is charged with the implicit or even unconscious desire to objectify certain goods as desirable, as eventually reachable "within their means". This further illustrates that taste is a system constituted by a person's position within the structure of different conditions, providing people with a sense of realization when they can finally own these goods, as with Kelly's Converse shoes. Her desire for those shoes was already present before she started working in Singapore and earning the income that she now does – aspiring towards purchasing those shoes was already an important part of the process of shaping her motivations to work for higher wages in Singapore. This does not negate the idea of the taste for necessity but, rather, illustrates the historical formulation of this taste. Bourdieu argues that "tastes that are actually realized depend on the state of the system of goods offered" (1984: 231). This is to say that as individuals move into different spatial circuits of production – as Kelly starts working in Singapore – the sort of goods that are available to her change as well. These products meet her own consumption aspirations as shaped by her class conditions and position ("branded and not too expensive"), therefore offering her the possibility of being satisfied ("always wanted a pair"). Indeed, there really is "something for everyone" (Bourdieu, 1984: 231). Through this act of consumption choice, people's positions and identification of suitable goods "go together" because they are situated in roughly the same positions in their respective cultural-economic spaces. The geography of their tastes is therefore shaped by their cultural moorings in both Singapore and Malaysia and facilitated by their mobility across the border.

Embodying class: Habitus

These class identities and practices also feed their habitus, which is a pre-reflexive structure that enables people to be classified and also to classify others. As Seran and Dan say:

> Seran: You can sometimes tell who is Malaysian and who is Singaporean just from the way they dress, the way they talk, the way they walk, their manners.
>
> Dan: I can tell just by looking which Johoreans work in Singapore and who are the ones who work in Malaysia. Also, I think

> Singaporean gay men dress very well, take care of themselves at the gym and go clubbing a lot but not so in Malaysia.

In this quote by Dan, who is gay, we see how his sexual orientation intersects with his class identity and shapes his reading of gay men in both countries. Class is reproduced through the commuters' practical and embodied knowledge of Singapore and Malaysia, differentiating them while also allowing them to differentiate others.

As mentioned earlier, many of the commuters are from Malaysian states outside Johor where their families continue to reside so, often, the effects of their class changes are felt beyond Johor. Seran says,

> I want to give my brother a better university life than I had so I sent money back to Penang for him. He doesn't have to use old textbooks like I did now . . . after I work for a few more years here, I want to go back and help my father expand his business.

Dan also tells me:

> When I go back to Kuching now, I definitely notice that Kuching men like long hair. I don't know why they like it! In Johor there isn't this fashion. Kuching people also think that I am "back from the big city" but there isn't this feeling among people in Johor because so many [Johoreans] work in Singapore.

Lisa, a Chinese-Malaysian working as a retail assistant, shares Dan's sentiments,

> I don't feel so different in Johor but when I go home to Selangor, my family and friends sometimes think that I am *hao lian*[9] if I use something that I bought from Singapore.

This quotes demonstrate the class reflexivities of these commuters as they enter different spaces. Their participation in the labour process in Singapore conditions their socio-cultural experience back in Malaysia – an experience that can sometimes result in tension within their households and sending communities. This class gaze, however, also works in another direction. While they may be seen as "better" or more "advanced" than Malaysians who are not working in Singapore, they are also aware of their class status in

Singapore. Muthu and Ah Soon, a Malaysian-Chinese man working as a carpenter's assistant, say,

> Muthu: Singaporean Indians think they are better just because they speak a lot more English than I do. But I can speak English also!
>
> Ah Soon: Promoters, home renovations, operating of machineries mostly done by Malaysians. Why? Because Singaporeans don't want to do. Singaporeans are highly educated. If I ask you to be a promoter, you want to or not? I don't think so because the pay is low and the work is hard.

This was my turn to feel slightly sheepish, even ashamed, about my own class privilege, because he was right – I have never considered taking on work as a promoter in a department store. The pride/shame dialectic, conditioned by people's positions in the Singaporean division of labour, is seen in Muthu's emphatic claim of being able to speak English and Ah Soon's logic of Malaysians doing harder work for lower wages than Singaporeans. Lowith argues that this is what distinguishes the working classes from the bourgeoisie, the disadvantaged from the privileged. The latter has no critical consciousness of its condition, whereas the former is "conscious of its dehumanization and . . . alienation" and, at the same time, it is precisely this consciousness, this self-reflexivity which makes the proletarian "less dehumanized than the bourgeois because he is so in a way which is clearly apparent, not concealed from him or idealized" (Lowith, 1983: 109). In Singapore, the inferior status and difference of the Johorean worker are not only essential features of the political-economic context of its division of labour. Rather, these politics of wages serve as aspirational forums in which to articulate claims to status and class differences. Deploying the citizenship of these Johorean workers through the seemingly objective, meritocratic notions of "skills differentials", language skills, education and "willingness to do jobs that Singaporeans don't want to do" generates not only material earnings but also reproduce class. In Ah Soon's quote, it appears as if the Johorean commuter [continues] to be subordinated to the division of labour as well as [his] own instrument of production. Similarly to Mann's work on Black American workers in California, however, I do

not think that the above quotes show a commitment, or even a resignation, to a working class identity by the Johorean workers (Mann, 2007). While it is difficult to "prove" or ascertain that these workers truly believe that they are only worthy of their jobs and wages in Singapore, there does appear to be a sense of self-conscious class positioning by these workers through their understanding of what is desirable work. This understanding of their position in the relations of production shows that they are not passive receptors of the existing economy of wages, in spite of what their wages and accessibility to jobs interpellate them as being (Mann, 2007). Instead, it demonstrates their reflexivity of the symbolic limits of class.

Ah Soon's sentiments resonate with the Singaporeans with whom I have spoken: the Singaporean attitude towards Johoreans seems to be complicit at best and painfully discriminating at worst in the reproduction of class differences between them and the Johoreans. Aileen, Singaporean-Chinese client assistant at an international bank, and Kenneth, a Singaporean-Chinese man working as an operations analyst at an investment firm, succinctly sum up the middle-class Singaporean attitude towards Johoreans working in Singapore,

> Aileen: What grounds are there to interact with these workers? They wouldn't feel comfortable at the places I am comfortable at. I wouldn't feel comfortable drinking at their kopitiams [coffee shops]! I am working at Raffles Place and they are probably at the industrial area doing some factory work.
>
> Kenneth: We dress and talk differently. Our accents are different even though we speak the same language. Mindsets are also different. Their skills are different. What they can or cannot do is different and what they are willing to do is also different from us. Like it or not, we have to swallow the bitter pill. If not, who is going to clean the office for you? The Singaporean? Of course not! The Malaysian most likely will!

The distinctions that Singaporeans draw between themselves and the migrants are based on a combination of their human capital, their willingness to accept low-status work and lifestyle choices. The class identities of Johoreans and of middle-class Singaporeans are therefore co-constituted based on the articulation and materialization of

difference. This connection through the relationship of difference underpins class boundaries. Class is indeed mutually constitutive and relational rather than separated and unvarying. Through the rhetoric of multiculturalism and almost grudging acceptance, there is the reinforcement of class inequalities and privilege in the workplace where certain people are constructed as more suitable for certain types of work.

Conclusion: Difference matters

This chapter has shown that the Singapore labour market has been sustained by uneven development and maintains this by keeping its borders porous to an extent. It also shows that the local labour force continues to draw many of its low-waged workers from beyond its national boundaries. The geography of this unevenness is manifested in two ways. Firstly, regional developments have created a particular form of border porosity which explains the flow of movement between Singapore and Southern Malaysia. The second spatialized expression of this unevenness is seen in the distinctive mobile/immobile selves of these commuters. Their decision to work in Singapore, while living in Johor and often maintaining family ties with their home areas further away from the causeway, necessarily means that movement is a crucial part of their relationship with Singapore. This constellation of mobility (Cresswell, 2010), however, encounters friction, shaped by the historical existence of racialized citizenship in Malaysia and the discourses and practices of meritocracy in Singapore. The reproduction of difference and distinction amongst local and foreign workers – and also within the latter group – is a result of an intimate and mutually reinforcing project of abstract structural forces of global neoliberal capitalism as well as the will of workers in everyday settings (Wills et al., 2010). The class-making project is one that is fraught with cultural nuances which are powerfully shaped by, but cannot be reduced to, people's economic conditions alone. A seemingly neutral discourse suggesting that the division of labour is based on work skills and willingness to take on dirty and dangerous work disguises finely calibrated regulation and discrimination against certain workers. This is one way in which difference and inequality are reproduced in the global city. Indeed, the class position of these commuters is also shifting, often redefined as

they move across space and mobilized at particular times, scales and places. It cannot be simply assumed, however, that people employed in workplaces commonly thought of as middle-class are exempt from forms of exclusion. In the next chapter, I discuss the social contours of financial work that coalesce a particular sense of cosmopolitanism while, and indeed *by*, filtering out certain groups of people.

5
Constructing Cosmopolitanism in Singapore: Financial Professionals

Lionel, 45

Lionel is Singaporean-Chinese and was educated entirely in Singapore. He is a private personal banker with a Scottish bank in Singapore. His job includes acquiring new accounts and wealth preservation and management for clients and their families. His first job was with a Singaporean bank, where he worked for three years before finding his interest in risk management. He moved into another local bank, where he worked as a risk analyst, assisting the management in balancing risk. After one and a half years, he moved onto the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS), where he was part of the committee on risk management. Lionel felt this move was strategic for him to "get a more macro view of risk management".

He found himself in a "career crisis" after two years working in MAS, and felt that he was "at a major turning point, a cross junction" where it could mean a lifelong career in risk management if he were to continue in the same field. He decided that he wanted to "make a career move where it would fit into who [he] would become six years from now". He then went into security banking with an American bank in Singapore "for a while" before joining the Scottish bank as a private banker, a step which he felt was "the next step up from normal retail banking". His current job requires him to travel abroad, particularly to Indonesia, where many of his clients reside. His business portfolio is made up of people from diverse ethnic and national backgrounds – Italians, Germans, Indians and Chinese – in various lines of work and with different family backgrounds. Lionel

feels that he got the job because he is "comfortable with people". He told me that even though the ability to bring in revenue was "95% of the job", success as a private banker also meant he had to be a "strong team player and have the type of personality – whether you are dynamic, resourceful, the types of businesses you can bring in".

Lionel's response suggests that success in financial work is complicated – job productivity formed a large part of it but the processes through which one achieves this productivity rate are compounded with personality traits that fit into corporate strategies; soft skills, if you will. He tells me that success in his business relies heavily on trust and credibility and that his customers will evaluate the "whole package: experience and appearance". Lionel feels the dynamism and the opportunities to travel in his line of work fit well with his personality because he "is someone who cannot really sit still . . . I am very comfortable in an environment where there is a lot of change". His main disadvantage, he notes, is his "not so mature appearance", so he feels he has to take extra effort in presenting himself to his clients in a way that reassures them that he still knows how to best manage their finances.

Elizabeth, 35

Elizabeth is a white, British senior office executive with a Swiss bank. Her job responsibilities include managing a team of eight people in all aspects of office processes. She left London in 1994 because she "got fed up with the place" where she was doing contract work in finance. She then travelled to Kuala Lumpur to join her father who was working there. While she was there, she pursued an interest in scuba diving and worked in Malaysia as a professional diving instructor for five and a half years. She returned to London in 1999, where she applied to a university in London. After being accepted, however, she decided to defer it because she felt that she "couldn't give up [her] salary and it would have cost too much of life and time". She worked for the Swiss bank in its London office. Upon hearing news that she might made redundant, she looked for work both in and outside of London. She went for an interview with the director of the bank's Singapore branch and decided to take the offer after some negotiation even though it meant taking a pay reduction. For her, the move to Singapore was more of a "life change", where she feels

she can experience "different cultures in South East Asia". She thinks that she was able to get the job because she had acquired skills and experience from her work in the London office but also because she was "tenacious, pushy and had a bit of balls to come here, being a risk taker". Her current work in Singapore requires her to travel to various offices around the world. In particular, she remembers her short-term work experience in the bank's New York office; she felt uncomfortable there because she felt the "sexual and racial discrimination there was really quite shockingly disgusting". She also felt that, in Singapore, her educational qualifications mattered less than her personality did, which helped her in fitting in and "winning the confidence of the management team and director in Singapore".

Similarly to Lionel, Elizabeth feels her professional success did not solely depend on her technical skills; her personality was important in the bank's decision to hire her. Even more so than Lionel, though, Elizabeth feels her successful employment had little to do with her educational background. Contrary to McDowell's findings about bankers in the City of London, the criteria determining an employee's perceived value appear to have shifted away from emphasizing private school education and a good university to the issue of embodying corporate fit (McDowell and Court, 1994).

As well as exploring people on the "margins" of cosmopolitanism, it remains important to examine the "centre". That is, as well as explaining the experiences of low-waged migrants in the Singaporean model of development, I also unpack the social relations embedded within spaces and groups most often considered "cosmopolitan". This chapter addresses how bodies are socially reproduced as different even amongst financial professionals, which continues to illustrate how global capitalism is lived by different people in very different ways through the division of labour in Singapore. It reinforces the argument that the neoliberal global economy is a volatile construct that reproduces class differences through relational processes. Before the empirical analysis of the reproduction of class, I will first contextualize my work by addressing some of the literature that sheds light on issues of the "doing" or performance of identities at work in new service economies.

A question central to this project has been directed at how certain people are constructed as more suitable for certain jobs than others in the neoliberal global economy in the context of Singapore's division

of labour. More specifically, in this chapter, I examine how and why relations of power and domination sustain associations of social identities in professional work in the financial sector of the new economy. Nigel Thrift notes that features of global capitalism, such as the growth of high-tech firms, the increasing importance of mobile and highly skilled talent, the rise of entrepreneurship and venture capital, have been branded as the "new economy" or "knowledge-based economy" (2000; 2001: 414). A financial organization's management body must situate itself so that it can set the mechanism for reproducing business culture and identity that will *embody* particular values of the new economy. Thrift identified the chief ways in which a management body tried to achieve this. Firstly, it became more diligent and comprehensive, a more spread out body – "do more, contribute more, help each other more" (2001: 418). Secondly, the major body must be passionate so as to engage others emotionally, not just in terms of technical skills. The third way to achieve success in the global economy is for the management body to become more adaptable. Bodies occupying jobs in the new economy have to be involved in continuous learning and work towards leading change – "be prepared for surprises" – and be "innovative and creative" (2000: 681; 2001). This learning has to be carried out in a shared community rather than as an individual. Finally, the management body has to be participatory to the degree that bureaucracy in the organization is persuasive rather than coercive and "goes with the flow" (2000; 2001: 419). These characteristics already set financial work markedly apart from construction and low-end service work.

These measures at the organizational level transform the notion of work in the new economy so that it has greater cultural intensity. At this point in the division of labour, the value of a financial employee is calibrated in highly different ways from a Bangladeshi worker or a Johorean commuter. This vogue for conducting financial work also changed the rate and nature of embodied social interactions (Schoenberger, 1997). To write off the new economy as simply a discourse is to gloss over discourse's materiality. This is because while the youthful and exuberant countenance of the new economy benefits many of its stakeholders, it can also further entrench unequal social relations that remain regressive.

This leads us to questioning how individual workers adapt or negotiate their other social identities (e.g. gender, race, ethnicity)

to fit into the participative and culturally intense nature of financial work. As Bourdieu argued, the possession of cultural capital by high-status employees is evidenced not only in their educational and professional credentials but also in the "embodied states, as modes of speech, accent, style, beauty and so forth" (1984: 243). Thus it would be more accurate to connect the presentation of the body, the individual and the organization in attempting to understand the dynamics of social segregation in everyday workplace interactions and, at a broader level, the division of labour at the cosmopolitan workplace.

While the theorization of class practices, social relations and how these can be traced all the way to the stylization of selfhood leads to the understanding that the body and self are fluid and changeable, this is not to say that the socially marked body at work is unencumbered by the wider structures of power that affect and reflect the organization of firms and deep-seated patterns of occupational segregation. Indeed, I hope it is thus far clear that working bodies are very much subjected to intense regulation, often inflicting greater harm onto some people than others. My data on work in the financial sector show that it is the construction of *selves* that is very much an enterprise inscribed by specific forms of power to the extent that this construction can be reinforced and inculcated across scales – the new economy, the organization, the occupation, the self. In her work on high-status financial professionals in the City of London, Linda McDowell asserts that the idea of gender performance is particularly helpful in understanding the construction and maintenance of gender identities and gendered power relations in the workplace (1994; 1997). While McDowell's work is largely based on gendered bodies and identities, the key points in her argument could also be applied to the other axes of selfhood, such as race, ethnicity and class.

Just like being female, being of a particular ethnicity is not so much located in biological difference as it is in a cultural (re)performance in which "natural-ness is constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex [or ethnicity] (McDowell, 1997: 164; 1999). The aim of this ongoing reproduction is the creation of a coherent identity. Reminiscent of Bourdieu's work on habitus, McDowell notes that, "through acts, gestures and clothes, people perform their identity that is manufactured, manifested and sustained through corporeal

signs and other discursive means" (McDowell, 1999: 55). I hope it is clear that the issue of identity performances and selfhood is crucial to understanding the linkages between the individual and social relations.

Performativity in the financial workplace is not limited to individuals in wealthy industrialized countries either. Beverly Mullings demonstrates in her analysis of female bank professionals in the Caribbean that, along with the new economy, the increase in the number of women in high positions does not necessarily challenge gender inequalities (2005). Instead, Mullings shows that gender regimes and different valuations of feminine work are embedded in everyday workplace practices to the extent that women are hired for the traditional feminine traits of being caring and nurturing. At the same time, women are also seen as being more diligent, focused and responsible, and feel pressured to perform to those identity expectations (2005: 18).

Intersecting class with other social identities

Class interests and identities can intersect and compete with gender, ethnic, language and national identities. In theoretically recognizing this, it is reasonable to argue that these identities could either hinder or enhance a person's access to the professional class identity. As mentioned earlier, all forms of capital are considered powerful components of class identities and practices in Bourdieu's framework. He did not, however, explicitly and systematically incorporate other capitals into his empirical analysis of social space, even though he did mention the importance of these in passing (Veenstra, 2005). The importance of gender, ethnicity, language and national identities in the manifestation and experience of workplace cultural distinction emerged through my empirical data. To the degree that workplace divisions are still relevant to class groupings, the fact that women occupy less physical space on the trading floor and Malay and Indian people are a rarity in the financial sector altogether, suggests that a gender and ethnic-blind class analysis for Singapore's financial professionals would not only be incomplete but also incorrect. My analysis in this chapter will illustrate the processes through which these forms of power are relevant to the delineation of social class groupings. In order to engage meaningfully in the theorization

of workplace culture in the financial sector, I argue that we must empirically explore the structural processes through which companies attempt to control access to and shape workplace culture as well as how employees themselves monitor their identity performance at work through everyday interactions with their peers.

I have organized my research findings into two sections. In the first, I explain the structural processes through which firms try to incorporate a "cosmopolitan" culture as their corporate strategy. We see that through the various stages of the recruitment processes those responsible for hiring personnel are careful to screen potential middle-level professionals not simply for technical capability and credentials but also, and perhaps more importantly, for a specific cultural capital that demonstrates to them an individual whose supposed habitus will be suitable for the firm's business culture. I assert that there are certain mandated elements of the individual's identity that are required for access to the professional classes – elements that are often constructed in terms of "cosmopolitanism". The careful framing of "cosmopolitanism" as a significant part of the desirable work culture enforced at the office can also be seen through the installation of different programmes and policies as well as the promotion criteria for workers. I will also illustrate how workers themselves create and maintain a particular sense of cosmopolitanism in their everyday workplace attitudes and practices. I argue that cosmopolitanism is more than a social identity and/or culturally open disposition. It is also a powerful filter that limits access to certain performative kinds of work in the financial sector. In the second part of the chapter I will show how normative and precarious the practices and attitudes of cosmopolitanism are. I will clarify how class continues to be reproduced through its intersections with race, ethnicity, nationality and gender at the diverse workplace.

Recruiting the cosmopolitan employee

> Part of it is not only qualifications but also your personality: how well you can fit into the corporate environment.
>
> (HR manager, Bank A)

Recruitment is a crucial element in the constitution and reproduction of organizational cultures. The recruitment process itself – in terms

of interviews, tests, assessment techniques and selection criteria – is embedded with particular understandings of what an ideal cosmopolitan employee should be. I investigate how the cosmopolitan work culture of financial institutions is reproduced in the recruitment process through two major factors: the pre-organizational cultural capital that new recruits bring with them when they join the banks and the nature of the selection process itself. From these two factors, we can see that the organization's perception of what constitutes a cosmopolitan individual is embedded within the interviews and other selection procedures. Aside from work and academic qualifications, the data also reveals that the cultural and social background of recruits plays a vital role throughout the selection process. By examining these issues, we can begin to understand how recruitment strategies not only create a corporate culture which is closely linked to organizational form but also provide a springboard for particular social norms and values that shape social relations within the workplace and perpetuate organizational strategies (Schoenberger, 1997). I draw upon my interviews conducted with an HR manager, Kaitlyn Brown, from Bank A, a foreign wholesale bank, and with Rosalie Chan, the director of the Asia-Pacific operations for XYZ HR group. I will also be referring to the various websites of the banks the respondents work for recruitment policies and programmes.

Firms are keen to promote their work environment as diverse and peopled with talented individuals. For example, the first two lines on Credit Suisse First Boston's website read,

> We're an extremely diverse business, with equally diverse needs in terms of skills and experience. Our diversity recruitment strategy is focused on "casting a wider net" as we continue to build a pipeline of exceptional talent.

The career webpage of the locally owned United Overseas Bank (UOB) says, "We believe in investing in the best people and providing an environment that encourages and rewards superior performance and enterprise". This initial observation already suggests that employees in the financial sector must be able to deliver on job productivity in a dynamic and diverse environment. The cultural nature of financial work is revealed further down the website of Barclays Bank, where there is a list of values prescribed to employees that would "make

Barclays a great place to work". These are: seeing the world through our customer's eyes, great leadership and teamwork, delivering on our promises, high performance and great behaviours driving exceptional rewards and respect, trust and integrity. It was also stated, "our values – or guiding principles – are the glue that binds our organization together and shape everything we do" (Barclays Bank homepage[1]). These attributes are not only addressing the technical skills of the desired Barclays worker but also suggest that a type of social interaction is expected so that "teamwork" can flourish and "respect and trust" can be established. Indeed, from this quote, the corporate ends of this strategy are understood as achievable only if these values are upheld in their entirety.

UOB also asserts, "An employee of UOB is expected to perform according to the four Core Values of the Group, namely, Integrity, Teamwork, Trust & Respect, and Performance Excellence". There are also captions following each "Core Value", denoting what each of them entailed in work performance. For example, under the mandate for "Teamwork", it is stated that "We work as a team in which everyone, even the most brilliant, is united to reach our personal and corporate goals through co-operation and mutual loyalty" (UOB website).[2]

These are attempts to create a set of standards not only to show what recruiters look out for but also to guide social and professional interactions within the bank. These "standards" tell us less about the actual process of recruitment than flagging the types of people they are keen to hire. For example, the corporate values of UOB do not address the technical skills expected of an employee, except for "performance excellence". From these corporate discourses of ideal Barclays and UOB employees, we can start to understand the importance of presentation of self and social interaction at work. Such encouragement for team-building is part of a series of practices stressing the increased productivity of business and knowledge transfer through active participation in heightened practices of interaction (Thrift, 2000).

To enable this process of interactivity among workers of diverse backgrounds, however, individual bodies must be addressed. A closer observation reveals that fitting into the firm's overall strategy is just as important as job productivity and skill delivery – if not more so. Further down the Barclays' website, for instance, it is stated, without

elaboration, under "What We Look For" on its career page, that "there are certain qualities that mark our Barclays people straightaway". This suggests that to become an employee of Barclays, one must be clearly able to fit into the corporate culture and image. This was further revealed in my interview with Kaitlyn, who said that Bank A hires people who "know they are working with a team to help get the job done" and that the ideal employee at the firm would be a "strong team player" because "it is so important to have that to be successful here". Rosalie also says, "I would still go through the interviews of what you want to do, rather than what I want you to do. Then I would try to see if your values, your expectations would be in line with what I am looking for". This evidence is in line with Schoenberger's argument, that "cultures are necessarily integrative and act to produce stability and consistence in the firm" (1997: 117).

Thus, identity construction, social interaction and work success are interconnected to the extent that the professional self must be narrated in ways that are consistent with the organization's identity in order to gain membership into the firm. The people who gain entry into this sector must demonstrate that they are symbolically fitting in with the corporation's culture. Indeed, this suggests that there is a pre-supposed cultural context of the firm and it is within the firm's objectives to hire people who can reproduce and/or enhance that culture. As Schoenberger argues, the relationship between culture and strategy is largely instrumental (1997).

The attempt to institutionalize "diversity" at work also comes through in the ways in which different peoples are constructed as suitable for different work niches and cultures in the bank itself. Barclays, for instance, states,

> our culture varies between areas – the atmosphere on a trading floor, for instance, is quite different to that of a retail bank. The advantage of these differences is that they allow us to attract people with all kinds of skills and ambitions and offer many different career paths.[3]

While this suggests an institutionalized recognition of difference – different skills in different people – it also serves to limit people's mobility into different work areas by constructing a type of "suitability" for particular cultural geographies at the firm.

While talking to Rosalie, she revealed that, during the first interview for a middle to upper level management position in a bank,

> as much as 30% [of the decision-making] will go into how you fit into the corporate image, 30% goes to the impression, another 30% will be how you talk, your gestures, your posture, your dressing. Less than 10% is your qualifications. I don't stress so much on the qualifications because if you get to this stage, chances are those things are already taken for granted.

Technical skills are hence are not the prime factor in securing employment at this stage of the recruitment. Aside from being able to fit into corporate aspirations, there is also a strong performative element to the recruiters' assessment of the interviewee. Rosalie elaborated,

> If I were to short-list ten people now . . . you look at the person once they walk in through the door, confident and professionally dressed, hair nicely done up, little to no makeup for girls, you form an impression. Chunky jewellery might be ok for the advertising industry but banks deal with professionality and hence we are more knowledge-based and conservative so you cannot have somebody giving off the impression that you are a young rocker, punk. You want somebody out there who exudes professionalism and addresses the values of a bank!

An individual's dress at the interview is therefore already a signifier of his or her perceived "fit" into the firm's corporate culture. The fashioning of an individual's identity and assessment of their presentation begins once the person enters the interview room to the extent that assumptions are made about their prior identity assemblage, which then leads the interviewer to make assumptions about their potential future work performance. The narration of the self via dressing is hence directly connected to the individual's perceived ability to manage tasks successfully in the financial industry, where initial approval is based on the individual's ability to convey "conservatism" and "knowledge" through his or her dress during recruitment. Assuming the candidate has already met the academic

criteria, the superficial presentation of identity during the interview itself could filter his or her access to the professional classes. The final sentence in the quote also reinforces the importance placed on how the employee should be representing and embodying the cumulative shared learning experiences of the firm. This strategy of the firm, thus, indicates a type of work that requires a set of values in which product quality is very important, as opposed to values which may have, in the past, emphasized quantity of output (Schoenberger, 1997: 117). Part of the cultural work of the firm then, is to make actual practices (choosing whom to recruit) appear to be consistent with the announced values (in the case of Bank A, the recruit must be a "team player"; at Barclays it is the "recognition of difference") (Schoenberger, 1997: 129).

Candidates who make it to the later parts of the recruitment process are assessed on the increasingly intangible, "soft" qualities that allude to a certain type of cultural capital. Rosalie pointed out,

> If there is a Japanese firm in Singapore, most of the clients would be Japanese . . . you would most likely have a Japanese national, not because the Singaporean is not capable but because the Singaporean may not have had the exposure to the Japanese culture, especially if you are a service provider.

A client advisor assistant at a Scottish bank, Irene, also noted,

> [My company] definitely tries to recruit according to your familiarity. I mean if you're European, they will probably put you at the European desk. If you are Indonesian, you'll be at the Indo[nesian] desk. Like me – I speak Bahasa Indonesia and the clients' reactions will usually be like, "oh you speak Bahasa! So much easier!". It's natural, right?

From these two quotes, there appears to be a pragmatic and strategic side to hiring people with particular social backgrounds. The decision to employ an individual, thus, is based partly on the clientele and partly on achieving efficient service delivery. From the point of view of the firm, pre-organizational cultural capital and access to social networks are important because they fulfil wider corporate objectives.

Socializing cosmopolitans into corporate culture

Once hired, newly recruited employees usually go through orientation programmes, where they will be introduced to particular policies and programmes that address the values and strategies of the firm. This section will describe the programmes that are meant to align new recruits with the corporation's values and then draw upon the respondents' actual experiences with these programmes, thereby shedding light on how far these initiatives are effectively grounded in actual workplace practices.

On the website for Credit-Suisse, they indicate their goal:

> to achieve an inclusive workplace where everyone is treated with dignity and respect and where each individual has the opportunity to advance and succeed. Individuals of different genders, races, ages, religions, nationalities, ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations and disabilities are thus brought together to create a world-class team of financial services professionals.[4]

There are also annual awards given out by external agencies such as the "Singapore Family Friendly Employer Award" and the "Corporate Equality Index for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Employees" awarded by the Human Rights Campaign. These initiatives signify the organization's attempt to foster an inclusive work culture in a diverse, multicultural environment; by reaching out to external groups for recognition of its global, cosmopolitan image, it attempts to extend this beyond just the staff within the company.

There are also attempts to encourage networking among people of diverse backgrounds at work. Citibank,[5] for instance, has launched a programme called the "Employee Network" as "part of [their] strong commitment to diversity and inclusion". This programme aims to "provide members with an opportunity to share common experiences and build awareness of diverse cultures and communities within the company". To do so, there are talks by guest speakers, panel discussions that promote growth and development for the company and also mentoring programmes for new recruits. Cultural facilitation in the firm is hence encouraged via inter-personal engagement among staff and through the promotion of external recognition.

There are also regular internal reviews in some institutions; Kaitlyn revealed to me that her company performed them at six month intervals. During these reviews, employees literally get graded – they are awarded A, B or C – based on their job performance and reputation. According to her, employees have to get at least two As to qualify for a promotion after a review. I would argue that these reviews are part of the corporation's strategies to maintain a standard of work performance and communication within the institution. It is also possible to argue that employees' attitudes and socializing patterns are motivated by this pragmatic knowledge.

The research, however, demonstrated a more complex issue of cultural order at work than that mandated by the organization. Kaitlyn put it to me blatantly,

> There isn't a very, very good mix at work . . . you would find there are cliques like the Taiwanese people would always eat out together and in the past, there have been programmes at work that try to organize things [in Bank A] to try to bring people closer together, to try to get them interacting but I think it is not something that they are doing so much of recently.

Analysing her response sheds light on two things: interaction at the multicultural workplace is divided by social identities, in this case, national identity in particular; and the actual measures to maintain an inclusive work environment are not as comprehensive or effective as the information on the websites initially suggested. All of the respondents, with the exception of two, told me that they have never participated in any programmes geared towards promoting diversity and inclusion at work.

As Kenny, an operations analyst at an American investment company, told me,

> I do find racial differences at work – it doesn't even have to be outrightly violent. A lot of times, people just hang out with people like themselves – the Chinese hang out with the Chinese and the Caucasians are kind of hippie, you know . . . this is more obvious over lunch, sometimes over drinks, even just talking in the workplace. Sometimes when you go to the pantry, you'll see the

> Indians talking at one table and the Chinese at another table and the Hong Kong guys at another table.

Such responses suggest there continue to be contradictions and tensions among financial professionals of different social groups. Organizational programmes are both limited in themselves and also challenged by the inertia of social divisions among employees. I would argue that the organization's attempts to create a cohesive cosmopolitan identity through discourses and policies perpetuate difference and "other-ness" at work. It would not be too far-fetched to also argue that this so-called cosmopolitan identity maintains its elite status by articulating difference. These differences among groups at work create the basis for struggles and negotiation, the outcome of which will determine the kinds of change that are chosen or resisted. Indeed, such organizational measures have the power to construct the legitimate workplace culture, which in turn, allows certain individuals of particular identities into the professional classes while excluding others. In order to understand how identity politics intersect with a person's employability and career mobility, we need to examine the various processes of these struggles and negotiations that are embedded in everyday work practices.

The objective in this chapter so far has been to understand the creation of a cosmopolitan, diverse culture in financial institutions at the organizational scale. From examining the recruitment process, we can already see that there is a distinctive screening not only for people with suitable technical skills, but, and I would argue more importantly, for people who exhibit an identity that could fit in well with the professional image of the firm that is constituted by a selected criterion of cultural and social understanding that demonstrates a brand of globally situated financial knowledge. Interestingly, people who have never had long-term experience abroad can still be selected to work in the organization. This is possible because of their ability to construct and present a self that coheres with corporate fit.

Performing cosmopolitanism

Transnational financial professionals create and maintain a professional cosmopolitan identity via everyday workplace practices and attitudes. I explore in some detail how there is a strategic alignment

of an individual's identity with corporate culture: we see how work, as a cultural process, is necessarily social to the extent that responsibilities are allocated and contested within a specific identity politics and how this process is justified, as well as who is part of the corporate community and who is excluded. The purpose here is to demonstrate how the institutionalization of a particular form of "cosmopolitan" workplace culture, as explored in the previous chapter, is interpreted "on the ground" by people who have gained access to the financial workplace. I will show how middle-class employees strategically shape their professional relationship with one another, both through their dispositions and through performances valued as "corporate fit".

The rhetoric of diversity for a dynamic and cosmopolitan workplace seems well accepted by many financial elites, both Singaporean and transnational. As Lionel, a 31-year-old Singaporean-Chinese male, put it:

> If you put a diverse group of people together, the workplace is more dynamic because they are very . . . they are not in a strait jacket thinking . . . different people do different things and different holidays . . . people also talk about different things and when you come into contact with this a lot, you naturally tend to see things from a different angle, you see things more holistically . . . I think it is more on how you present yourself than the colour of your skin.

The general acceptance of a multicultural and diverse work environment also seems to be a strategic way of negotiating success in the workplace. There appears to be more emphasis on fitting into corporate culture than into gender, ethnic or class identities. As Gwen, a 43-year-old British-Indian female, and Jamie, a 35-year-old white British man, said,

> Gwen: I think one of the most important things about anybody who is offered a position is the way you think that person would fit in to the group, to the corporate image . . . and I think that my desire to make my team a strong team is to focus on having a common objective and goal and working with one another.

> Jamie: If you're in an environment that is very mixed, you're socializing with the locals, if your clients inevitably are going to be locals, you will have a greater chance of being able to understand them or deal with them without upsetting them which is really important in business.

It appears that the skill of opportunist networking in the context of the cosmopolitan workplace can be mastered over time. In other words, the cultural capital of directing one's identity in the workplace can be accumulated, so we cannot understand cosmopolitan identity by separating social networking and pragmatism. These values of the dominant culture, as Gwen describes above, "must be internalized so that people have a sense of the rightness of things and also of their rights in the context of the culture but without needing to appeal explicitly to that culture for validation" (Schoenberger, 1997: 129). As Chaandra, a 25-year-old Indian eloquently put it,

> It's a whole game, that's what it really is . . . a game of how to deal with different types of people and how to communicate with them. And, more importantly, how to get them to communicate with you. Nothing in life is free, right? But at the same time, you want to be able to get as much information as possible from as many sources by putting in the least amount of effort . . . I know how to best position myself and I know how to disseminate information that I am giving or getting for maximum benefit. It is not gossip. It's a question of knowing what's happening when and how to take advantage of it.

From Chaandra's perspective, then, the cultural capital of professional identity at work comes with certain rules, regulations and strategies: participants (that is, fellow employees) can navigate by learning the "tricks of the trade" of social skills, which includes being able to overlook, or at least seemingly work around, ethnicities, nationalities and genders. Once an individual has the cultural capital to do so, he or she will have access to an information circuit where they are able to receive and perpetuate information about work. This is a power-laden position because it affects who gets what information and, hence, who will eventually be able to capitalize

on the knowledge so that they are in a better position to access the dominant strategy at work. Chaandra elaborated,

> This guy was brought over from India and when he wanted to resign, he didn't want to tell anybody on his team. He told me. No reason why he should – quite a senior guy. But because of the relationship I had with him, he told me. I met him for lunch and while I met him for lunch, I might as well meet his team of people so I called some of them . . . so I sort of got the network going by rounding up this finance person and this IT person as well. I like to serve the role of the connector . . . so I had coffee with them for 20 minutes before I rushed to lunch with the guy I was meeting. And then I'd set up another from the department of finance for coffee afterwards. I received a lot of knowledge of what's going on in the company because they were all willing to talk to me, be open to me.

While cosmopolitanism may appear to be inclusive of gender, ethnic and national groups, it continues to be a powerful sorting tool that places people in different social and professional positions along the power-knowledge spectrum at work, depending on their networks. Moreover, social interactions carried out through opportunist networking seem as important as those in more formalized networking during office meetings and seminars, as illustrated in the above quote. As Beaverstock argues, internal networking within the firm is one of the most important processes for facilitating knowledge transfer and accumulating specific firm intelligence (2005). It appears then that the ability to craft a cosmopolitan attitude and identity is one that classifies people in the financial sector.

Classifying cosmopolitan consumption

Middle-level financial workers also share common aspirational consumption habits that become tangible markers and symbols of belonging to a coherent professional class, which may not appear at first glance to be associated with any particular gender, ethnicity or nationality. Ken, a 27-year-old Singaporean Eurasian told me,

> They all like to have Mont Blanc pens, expensive Mont Blanc pens – not the $200–$300 kind. I am talking about the $1000+ pens! They also wear Ferragamo shoes and all that . . . for me personally, I buy cheap shoes, but they have to look expensive because I think if you want to be successful, you have to dress like you are already "one of the bosses". Sometimes when we are waiting for a cab after a meeting and they ask, I just say "yah, this is Zegna" – actually its not! I met this MD of a large company and I happened to wear my Hugo Boss tie for that meeting – usually for big meetings, we wear the expensive ties – and he was telling me he has a big collection of Boss ties. I told him I collect Rennie Schegahl ties and he said "oh those are very nice, even though they are a bit expensive . . . " And I was laughing inside because Rennie Schegahl ties cost $2.50 each and I do have a bunch hanging by the door. So ties, I don't really pay attention to because I know it's very hard to tell if they are expensive or cheap . . . but you still feel you need to maintain a certain image . . . So I will continue wearing my expensive-looking-but-cheap shoes.

Shelley, a 24-year-old Singaporean-Chinese client advisor assistant, said,

> There are also back-office people who want to dress like front-office people – they wear cuff-linked shirts everyday. They make sure not a single strand of hair is out of place, etcetera. Those people who are trying to impress people for whatever reason will dress like that . . . they want to give people a sense of "wow". It's a feel-good thing for them. But after you talk to them for a while, you know they are not the front-office type.

The bourgeois cosmopolitan image is one that clearly requires active maintenance and performance. These goods become associated with a particular well-to-do identity at work: that of the professional cosmopolitan. While these goods could be "read" as simply bourgeois and not necessarily cosmopolitan, I would argue that, in this context, they do signify a sort of world-class savvy in consumption. Indeed, adorning the body with these global brands signifies that the owner is a person who has the cultural and economic means to embody cosmopolitanism. In other words, to be decorated with these material

assets, the individual is also dressing himself or herself to fit a specific image and to play a certain role in the financial workplace. Appearance can be passed off as the signifier of conduct: if one can "carry it off", to look is *to be*. Indeed, Shelley's quote suggests that appearing to be is different from appearing as – there is a fine line between embodying and displaying dispositions. The representation of one's own body is from the outset built up from one's subjective image and bodily hexis and is thus obtained by "applying a social system of classification based on the same principle as the social products to which it is applied" (Bourdieu, 1984: 193). Further, as Shelley told me,

> I think you can tell which lady is from a foreign bank and which lady is from a local bank. Just look at their bags. The foreign bank lady will carry a branded bag – maybe Prada? – and the local bank girl will carry just a normal brand, but then, she will also be prettier than the girl who works in the foreign bank.

Indeed, the logic of social heredity sometimes endows those "least endowed" (i.e. the "local bank girl") with the "rarest bodily properties, such as beauty, and conversely, sometimes denies the 'high and mighty' the bodily attributes of their position, such as height or beauty" (Bourdieu, 1984: 193). Within this universe of classed bodies then, one can map out the reproductive logic of social structure. Bodily properties, such as beauty and manner of speech, are perceived through the social system of classification. Prevailing wisdom tends to rank and contrast the properties among the dominant and the dominated where one's distance from the top (i.e. being in a high-ranking position, working in a foreign bank or being in a front-line job) can either be compensated through one's soft knowledge of the game (e.g. Ken's choices of ties and shoes) or one's groundedness in natural expression (e.g. beauty). Further, this natural expression can also betray one's distance from the top, despite consumption taste – such as Shelley's remark that a person's speech can give away their actual job position. As Bourdieu argues, the body is a social product, the only tangible manifestation of the person (Bourdieu, 1986; Skeggs, 1997: 102). The sign-bearing, sign-wearing body is also both a producer of and produced through signs which can physically mark an individual's class bearing. In this sense, it is possible to argue that gender subjectivities require a particular coded display of class:

consumption choices, physical appearance and, perhaps most salient of all, disposition, which not only locate one's distance from what is cosmopolitan but also enable others to read one's position within this division of labour (Skeggs, 1997). Class identity within the financial sector is hence based on a form of exclusion – one which is carefully calculated according to individuals' attitudes and behaviour, and which is shaped vis-à-vis, but not limited to, a person's technical skills.

Taste of necessity versus taste of luxury

Bourdieu argues that the basic opposition between the tastes of luxury and the tastes of necessity is specified in as many oppositions as there are different ways of expressing one's distinction vis-à-vis the working class and its primary needs (1984: 183). This, he argues, amounts to the "different powers whereby necessity can be kept at a distance" (1984: 184).

As Calvin, a 28-year-old Singaporean-Chinese investor, told me,

> I have always liked beers so I drink more in bars after I started this job. I also picked up whisky but I don't think that has anything to do with my job. I don't know if it's really about the new salary. Maybe I started spending more on guitars now that I am earning my own income compared to when I was a student because most of my money is now disposable. I just buy a lot of guitars. I've also started looking at the stock market but I guess that's normal for everyone. I suppose I still budget – I don't spend every single cent I make although I know people who do. But it is not like I keep such a close eye on every dollar I make.

This quote illustrates an economy of practices that is subtly yet systematically different from the Bangladeshis and Johorean commuter workers. The disappearance of economic constraints ("I don't think its because of the new salary"; "its not like I keep a close eye on every dollar I make") is accompanied by a change in social tastes – in Calvin's case, towards whisky and an interest in the stock market. It is not so much a fundamental change towards rising above and beyond the constraints of economic resources anymore. Rather, it is the relaxation or distancing of his constraints as he earns a middle-class wage which allows him to realize his consumption aspirations. Calvin's

attitude and practices illustrated here also tie in with Bourdieu's argument regarding habitus. It is precisely because of his existing material conditions as a middle-class financial worker that he is able to pursue certain goals or practices. This is suggested by the regularity of his interest in the stock market, without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the tools needed to attain them, as well as the fact that his interest exists without the deliberate orchestration of another actor (Bourdieu, 1977).

Reproducing racialized identities

As the notion of a cosmopolitan identity becomes perpetuated through and embedded within everyday workplace practices, it can lead to an increasing notion that a sense of self can be imagined as transcending ethnicity, nationality and gender. Indeed, there is the sense that people can be mobilized beyond their various social identifiers. Chaandra said,

> I don't rely on my ethnicity cos that's what a lot of these people who have these problems tend to do – they rely on their ethnicity: "I am Indian, therefore I treat you this way". I don't have any of these problems. I forget sometimes that I am Indian even which is an amazing, amazing thing.

A closer look, however, suggests that racialized relations take on a different dynamic from gender and sexuality in terms of accessing financial work. For most of the respondents, their colleagues were mainly Chinese. All of them had at least three or four foreigners as colleagues, while, as one of the respondents pointed out, "there are literally one or two Indians in the workplace and no Malays". Not only does this ethnic composition fail to correspond with Singapore's racial makeup, the responses I recorded also suggested more calculated ways, both practically and discursively, of excluding these ethnic groups in the workplace. A Singaporean Indian, Jayakumar, who is in his 30s, told me,

> The Malays . . . I hardly see them. Because there is really one of them at night and the other one in the day! Very few of them. So you hardly notice they are there. I had Malay friends who were

> just turned away like that. It's quite bad *lah*. I also know a lot of Indians and Malays who have told me it's damn hard. I think you see mostly Chinese because of the education levels? If you go to the mailing room, it's all Malays! Maybe it's their culture? They are the ones who sort and deliver the mail. Out of the five people who sort mail, four are Malays. Maybe it is what they want out of their lives?

The invisibility of Malay persons at work highlights some of the ethnic inequalities in gaining access to the global financial workplace. Racial identity remains a salient filter that excludes particular groups of people from the professional classes in spite of the organization's supposed values of diversity and inclusion. Ken said,

> The ethnic breakdown in my office is very strange . . . Mostly Chinese . . . I recommended this guy, who had almost ten years of cash management experience . . . he wasn't asking for a lot of money, he can do sales, project implementation, can trade, will hit the ground running and roll out projects straight away. But they didn't hire him, I felt, because he was Indian. They don't want Malays as well.

Gwen, a British-Indian in her 40s, also talked on this theme:

> I found it quite interesting because the people in HR didn't realize I was of Indian origin since my name was Nelson and maybe I looked Latino or South American. We were hiring and they were going through the CVs . . . and every time an Indian CV came through, they threw it into the bin without even looking at it.

It appears that the inequalities in racialized relations are a lot more blatant than with gender. An Indian person encounters a lot more difficulties in accessing the financial workforce and, consequently, the financial professional identity in Singapore; with gender and sexuality, there are more ways available to employees who can negotiate their performance of it to intersect in strategic ways with their professional identity and job performance. Not only is this a significant point of deviance from official workplace policy, but, as

mentioned in Chapter 2, it also contradicts Singapore's ethnic policies at large where racial discrimination in hiring is illegal, especially since "Indian" is one of the state's four official races.

Aside from these blatant measures in keeping out particular racial groups, racial inequality between groups is also seen as normal. As Kelvin and Shelley told me,

> Kelvin: I would say our racial breakdown is pretty much Chinese. One is Malay and the other is Eurasian. But that's because we are predominantly dealing with Chinese people . . . Of course when you work with the whole department, you get to know only certain people.
>
> Shelly: I wouldn't say there is any racial discrimination. Although sometimes I suppose I find the Swiss to be quite impolite. Like they speak in German or Italian when there are Chinese people around. There was once a promotion of an Indonesian Chinese lady to a high management level. Then a lot of the higher ranking Swiss men were not very happy having a female taking over their roles. They were gossiping in German in front of her and the head of Singapore told them off and said "I think you'd better speak in English to be fair to everyone" . . . The Swiss think they are all superior to us and that's why they were really unhappy when someone not like them was promoted.

These discourses that render the current racialized makeup as normal are one of the subtle practices and salient ways through which racial power imbalances are maintained in a multicultural workplace. While it is valid that workers are not likely to know everyone who works at the office, it is also important to note that these quotes reflect some of the processes that produce and reproduce this imbalance so that it appears normal and a mundane part of the work experience.

Exclusions of particular racial groups are also discursively processed in the day-to-day language in the workplace and these manifest frequently in office humour, as illustrated by Ken and Chaandra,

> Ken: The advantage is I like to crack a lot of "Maht"[6] jokes and Indian jokes so I don't really have to look around before I crack

> those jokes and I am not afraid they would reach or hurt that person who is a Malay and it comes back to me, because they are all Chinese and they all get the joke!
>
> Chaandra: I wouldn't call them racist jokes. I've had jokes made to and about me! I come right back with "you English sod!" and they're cool with it! It's fine! It's not a problem. Very relaxed, very open. There are some Jewish jokes too.

While these jokes were presented as not openly intended to harm or be malicious to certain groups of people, the very fact that people make these jokes suggests that there is an undercurrent of racial politics in workplace culture that employees have picked up enough of to share in a humorous way. This everyday, taken-for-granted nature of office humour further entrenches racialized power imbalances. Humour is therefore a subtle, deeply embedded way of supporting the internal status quo in the form of such imbalances between particular groups within the workplace. The colour bar is reproduced through people's participation in it via office humour, which can also cause feelings of frustration for some people. Jayakumar revealed,

> I used to have this one Chinese staff under me. She will pass stupid remarks like "eh you so black ah, like black out like that" – this kind of thing *lah*, so *wah lao*,[7] I also *du lan*[8] her . . . But I think they cannot everything come out[9] because I speak Mandarin [laughs]. It's very hard *lah*, if your manager can still poke fun at your colour – I've been through that. You cannot have people who discriminate like that.

Simply recognizing the presence of power imbalance in the workplace is important, yet not quite sufficient. It must be recognized that there are both overt and subtle ways in which work practices and discourses, over time, produce and re-produce specific racialized dynamics that express alliance, domination and subordination. Jayakumar has been working in Singapore's financial sector for more than ten years. He has faced discrimination, but he stayed on, he said, to "prove that he could make it". This suggests that ethnic tension is salient – it is not quite enough to push him to leave, but it is still present in his daily work experience so much so that it intersects with his professional self-identity. Jayakumar's ability to speak Mandarin

has enabled him to negotiate his racialized identity to cope with the discrimination that confronts him.

For Ken, his Eurasian identity sets him apart from the Chinese majority of the bank's employees but his ability to speak Chinese, like Jayakumar, protects him from blatant discrimination. His physical appearance also means that he could pass as a Caucasian person – a conscious identity negotiation which places him at the front-line of many professional interactions both externally and internally. He said,

> I am a poster-boy. I literally mean the poster boy! We have this employee survey thing and I am on the poster! So whenever we have any meetings or seminars, I am the one there! When they give out the pamphlets to invite the people, my name is always there, with me in the background. The speakers are usually invited from elsewhere, like we have this speaker from XYZ company and from Bank B, I was the speaker within.

Ken's quote contributes to understanding both local workplace identity politics and, at a broader level, cosmopolitanism in Singapore. While he is a racial minority at the office and does face certain pressures because of it (having to handle the difficult accounts, for example), his identity is also engaged as the face of the corporation's image. His visibility as a "poster boy" within and outside of workplace boundaries is based upon his ethnicity. Ken is visible not because he represents the dominant race of his workplace but because his ambiguous racial identity is believed to set his firm apart from other local banks. This not only suggests the shifting nature of his identity according to work contexts, but is also symptomatic of the cosmopolitan culture: it is more available to those who look more Caucasian, hence, cosmopolitanism in the context of the financial workplace in Singapore is more accessible to those with particular ethnic appearances than others.

A matter of course: The "natural" attributes of being a woman

Gender is one of the key ways in which "cosmopolitan identity" remains exclusive – through the construction and/or performance of difference via gender. In short, gender is a way in which "otherness"

is created and maintained in the workplace. On the one hand, gender inequality in the workplace does not appear as crude in the Singaporean workplace as it does in McDowell's study of financial workers in the City of London (McDowell, 1997). As Andrew, a white Scottish man in this 40s, told me, "HR is very, very strong these days" in trying to prevent overt gender discrimination and outright derogatory comments at work. On the other hand, however, there continues to be a gendered interpretation of the rationales for identity negotiations and task assignments at work.

Similarly to McDowell's findings, I have found that the embodiment of "natural" gendered attributes is often used as a rationalization for women's work positions (1994; 1997). With reference to the quotes below, it can be argued that a woman's position in a bank and, at a larger scale, across the financial sector, is "naturalized" by notions of female attributes. Justin, a 27-year-old Singaporean Chinese man said,

> for women, like personal assistants, secretary, accounts, payables and receivables . . . work that requires for you to be more meticulous and patient.

From the above quote, it can be understood that women are perceived as more suitable for some work than others not because they may have technical qualifications that render them more capable as a secretary, but because their gender identity ties them to particular attributes – such as paying attention to detail and patience – that are constructed as natural. Kelvin said,

> I work in a private bank and private banks tend to hire more ladies . . . probably 60% women . . . it's just the way it is, the front end. You look at all the private banks, chances are they are all women . . . because you are selling a product, people tend to feel more comfortable talking to a female than a man.

Kelvin is expressing what some of the other respondents alluded to – the distribution of women across the financial sector is rationalized by their perceived identity as women. Women are seen as more suitable for the sales line because the nature of the woman in the bank is constructed as befitting the nature of the sales job. Face-to-face

interactions with clients, who are almost always male, are considered to be more productive with a female salesperson to the extent that being female is part of the sales job norm.

Interestingly, Gwen, who is the director for the Asia-Pacific eCommerce platform in an English bank, also asserted a similar view:

> I think a male can be too testosterone-heavy . . . a woman would probably have a softer style, you know, bringing people together, building consensus and I think that sort of nurturing, natural characteristic works well.

This suggests that this construction of the female self is recognized not only by the men at work, but the "high-flying" woman in the bank can also see the "natural" aspects of being a woman as not only normal, but advantageous as well. In Gwen's example, by emphasizing the imbalanced working styles of men and women, there can be a consensual balance in decision making during work.

These attributes can affect the position of women in the bank's hierarchy in very concrete ways that are often passed off as a matter of course. Keith said,

> The women who are not in senior positions are having babies. They are taking a lot of leave, because of their babies. Sometimes they come to work and their son is giving trouble at school, they have to run off. Other than that, they are taking leave before they give birth and after they give birth, they take leave for confinement and then they tend to fall sick after that and they take (medical leave) for another few months . . . the women who are in higher positions, you can see they have a dedication there.

Keith's response was also echoed by other respondents. Women's status in the banks is sometimes explained as a pragmatic decision: it is not as efficient to hire a woman for a senior position simply because she may have "womanly duties" that could interfere with her job productivity, such as childbirth and taking care of her children. This notion was reinforced by the contrasting rationale for favouring men in senior positions. As Keith elaborated:

> because when you put a man, especially at a high position, you know this guy is probably not going to disappear for three to four months at a stretch because he got pregnant. So it's for a very practical reason.

The gender division of labour in the workplace is also closely tied to the supposed family-oriented characteristics that women are expected to have. As Chaandra illustrated:

> On the trade floor itself, you probably have 90% men and 10% women split. And that too is a preference. You don't see many women willing to work in such an environment because it does mean you have to give up a lot of your social life and family life. It's not uncommon, let me just say… it's all part of the job. So [people who work on the trading floor] have chosen the job over the family.

Types of femininities

This section focuses on the negotiation processes of the female body and dispositions. The analysis demonstrates that the female self is not a singular, homogenous construction but rather, one that varies among different people. Gender is also spatialized unevenly across the workplace where femininity is deployed and constructed differently in different areas at work. I illustrate how different femininities are presented at work. Diversity in the workplace is embedded with different presentations of female subjectivity, which drive the reproduction of varied sets of gendered norms and acceptable behaviour. A woman's body type, choice of dress and overall disposition can locate her in a particular social position at work, yet this is also dependent on her professional status. In spite of notions of "inclusion", there continues to be social differentiation to the extent that some gendered bodies are more suitable for certain types of work over others. The conversations and interviews I conducted also shows that there continues to be fine-tuned gender-based identity negotiation embedded within everyday discourses and humour at work.

All of my respondents worked in institutions where the trading floor is male-dominated. The few women who do work in trading

generally appear to perform the role of tough, immaculate females. Tian Ci, a Singaporean-Chinese IT executive in his late 20s told me,

> You'd be surprised – some traders are aunties! Outside of work, you would think they are just some *huang lian po*.[10] But they are really tough in the office. You would think that she is just a mother if you saw her outside! When you see her on the trading floor, you'd really be scratching your head, thinking how she got there.

This aggressive behaviour was noted amongst respondents who interact with female traders. It is highly likely that women assemble their identities with traits that are often associated with men because feminine bodies are considered unsuitable for the trading floor. Women who are seen as aggressive at work may challenge the idea of females who are nurturing and consensual, hence creating the notion of a diverse work environment. In doing so, however, the construction of their work identities continues to produce gendered notions of what it means to be successful at work. This construction of the aggressive female could then be an attempt to show that just as she can take on masculine characteristics, so too can she perform the job, hence fit into corporate aspirations, as well as a man can, if not better. Chaandra said,

> The women on the trade floor are a lot more confident than those in the back office. They don't take nonsense from nobody. Very hard women. They do tend to dress up more and they generally got the Don't Mess With Me attitude. It's hard to say in a multicultural environment but Hot is Hot! Male counterparts dress well on the trade floor. Women on the trade floor? They dress perfect. Their dress sense is a big factor – no doubt about it, they dress to impress. Except for a few, but that's because they don't have the best body type in which case they don't give a damn. For women, esp. You've got to look good. Unless you are really THAT good and there are very few of those. Those women don't take nonsense from nobody!

Gendered identities are also reconstructed through office humour. As Tian Ci elaborated:

> I think women would feel okay at my workplace even though it is mostly males. Back office girls are also usually not as well-kept or as pretty as front office. There are some . . . How do I say . . . some lower-educated people who do not have a false front when they speak to anybody. There was this time when I was sitting beside the printer and this Japanese lady happened to walk by to collect something. There is this typical Singaporean *Ah Beng* who has many years of experience. He has a loud R&B song for his cellphone ringtone, speaks in Hokkien and scolds vulgarities like nobody's business. So he turned around and called the lady's name. He then shouted out to everyday, "Actually you look quite pretty from the back". And then I started laughing because I knew what he was going to say next. And then the lady just ignored him at first and then he blurted out, "that's because they cannot see your face!". She just smiled – that's the back office girl for you. I guess once you get used to how they speak, you know he is not being malicious. He is just trying to lighten up the mood in the office at the expense of her of course – everyone calls her *Dua Bui*.[11] Cannot say that to a trader!

Female presence in financial work is marked in several ways. On the trading floor it is marked by two extremes: women are either immaculately dressed, which is linked to a tough attitude towards work, or frumpy, which is linked to a laissez-faire attitude. Women who work in the back office are rationalized as less physically attractive but less aggressive, even passive in response to the frequent jibes about their appearance, as Tian Ci's quote illustrates. This construction of feminine standards, of which the first one is dominant, is seen as above and beyond different cultural ideals of beauty. As a result, it appears a diverse and inclusive ideal while continuing to exclude particular groups of people, such as women who do not "dress to impress" or who are not considered pretty enough. Notably, all the female respondents who work in operations have had technical training for their work while some of the women who perform front-line work have not. There is also greater pressure for those whose work requires more bodily presentation to demonstrate their corporate fit not only by technical capability but by their cultural capital and physical appearance as well. Keith explained to me,

> There is this one girl – some of the guys think she is really attractive. She comes in and she likes to wear low-cut or very frilly skirts and big flowers and stuff like that everyday. She speaks with a very fake American accent. She is from the marketing team so she organizes events, like arrange for food, emceeing, book the room, stuff like that. She doesn't have a finance background . . . [but she carries herself that way] because it works. From a male perspective, when you meet or speak to a woman who is physically attractive, you tend to be nicer to her. You give her more attention. You have an emcee up there who is attractive, it works better than someone who is not to represent the bank.

Evidently, the woman that Keith described does not only carry out her work duties with technical resourcefulness. Her portrayal and "doing" of her femininity in marketing work is executed with the understanding that a certain physical appearance can locate her in a particular position within the professional classes, in spite of her lack of financial training. Her choice of accessories, clothes and way of talking become her way of differentiating herself from the rest of the women in the workplace to the extent that her success at work can be attributed to the daily, almost ritualized, performance of her identity.

Female presence in the financial workplace, even in traditionally male-dominated arenas like the trading floor, does not mean that women radically challenge the reproduction of any hetero-normative and/or sexist overtones. The femininities seen at work are not simply products of processes of feminization but, rather, continue to *be* the process through which women are gendered and become different sorts of women – they are, at best, "ambivalent femininities" (Skeggs, 1997: 98). The investment a woman makes in her femininity enables her to gain access to status and distinction within the financial classes. Conversely, lack of access, as conditioned by lack of economic means, such as experienced by the woman working in the local bank, can sometimes be read as more "authentically feminine" because she is seen as prettier. Arguably, however, the various constructions of femininities in financial work continue to be a useful contextualized cultural resource, where even the apparently more subversive constructions of femininity, such as tough women or the good-natured woman who laughs off "fat jokes", are used in the

service of maintaining a particular status quo – one which marginalizes particular body types, tastes and dispositions. Their performances are ambiguous rather than being necessarily transformative. I would here draw attention to a point made in an earlier chapter – one's aspirations do not only come from the other but from one's gendered and classed self in relation to others as well. Just as the Bangladeshi male migrant's belief in the primacy of masculinity powerfully reinforces his silence on his suffering, the feminization process of the middle-class financial worker sets up a form of symbolic violence through its reproduction. While Bourdieu views material forces, such as the division of labour and segregation within the work force, as central to gender oppression, he also regards the internalization of symbolic gender norms within physical dispositions as the most important element in the reproduction of sexual division. It would be inaccurate to think that Bourdieu sees an antithesis between the material and the symbolic. The choices one makes and the way in which one carries out one's identity – indeed, *the experience of gender, as with any other social category* – is shaped by one's agency which, in turn, is shaped by both discursive and material power relations.

Conclusion

The selective incorporation of people into professional financial work in Singapore has created a segment of the labour market that is well-educated, articulate and well-travelled. We see that this group of workers is coveted for both their technical and, more importantly as I have stressed here, cultural knowledge. This form of capitalist work practice, however, is based on reproducing certain performances of personhood and social interaction both at the corporate and everyday, interpersonal levels. I have demonstrated here that access to the professional classes in financial work aspires towards and is in fact dependent on the performance of a cosmopolitan identity, which is an exclusive and often paradoxical identity. On the one hand, there is the pragmatic need to accept diversity at work. On the other hand, however, in the performance of this cosmopolitan identity, bodies continue to be closely regulated to the extent that normativities of gender, ethnic, racialized, national and linguistic identities are further entrenched in the workplace. I have also shown that the reproductive processes of class identity, personhood and exclusion

are interwoven and presented in the structural as well as the everyday performative practices and experiences of work in a "cosmopolitan" setting.

By drawing upon Bourdieu's notions of habitus, I clarified how people's pre-reflexive actions and dispositions can locate them in particular social spaces. This suggests how people's access to work is not entirely based on technical skills but on their pre-organizational sense of the tacit rules that dominate the workplace (Skeggs, 2004). In this sense, habitus is a powerful and often intangible sorting tool that subjects people to certain social statuses. This internal organizing mechanism of habitus is not only applicable to understanding the complex web of differentiated social relations but also useful for understanding the "body politic" of the individual. I also illustrated how a person's embodied habitus, or hexis, marks him or her as more suitable for one space over others. As Rosalie pointed out, hiring personnel often assess the eligibility of a potential employee by noting how the individual walks and sits during the interview. Even after gaining entry into the financial sector, individuals continue to identify and differentiate themselves according to the dominant practices and discourses of the workplace.

In Bourdieu's terms, the way in which people actively engage in these processes of identification and differentiation serves to codify their bodies. In the attempt to banish vagueness about their possibly convoluted identities, individuals have a hand in shaping the way in which they are perceived at work, such as the gay man or female trader who is overtly assertive. This suggests that even though there is a dominant cultural hierarchy at work, individuals also have the agency to negotiate their own identities – this view enables us to understand the workplace much more as a site of active, ongoing struggles among people of different backgrounds. I noted in Chapter 3, however, that agency here does not mean complete free will. This framework suggests that even though these people actively perform their identities to fit into corporate culture, there is a degree of oppression at work to the extent that the people who can best adhere to the dominant corporate culture are distinct from others symbolically. For example, on the one hand, Chaandra noted that his ethnicity has not been a barrier for him – which could suggest that diversity is being recognized. On the other hand, however, he also said that he always makes the effort to network strategically

so as to access professional information as efficiently as possible. He further noted that this ability to communicate sets him apart from others who might be conscious of their ethnicity or gender. In this example, Chaandra feels the routinized performance of his cosmopolitan identity is strategic for his professional advancement; yet, it is always done in relation to the powerful dominant culture in the social field of financial work – the need to network in spite of gender, ethnic and racial differences. This also articulates Bourdieu's notion of distinction, which is always constructed in relation to the symbolic power that dominates the group. By investing through his actions and dispositions to the dominant cosmopolitan culture at work, Chaandra is building up and sustaining his own symbolic capital. Consequently, those who still have technical capability, such as the Singaporean graduates Chaandra pointed out, are denied entry into the professional class because they are seen as unsuitable for the global, cosmopolitan identity that the firm demands. It is therefore the de facto cultural differences that allow for distinction.

Although access to financial work is not often openly discriminatory, the micro-politics of everyday interactions among employees continues to situate them as unequal in social status. Financial employees either actively fabricate their identity to fit the dominant corporate culture's expectations of them or they are marginalized from social networks as a result. This can culminate in hindering the individual's workplace mobility since employees can be graded according to how well they fit into corporate culture. Furthermore, since much of this work is based on knowledge transfer, those who do not fit into the social networks at work could well be left out of information circuits as well. As a result, there is a cause/effect mechanism that reproduces intolerance and inequalities in the workplace.

The "doing" of identities is crucial to workplace success to the extent that individual bodies address particular roles according to their gender, racialized, ethnic and language identities. Furthermore, there are diverse presentations of gendered bodies that can physically locate them in different office spaces and tasks. For instance, the "hot and aggressive" female is rendered more suitable to the male-dominated trading floor, whereas the "flouncy and flirty" female succeeds in marketing because her image "works" to her advantage. There are also multiple masculinities at work – interestingly, the findings suggest that there is a more prominent idea of the ideal man

in the financial workplace than the ideal female. This likely means that the "worldly" alpha male is still touted as most bodily suitable for the professional classes in financial work. The inequalities that impact certain groups – such as the Malay people and effeminate men – become naturalized over time through discourses that render them either as normal or humorous. The physical presence of these people in the bank suggests that there is some structural leeway for them to access the financial workplace, yet their experiences via the everyday interactions show that there continues to be intolerance towards certain groups of people.

In spite of the banks' articulation of policies and values that emphasize "diversity" and "inclusion", there is a very specific type of individual that gains entry into the professional classes in financial work; and, after initial access, there are also specific tasks allocated to particular types of people within the sector. Indeed, the notion of "cosmopolitanism" is used as a screening tool as well as a culmination of processes that select particular groups of people to be included in the social networks and knowledge-transfer – elements that contribute to work success. The performance of the cosmopolitan, corporate fit *at* work hence serves to produce and reproduce the power inequalities to the extent that there are specific displays of employees' gendered, racialized and ethnicized selves that are constructed as "fitting" with the organization's supposed cosmopolitan values and task allocation. It becomes reasonable to think that the ongoing performance of a professional cosmopolitan identity is much more fragmented when we take the historical and social backgrounds of employees into consideration. Class reproduction within the financial sector is sustained through the strategic notion of "cosmopolitanism" and through the normative performance of the cosmopolitan employee.

This chapter has stressed, more so than others, that personhood and selfhood are products of, and produce, class inequality in the workplace. The practical and discursive claiming of selfhood can be understood as class performativity, as selfhood brings with it entitlements not only denied to others, but reliant on those relationships with others either as a resource or a limit to their entitlements (Skeggs, 2004). The notion of cosmopolitanism, then, is used as a screen that selectively filters individuals' access to the professional classes in the financial sector, thus setting the mechanisms for social

inequality and struggle at work. Ideas of "diversity" and "inclusion" are hence used to mask the intolerance and inequality that continue to pervade the financial workplace.

It is worth repeating that while the data has illustrated how many of the practices of class identity and their reproductive strategies within financial work centre around the demonstration of cultural capital and cultivated habitus, this does not mean that there is no ongoing exploitation in this workplace. Conversely, neither does it undermine the display of cultural capital as a class reproduction tool amongst the Bangladeshi and Johorean commuter workers. Exploitation and subordination are both intricately linked and are intrinsic in various forms within all capitalist relations, more so especially when we consider the active role each individual plays in reinforcing these inequalities. Indeed, it is these intricate relations of class differences within and across different groups of workers that characterizes the division of labour in Singapore. It is, however, within these middle-class echelons that the Bourdieusian issue of cultural capital as aspiration is more pronounced as a form of, and hence holding greater explanatory value for, class reproduction than the sheer exploitative aspect of class as captured in Marx's writings (Wright, 2005).

Concluding Reflections

If "class" is the answer, what is the question?
(Wright, 2005: 180)

In this chapter, I evaluate my findings and also allude to their wider implications. This book has illustrated that Singapore, distinct in its own right but also bearing similarities to many other globalizing cities, has a division of labour strongly supported by migrants. The work identities of the labour migrant, commuter worker and cosmopolitan professional come with specific class realities facilitated by labour market change and much wider processes and spaces within and beyond the global city. These realities must always be read through a nexus of power relations in which different types of workers are discursively and materially attributed different values. The rise of global cities has been essential to the assertion and spread of neoliberal ideas and practices. This spread is never homogenous but is instead contoured by local and regional geo-politics, political-economic development pathways, migration histories and geographies. Far from being truly open to difference, the forms of cosmopolitanism found in Singapore perpetuate particular kinds of global sensibilities that are themselves exclusionary. These politics of exclusion and inclusion are also not simply polarizing but rather, fragmented and relational. Managing labour as a commodity is far from straightforward. In order for labour to be extracted, people have to be assessed, organized and disciplined through industrial policies and relations. In a labour force that is so reliant upon migrants, the management of labour also requires the management of migration.

The story of the global city is yet further complicated by people's own motivations and desires constituted through the multiplicity and de-centrings of their identities in relation to social constructions such as gender, race, citizenship. As Doreen Massey reminds us, the politics of place is constituted through outward and inward fragmentations and nowhere is this more concentrated than in a global city (2007). Rather than losing their role as active agents in urban centers, states and their bureaucrats are contributing to uneven urban development and inequalities within and beyond national territories through policies and discourses.

Underpinning the growth within and of a global city is the growth of inequality. I have shown how the class-making process, driven by development aspirations in Singapore, is central to understanding inequality at different scales in the city-state. In other words, the state is a site of the genesis of class. The experience of the global city is different yet related for the different groups of workers within its labour force. Aspirations of social mobility and, in particular, middle-class lifestyles are pervasive. This speaks to not only the cultural dominance of middle-class desires but also the heterogeneity of those who aim to become middle class. At the same time, however, part of the inequality is that becoming a particular kind of middle-class individual is elusive for many. Class inequality does not simply lie at the root of economic exploitation and social marginalization within this form of capital accumulation and production. It is also behind the sorts of challenges different people must overcome to access a livelihood that is perceived to improve their lives. Because it is about social relations, class cannot solely be understood through the analysis of structural conditions either, although these can profoundly shape and, to some extent, channel people towards certain economic lives. Class is a highly nuanced form of subjectivity that is inhabited through other categories such as gender, race and nationality. These processes of subject-making are co-constituted vis-à-vis people's own desires and hopes, which are often in line with dominant narratives of development. There is, hence, a powerful unifying idea behind class. This is not to perpetuate a romance of class solidarity but, rather, to highlight the relational, structural and intimate ways in which developmental strategies, such as Singapore's, can work through class. The class-making process at the scales of individual and state aspirations is fraught with relationality to and

subordination of others. Inequality is vital to the reflexivity of one's class and one's desire to move beyond it socially.

The workers in this study emerged both as subjects and animators of the nexus of structures and power relations that constitute development. The global city aspirations of state bureaucracies in Singapore, realized through its immigration and labour policies, not only locate certain groups of people in particular positions within the workforce but also facilitate certain ways of being and becoming. In this regard, class inequality is entirely central to the lives of the workers, whether consciously or unconsciously. Within this form of economic organization, each group of workers is incorporated and valued differently and has differentiated access to resources. Class, in these terms, is structural – in that the division of labour organizes what economic opportunities are available to them – and is operated through a myriad of capital transformations – culturally, symbolically, economically – which are more available to some workers than others; these two aspects are not discrete, but each one shapes the other.

The analyses presented here demonstrate that, as others have shown previously, there is nothing merely cultural about the processes behind discursive and symbolic events. These processes are central to capitalist political and economic practices. Capitalist economic production, however, also guides the shape and form of social reproduction, integral to which are consumption and lifestyles. Within social reproduction, there continues to be domination and symbolic violence that reinforce hierarchy and difference amongst people who occupy different positions within the division of labour. In short, people's economic lives shape and are shaped by their lives as social beings; class processes are constituted by every other aspect of social life. Class inequalities are created and maintained through practices and discourses of exploitation and domination in the intertwining realms of economic production and social reproduction.

The ways in which I have elaborated on the concept of class in this book have been shaped by the questions for which I sought answers. I seek not only to explain the broad variations in the social organization of inequality but also to answer a narrower but no less important question about the subjective identity of individuals in society, which categorizes people within a system of economic and social stratification. The questions one asks are not without their own

theoretical moorings and normative concerns regarding the world in which we live (Wright, 2005: 180). The theoretical approaches with which one chooses to frame and answer these questions hence also depends very much on the questions themselves. The class theories presented in this analysis are formed by an integrated reading of Marx and Bourdieu, which provides explanatory power that cannot be found in simply one or the other. This is not as messy as it sounds as both Marxist and Bourdieusian class theories have their own particular and complementary strengths in addressing different issues. Indeed, Bourdieu himself argued for the flexibility of his theories and the necessity of pointing out their inconsistencies (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

It is these conceptual inconsistencies that become resources for theorizing from a non-Western context. It was through my fieldwork that I truly grasped how unstable and fluid empirical realities and the theories that frame them can be. In response to these inherent complexities and methodological challenges, the extended case method became a useful tool not only for making sense of these empirical realities through a particular theoretical lens but also for explaining everyday practices when theoretical prescriptions start to falter. This methodological dialectic of extending, reconstructing and piecing together theories informed by empirical data was particularly useful, indeed even necessary, for discussing class through inequalities perpetuated at different scales in light of Singapore's development strategies. By using Marx's notion of exploitation and Bourdieu's theory of practice, I have tried to make the implications of the division of labour in Singapore more comprehensible and, at the same time, more nuanced. The Bangladeshis and the Johoreans, who are valued for their cheapness and if not their disposability at least their ease of replacement, were incorporated and positioned differently from the middle-class financial workers. The number of work-permit holders suggests that, as a cheapened sector of the labour force, they are valued precisely for the ways their "non-skills" contribute to Singapore's growth as a cosmopolitan city. To ensure their cheapness, however, existing policies and discourses create them as temporary workers who must be monitored by employers and the state. In painful irony, their position at this end of the division of labour is made permanent by an enforced transience through forms of domination and control

over labour. Not only do these measures mark these bodies as different from other groups of workers, it also creates different experiences of class between them and the workers who are not on work permits.

The problem that revealed itself immediately was the sheer vulnerability and exploitation to which the Bangladeshis were exposed – which is uncharacteristic of any other group in this study. Recruitment agent and labour broker fees immediately engulfed them and their communities in debt even before they started work. The presence of the special pass illustrated just how precarious the work-permit system can be for these workers. While the special pass is a step towards institutional recognition of how dangerous and fragile the livelihoods of work-permit holders can be, it also systematically locks workers into a state of unemployment as most holders of the pass are disallowed from work. The control an employer continues to have over his/her workers means that the looming threat of repatriation persists and many special pass holders are rendered homeless – a form of vulnerability not experienced by any other groups of workers in the study. The notion of exploitation applies most urgently to this group of workers; the division of labour generates more fear, fragility and harm for some workers than others. Although it has been argued that Marx's class analysis should not be reduced to being a moralistic analysis and is, above all, a political judgement. The strength of the concept of exploitation lies in the way in which it channels our focus towards the deprivations that some groups of people face in this socio-economic organization of resources.

This is not to say that other forms of class reproduction were neither present nor as salient within this group of workers. While the Bangladeshis did not have access to the sort of capital that they could take advantage of – that is, those forms of capital which are flexible, such as the cultural capital of the middle-class professionals that can be converted and traded-up for symbolic capital and economic gains – they still made the most of what they had by developing a taste for what they could afford and often used this taste choice as a way to distinguish themselves from the "overspending" middle classes. Commodity consumption not only featured as a motivation for people to move to Singapore to work, but also emerged as a source of differentiation amongst the three main groups of workers discussed. For all of these workers, consumption became a

particularly useful way of understanding their class experiences and aspirations as it not only reflected economic needs and material interests but also how these shape the acquisition and display of consumer commodities, serving as symbolic measures of success and status in Singapore. These consumption practices often produced powerful constructions of class identity, which can both empower – as with the middle-class workers who have the economic means to purchase the right tie, bag, shoes – or silence – as with the Bangladeshi male migrant who still exhibited middle-class aspirations by choosing to purchase household items before returning home in order to disguise his state of joblessness in Singapore. Although apparently irrational economically, consumption is a channel through which workers participate in social practice and cultural expression. It may not free the worker from particular social bindings – the exercise of the worker's agency here continues to reproduce the primacy of a normative masculinity, where the man continues to be seen as the economic provider. The way consumption becomes a lived, salient aspect of class reproduction lies in whom it empowers or silences, whether it is the cultivation of the taste of necessity or of luxury. This illustrates that Bourdieusian class processes of distinction operate precisely within – not beside or separately from – Marxist class processes of exploitation.

While the Johoreans I spoke with did not need to pay high broker fees, their work journey was a stressful daily affair over long distances and with frequent causeway traffic jams. Local labour policies in Singapore mean that Malaysians do not face the same barriers of entry into different sectors of the economy as other work-permit holders, such as the South Asians. My research, however, revealed that accessing work in Singapore often relies on social capital, such as established networks of family and friends who are already working in Singapore. Their position in the division of labour in Singapore also did not allow the Johoreans to purchase affordable housing nearer to their work places, yet Johor's close proximity to Singapore meant that a daily crossing to access high wages was still feasible. Their acknowledgement of the fact that they are taking on jobs that Singaporeans refuse suggests that they are far from being passive or blind recipients of the work they perform. Commuting, it could be argued, is part of their conscious strategy to access a different livelihood and lifestyle. Aside from not having to pay broker fees, these

commuters were also not as reliant on their employers for their daily needs, such as accommodation, meals and transportation to and from work. Their greater autonomy compared to the Bangladeshis arguably meant that they were less vulnerable to outright coercion from their employers.

Among the financial workers, expressing forms of cultural and symbolic capital emerged as a more pronounced indication of an individual's value at work as seen through recruitment and promotion practices. This is not to deny existing forms of exploitation among the financial workers: indeed, that they do not own the means of production suggests they are still selling their labour for a wage in the workplace, hence participating in a labour process that to some extent subsumes their working bodies under capital. Without reducing one set of relations to another, I argue that theirs is a complex class position in that they are able to nonetheless appropriate part of the surplus through skill exploitation/domination and that their performance of a particular form of identity is central to the structuring of class identity (Wright, 1985). While many of the financial workers I spoke with held relevant degrees, for the back office workers particularly the ways in which they were recruited showed that their value at work goes beyond technical skills – that is, it includes a normative performance of a cosmopolitan identity. The middle-class financial worker uses his/her leisure pursuits to increase their productivity and market value – a resource that does not hold value for the Bangladeshi or Johorean workers. The ongoing performance of being worldly – accepting diversity, wearing the proper brand names, participating in particular leisure activities, being able to joke about different things – becomes part of fashioning the cultural omnivore. It becomes part of the strategy to legitimate the desirable, cosmopolitan self in the "hip work" that takes place within the financial sector. This particular cosmopolitan work identity, like all social identities, is an unstable one that requires ongoing maintenance and intersects with other subjectivities – gender, race, nationality and sexual – with some individuals being seen as more readily suitable for particular types of job tasks. Cosmopolitanism here becomes a class identity above all else: it is rooted in the division of labour and is created through processes by which some people are denied access to economic and cultural resources because they are not recognized as being worthy recipients. Phrased more strongly, this illustrates that Marxist processes of

class exploitation are precisely present within – not separate from – Bourdieusian class processes of distinction.

The strong emphasis on personal appearance and the reading of other peoples' appearance at work suggests that this is a central marker in the ability to make use of one's cultural capital in matters of economic and symbolic exchange. Appearance here does not only concern clothes – although this is an important component – but also includes one's tastes, attitudes and bodily dispositions as oriented by habitus. To participate in a class identity is to embody an economy of practical mastery that underlies and facilitates everyday readings of who is similar and who is different from oneself (Bourdieu, 1984: 73). It is also central to how one knows others as belonging or not belonging – it becomes part of the powerful discourse that legitimizes certain people over others in different spaces and for different job tasks within and outside of the financial workplace. This was demonstrated in the attitudes of disdain many of the middle-class workers' expressed towards Johoreans and Bangladeshis, although the term "class" was hardly ever invoked in my conversations with them. Instead, their working-class traits are presented as the outcome of individual and/or cultural pathology, as when Kenneth and Aileen emphatically pronounced that they would not be comfortable drinking in a coffee shop or taking on jobs that Johoreans would take. Another example would be how the lack of Malay and Indian colleagues is rationalized as "what people want out of life". Indeed, this form of cultural presumption is part of the normative middle-class project of maintaining itself as distinct. This form of collective identity both disguises and rests on the "we are not them" of identity reproduction. Ideas about identity reassert an often unrecognized class position, reproducing a middle-class sense of entitlement to particular cultural capital and bodily practices. This is one of the most salient ways that class is written on the body as it can be read as "rights, privilege, access to resources, cultural capital, self-authorization and propriety" (Skeggs, 1997: 152). Personhood and selfhood are both a product of and produce class inequality. Claiming selfhood can be seen as a form of class performance because selfhood is not only about accessing entitlements denied to others but is also reliant on others being made available as a resource to draw upon for the constitution of this self.

The Bangladeshis and Johoreans do not use, accrue and develop culture in the same way as the middle-class financial workers. Their relationship to legitimate culture is different in that what they have had to give up, risk and confront in order to achieve capital are different. The strength of Bourdieu's class analysis lies in showing that culture becomes an exchange value in self-formation, a resource and a form of capital (1984; Skeggs, 1997). It is this exchange that becomes valuable in class identity – it is this relationship of entitlement to and denial of resources that projects to us the inequality occurring across our social landscape. In a way, this is not entirely distinct from Marx's argument that the transformations of *things* into possessions through the appropriation of labour (i.e. exploitation) is facilitated not just by economic organization but, more fundamentally, through the social organization of workers and owners of the means of production. Bourdieu's analysis allows us to see how culture, conditioned by people's access to economic resources, can be made into objects to be possessed for their symbolic value (Skeggs, 1997). This is not to deny the importance of economic organization or work but to suggest that through its capitalization, culture has an exchange value, and can involve exploitation and appropriation. Like any resource, it is accessible to some, denied to others. This is not to say that low-waged workers have no culture. A classed reality is far more political than that. The cultural moorings that low-waged workers bear and the forms of consumption they can afford are often not as valued as those produced and consumed by middle-class and elite workers. They are not seen as suitable for cultural practices that bring about a sense of distinction for the middle classes. It is these barriers of entry which continue to reproduce class differences amongst the different groups that I indicated in my research questions. Within the circuit of resource distribution, whether material, symbolic or cultural, the identity politics being reproduced through their co-optation are always fragile and unstable, always requiring ongoing maintenance through the processes I have illustrated.

I started by introducing how I wanted to analyse inequality in the global city by examining class reproduction through the division of labour. My findings suggest that the power of the contemporary state, driven by its own aspirations of globalization, shapes the labour supply, and that it is not possible to understand the labour market without attention to national immigration regimes. I have

shown through my theoretical and empirical chapters that there are twin structural processes occurring at the same time that shape the class experiences of these different workers, the structure of the local labour market in Singapore and also the larger context of the migration process itself. We see that certain migrants have to bear the high costs of migration. For some people, such as Chaandra and many of the middle-class bankers introduced in Chapter 5, the migration process increases their flexibility, mobility and amount of capital in the marketplace. This is a migration pathway clearly not shared by either the Johoreans or the Bangladeshis. This is not to say that the middle class is not governed or monitored within this division of labour but that segments of the working population are differently disciplined. Couched within the cosmopolitan discourses, which are salient not just amongst the middle classes but also within Singapore's official rhetoric, are gradations of governance that occur along a continuum that overlaps with pre-existing racial, national and gender hierarchies at different scales.

This book is not meant to be an anti-global city argument. As Singapore is often seen as an exemplar of development success, it is all the more important to draw attention to the implications of its strategies on inequality and social difference. In order to understand these contours of development, it is imperative to recenter migrants as playing a key role in urban growth. The decentered geographies that emerge from this recentering demonstrates the vast reach of urban transformations. Through my ethnography of different workers, which underscores these implications, I explain inequalities as part of global city making through the differentiated positions and challenges that different groups of workers face, but also, crucially, how their dispositions and aspirations are vital to the reproduction of such differences and more broadly, the reproduction of Singapore's development strategies. It has been impossible to convey entirely the pain, pleasure, humour and arduousness experienced by the different groups of workers involved, whose narratives and experiences have profoundly shaped my research process. Yet, I hope that this book highlights the poignance and compromise embedded within the pursuit of mobility and aspirations as it exists in the global city today.

Notes

Introduction: Globalizing Class, Migration and Divisions of Labour in the City-State

1. See http://www.freetheworld.com/2014/EFW2014-POST.pdf, date accessed 19 August 2015.
2. See http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/singapore/overview, date accessed 10 August 2015.
3. See http://www.pmo.gov.sg/content/pmosite/mediacentre/speechesninterviews/primeminister/2014/June/speech-at-wcs-ces-siww.html#.VCURXecWGHl, date accessed 10 October 2014.
4. See http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/income-wealth-inequality-more-trouble-for-society, date accessed 3 August 2015.
5. See http://www.hdb.gov.sg/fi10/fi10296p.nsf/PressReleases/51A6512F14F32CC848257C6200226A1E?OpenDocument, date accessed 4 June 2015.

1 Researching Inequality in the Global City

1. Ministry of Manpower website, http://www.mom.gov.sg/foreign-manpower/passes-visas/work-permit-fw/before-you-apply/Pages/overview.aspx,
   date accessed 3 September 2014.
2. The special pass is issued by the Ministry of Manpower after workers who were on the work permit file a complaint or are no longer able to work because of injuries.
3. The Singapore-based NGO TWC2 provides breakfast and dinner to special pass holders through a restaurant in Singapore's Little India.

2 Situating Class in Singapore: State Development and Labour

1. This is a Malay word meaning independence from colonial rule, which at the time was conceived of as possible only with the merger.
2. See http://www.business.gov.sg/EN/BusinessTopic/HiringNTraining/EmployersResponsibilities/WagesNBenefits/hiring_benefits_wagesystem.htm, date accessed 12 December 2009.
3. See http://www.news.gov.sg/public/sgpc/en/media_releases/agencies/mom/press_release/P-20090603-1, date accessed 12 December 2009.
4. Ministry of Manpower website, http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/momportal/en/communities/workplace_standards/trade_unions.html, date accessed 8 October 2010.

5. Ministry of Manpower website, http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/aol/search/display/view.w3p;page=0;query=DocId%3Ae7cd017b-6259-4fbd-ac9f-59664543f2e9%20Depth%3A0%20Status%3Ainforce;rec=0, date accessed 15 August 2015.
6. Lee is referring to the uproar from residents of an upper-middle class neighbourhood called Serangoon Gardens at the end of 2008 when the government announced the decision to convert an old school compound into a dormitory for male foreign workers.
7. See http://www.todayonline.com/Singapore/EDC100219-0000109/How-the-next-five-years-will-be-different, date accessed 20 March 2010.
8. Heng Chee Chow, NTUC Deputy Secretary-General, http://www.ntuc.org.sg/mediastatements_030609.asp, date accessed 15 March 2010.
9. See http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/momportal/en/communities/workplace_standards/work-life_harmony/WoW__Fund/key_features_of_the.html,
date accessed 25 March 2010.
10. NTUC website, http://www.ntuc.org.sg/ntucunions/abt_ntuc.asp, date accessed 20 April 2014.
11. This is a group comprised of other ethnic minorities in Singapore – Eurasians, Jewish, Armenians, British, etc.
12. Committee on Singapore's Competitiveness (1998), https://www.mti.gov.sg/ResearchRoom/Documents/app.mti.gov.sg/data/pages/885/doc/NWS_CSC.pdf, date accessed 25 August 2011.
13. ESC website, http://www.esc.gov.sg/about_background_objective.html, date accessed 3 October 2011.
14. Ministry of Finance website, http://finance.gov.tt/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/pub90A98A.pdf, date accessed 14 December 2009.
15. Monetary Authority of Singapore website, http://www.mas.gov.sg/singapore-financial-centre/value-propositions.aspx, date accessed 14 December 2009.
16. Ministry of Trade and Industry website, https://www.mti.gov.sg/ResearchRoom/SiteAssets/Pages/Economic-Survey-of-Singapore-2014/Ch1_AES2014.pdf, date accessed 29 October 2015.
17. Monetary Authority of Singapore website, http://www.mas.gov.sg/Singapore-Financial-Centre/Overview/Asian-Dollar-Market.aspx, date accessed 29 October 2015.
18. This acronym was used in the 1980s and refers to the Indonesia–Malaysia–Singapore Growth Triangle. It was later on abandoned to downplay the semiotic significance of Singapore in the triangle (Sparke et al., 2004).
19. My objective now is to illustrate how these institutionalized categories classify individuals according to their work, skills and income, reproducing a type of class structure within Singapore. I will discuss the social consequences of these passes and permits as well as the different trajectories of workers in other chapters.
20. See http://population.sg/resources/population-composition/#.VYz1b6Ysr2s, date accessed 26 June 2015.

21. The government's rationale for this is the national interest. It does not want to expose Singapore's vulnerability in terms of its dependence on foreign labour. Questions I have posed to Ministry of Manpower officials regarding these statistics have not been answered.
22. See http://population.sg/resources/population-composition/#.Vd-ots4sqf5, date accessed 1 August 2015.
23. Dependents' passes are issued to children under 21 years of age and the spouses of employment pass holders, entitling them to live in Singapore with the pass holder (Yeoh, 2006). The long-term social pass entitles parents, parents-in-law, step-children, spouse (common law), handicapped children and unmarried daughters above the age of 21 to long-term visits (Yeoh, 2006).
24. Ministry of Manpower website, http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/mompo rtal/en/communities/work_pass/PEP/about_the_pass.html, date accessed 14 December 2009.
25. See http://www.pmo.gov.sg/mediacentre/speech-mr-lee-hsien-loong-prime -minister-singapore-human-capital-summit-opening-29, date accessed 1 August 2015.
26. This refers to the Clarke Quay and Boat Quay areas that were developed along the Singapore river. These two nightspots have since gone out of business.
27. This is an organization that aims to attract overseas Singaporeans and foreigners to develop their professional careers in Singapore.
28. Ministry of Education website, http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/speeches/ 1997/240897.htm, date accessed 14 July 2009.
29. See http://www.mom.gov.sg/newsroom/mom-statements/2015/13-mar-2014–statement-on-labour-market-developments, date accessed 30 July 2015.
30. Ministry of Manpower website, http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/mom portal/en/press_room/mom_speeches/2004/20040319-attractingforeign talenttoworkpasssystem.print.html?Status=1, date accessed 5 November 2009.
31. Ministry of Manpower website, http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/mom portal/en/communities/work_pass/work_permit/during_employment/ foreign_worker_levy.html, date accessed 5 November 2009.
32. Channel News Asia, 23 February 2010, http://news.sg.msn.com/cna/ article.aspx?cp-documentid=3895504, date accessed 5 March 2010.
33. Ministry of Manpower website, http://www.mom.gov.sg/Home/Press_ Release/Pages/20100223-FW_Levy.aspx, date accessed 6 November 2009.
34. Ministry of Manpower website, http://www.mom.gov.sg/Home/MOM_ Speeches/Pages/20100304-SpeechbyMinisteratTheBudgetDebateon ForeignWorkerLevyChanges.aspx, date accessed 6 November 2009.

3 Migrating to Singapore: Bangladeshi Men

1. All names have been changed to protect the identity of the respondents.
2. I will discuss these guidelines later on in the chapter.

3. *The Straits Times,* "Maid Agencies eye Bangladesh", 2 September 2010.
4. Bangladesh High Commission website, http://bangladesh.org.sg/cms/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=36&Itemid=57, date accessed 4 September 2014.
5. Information on the special pass, unlike the work permit and employment pass, is not made available on the website of the Ministry of Manpower. Inquiries to the Immigration and Checkpoint Authorities have also not yielded any official statistics.
6. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), http://www.bbs.gov.bd/PageWebMenuContent.aspx?MenuKey=445, date accessed 28 October 2015.
7. BBS Labor Force Supply survey 2010, http://203.112.218.66/WebTestApplication/userfiles/Image/Latest%20Statistics%20Release/LFS%20Report%202010.pdf, date accessed 28 October 2015.
8. High Commission of Bangladesh website, http://bangladesh.org.sg/cms/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=62&Itemid=95, date accessed 5 March 2010.
9. United Nations report on Bangladesh, http://www.un-bd.org/bgd/index.html, date accessed 15 July 2010.
10. Bangladesh High Commission website, http://bangladesh.org.sg/cms/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=36&Itemid=57, date accessed 5 September 2014.
11. See http://bangladesh.org.sg/cms/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=36&Itemid=57, date accessed 18 December 2010.
12. FirstCare website, http://www.firstcare.com.sg/package.php, date accessed 5 September 2014. Efforts to speak directly with agency managers were unanswered.
13. This is a pass which is issued to the migrant worker before he/she arrives in Singapore. After the medical body check-up in Singapore, he/she will be issued a work permit.
14. Director of HOME, personal interview, 7 August 2009.
15. See http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/momportal/en/communities/others/employment_agencies.html, date accessed 17 August 2014.
16. See http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/momportal/en/communities/work_pass/work_permit/application/requirements/Housing_Requirements/List_of_Approved_Housing.html.
17. See http://www.scal.com.sg/index.cfm?GPID=105, date accessed 5 September 2014.
18. See http://news.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne+News/Singapore/Story/A1Story20091207-184340.html, date accessed 20 August 2010.
19. See http://www.straitstimes.com/Breaking%2BNews/Singapore/Story/STIStory_285769.html, date accessed 11 December 2008.
20. See http://www.asiaone.com/News/The%2BNew%2BPaper/Story/A1Story20090127-117384.html, date accessed 15 February 2009.
21. See http://www.938live.sg/News/Singapore/EDC100303-0000250/There_s_no_way_to_go_but_cheaper_and_better_Labour_Chief, date accessed 7 March 2010.

22. Ministry of Manpower website, http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/mom portal/en/communities/workplace_safety_and_health/maintaining_a_safe_ workplace/report_incident/What_is_an_Incident_Report.html, date accessed 10 December 2009.
23. See http://www.straitstimes.com/BreakingNews/Singapore/Story/STIStory_ 503494.html, date accessed 7 March 2009.
24. This is a Malay word often used in Singapore that means "tolerate".
25. There is a monorail station within Vivocity Mall that ferries people to and from Sentosa, a man-made island off the southern coast of Singapore.

4 Commuting to Singapore: Johorean Malaysians

1. This is a neighbourhood in the northeastern part of Singapore.
2. This pass is in between the work permit and the employment visa. It is for mid-level skilled foreigners who earn a fixed monthly salary of at least $2,200 a month, http://www.mom.gov.sg/passes-and-permits/s-pass, date accessed 28th Dec 2015. S-pass applicants will be assessed on a points system, taking into account multiple criteria including salary, education qualifications, skills, job type and work experience (Ministry of Manpower website, http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/momportal/en/communities/work_ pass/s_pass/about_the_s_pass.html).
3. In both Malaysia and Brunei, this term is used to refer to members of the majority Malay ethnic group.
4. "Malaysia and Singapore: Milking It", http://www.economist.com/news/ asia/21627707-old-enmities-plague-crucial-partnership-milking-it, date accessed 21 August 2015.
5. See https://www.statistics.gov.my/index.php?r=column/cone&menu_id= d1dTR0JMK2hUUUFnTnp5WUR2d3VBQT09, date accessed 30 October 2015.
6. For an in-depth look at the changes in Johor as a result of industrialization, see Guinness, 1992.
7. Ministry of Manpower website, http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/mompor tal/en/communities/work_pass/work_permit/employers__responsibilities. html, date accessed 10 March 2010.
8. This is a social securities savings plan for all Singaporean and Permanent Resident employees (http://mycpf.cpf.gov.sg/CPF/About-Us/Intro/ Intro.htm, date accessed 27 December 2010).
9. A Hokkien term meaning "show off".

5 Constructing Cosmopolitanism in Singapore: Financial Professionals

1. Barclays Bank website, http://www.barclays.co.uk/careers/car_2_1_culture. htm, date accessed 4 December 2009; http://www.barclays.co.uk/careers/ car_2_1_culture.htm, date accessed 3 December 2009.

2. United Overseas Bank website, http://www.uobgroup.com/pages/careers/values.html, date accessed 5 December 2009.
3. Barclays Bank website, http://www.barclays.co.uk/careers/car_2_1_culture.htm, date accessed 3 December 2009.
4. Credit-Suisse website, http://www.csfb.com/about_csfb/careers/index.shtml, date accessed 8 December 2009.
5. Citibank website, https://www.citibank.com.sg/SGGCB/APPS/portal/loadPage.do?path=/prod/det/cbaw.htm&tabId=Financial%20Services, date accessed 7 July 2008.
6. This is a derogatory term that refers to Malay people.
7. Wah lao is a Hokkien term used to express exasperation.
8. Du lan is a Hokkien term used to describe feeling of aggravation, annoyance and anger.
9. The phrase "everything come out" refers to completely letting loose.
10. This is a derogatory Mandarin term for women who are seen as "old hags".
11. This is the Hokkien term for "fat pig".

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