Globalising Singapore: Debating Transnational Flows in the City

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Summary. **Transnational practices and networks of capital, labour, business and commodity markets, political movements and cultural flows are both the products of, and catalyst for, contemporary globalisation processes. An important site where the analytical lens can be trained to examine the way in which the material processes and discourses of globalisation and transnationalism intersect lies in dominant cities of the world urban hierarchy. As key nodes in the economic, social and technological networks spanning the world space economy, these 'global cities' are also places in themselves, where the social, cultural and economic fabric is not only woven out of local elements, but also clearly involves a high density of transnational relationships. In this paper, we examine debates in Singapore focused on four categories of transnational flows: the transnational business class comprising highly mobile, highly skilled professional, managerial and entrepreneurial élites; a large group of low-waged immigrants filling unskilled and semi-skilled niches in the urban service economy; expressive specialists who enliven the cultural and artistic scene; and world tourists attracted by the cosmopolitan ambience. Specifically, we give attention to the interdependence among these categories and assess the challenges which have to be addressed in Singapore's bid to develop 'best practices' for a 'cosmopolitan and creative' global city epitomising the essence of transnationalism while at the same time remaining a 'home' distinguished by a strong sense of local identity and community.**

1. Introduction

As a theory of transformation and a set of material practices, the concept of globalisation has attracted considerable scholarly debate (see, for example, McGrew, 1992; Robertson, 1992; Kelly, 1999). An important vein in the burgeoning literature examines the connectivities between what is, on the one hand, a rather abstract set of globalisation processes and, on the other, the processes of "transnationalism" which sustain "multi-stranded social relations" linking to-

gether "home" and "host" societies (Basch *et al.*, 1994, p. 6). It is argued that transnational practices and networks of capital, labour, business and commodity markets, political movements and cultural flows are both "the products of, and catalyst for, contemporary globalisation processes" (Transnational Communities Programme, 1998). For example, transnational communities—"communities that sit astride political borders and that, in a very real sense, are 'neither here nor

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there', but in both places simultaneously" (Portes, 1998, p. 3)—are both created in response to, and at the same time sustain and fuel, the process of globalisation.

An important site where the analytical lens can be trained to examine the way in which the material processes and discourses of globalisation and transnationalism intersect lies in dominant cities of the world urban hierarchy (Sassen, 1991; Yeoh, 1999). As key nodes in the economic, social and technological networks spanning the world space economy, these 'global cities' are also places in themselves, where the social, cultural and economic fabric is not only woven of local elements, but also clearly involves a high density of transnational relationships as well. Smith (1998, p. 485) in fact argues that

> there is no solid object known as the global city appropriate for grounding urban research, only an endless interplay of differently articulated transnational networks and practices.

This does not mean that the 'local' is obliterated, for global forces must necessarily articulate

> with distinctive ensembles of class and culture, power constellations and patterns of state/society relations specific to each locality (Oncu and Weyland, 1997, p. 1).

Borja and Castells (1997, p. 14) further argue that cities must integrate their "local societies" because

> without a solid base in the citizens, city governments will not have the strength that is needed to navigate those global circuits.

There is, however, a high premium on fluidity, mobility and connectivity in the global city, hence warranting attention not only to local powers and imperatives, but also how they articulate with forces and flows emanating from the outside.

The power of global cities lies in the paradox that greater global connectivity today has increased, rather than diminished, the need for global centres of command and control (Hamnett, 1995). The global reach of the individual city in turn depends on its position as a node within networks of capital, information and telecommunications in the regional and global spheres; its ability to innovate—that is, generate new information—as applied to economic activities, based on its capacity for obtaining, processing and interpreting strategic information; and its "institutional flexibility", defined as

> the internal capacity and the external autonomy of local institutions when it comes to negotiating the articulation of the city with companies and institutions which operate in supralocal spheres (Borja and Castells, 1997, p. 14).

The 'new frontier for urban management' in confronting the challenge of globalisation and global competition hence calls for not only positionality and expertise in capturing global networks, but also the ability to create and maintain a specific local culture of innovation and flexibility—a certain 'institutional thickness' (Amin and Thrift, 1992)—as well as a quality of life which will attract, maintain and develop high-quality human resources (both local expertise and foreign talent).

In updating Redfield and Singer's 1954 thesis on the cultural role of cities in order to fit 'world cities' into the cultural history of the present, Hannerz (1993) describes four groups of people who are actively engaged in the transnational flow of culture and who, in some constellation or other, give cities their 'global' character. These are

(1) 'transnational business', involving high-waged, highly skilled professional, managerial and entrepreneurial élites usually associated with finance, banking and business services;
(2) 'Third World populations', comprising low-waged immigrants who occupy insecure niches in the unskilled or semi-skilled sectors of the urban service economy;
(3) 'expressive specialists', who participate in the cultural scene in areas such as art,

fashion, design, photography, film-making, writing, music and cuisine; and

(4) 'tourists', who are present in considerable numbers, attracted by the cosmopolitan intensity of the global city.

Rather than a comprehensive catalogue, Hannerz (1993) intends these four categories as a heuristic device which may be useful in unpacking the transnational flows which help produce the global city. There are, of course, other transnational dynamics at work and Hannerz (1993) himself mentions 'cultural technologies of media' and 'information technology' as other forms of 'flows' with which world cities also have a special relationship.

In this paper, we have chosen to draw on Hannerz's four groups of transnationals as our organising scheme, primarily because its range accords well with the framing of categories in local discourse in Singapore and at the same time allows us to put together side-by-side what are often treated as separate threads in global city debates. This allows us to examine the dynamics of each flow as well as to interrogate their interdependence, for it is the interconnections among the different streams that ensure that global cities remain cultural marketplaces and business epicentres *par excellence*. Focusing on the way in which transnational flows of people—as embodiment of skill, talent, culture and capital—are materially and discursively drawn into the formation of the globalising city, this paper looks at the example of Singapore. Already one of the most open and networked in the world, the city has, in recent years, harkened closely to the beat of the globalisation drum in its drive to become a key global node in the region.

2. Singapore: Creating a 'Global City' and Sustaining the 'Best Home'

Within the world city hierarchy, Singapore is ranked in the second tier, among those aspiring for "superleague" status. As Chua (1998, p. 995) points out, Singapore "eminently qualifies for a place in the collection of cities which are discursively grouped under [the term 'world cities']" having been, since its 'birth' during the modern age of mercantile capitalism, intensely part of global service capitalism. This has had a major influence on the cultural context in which Singaporeans understand the meaning of the nation-state in which they live. As Harper writes (1997, p. 261):

> Singapore is a child of *diaspora*. Its history embodies many of the tensions of blood and belonging that the concept evokes. Singapore testifies to the difficulties of creating a modern nation-state on a model inherited from Europe in a region where history mocks the nation-state's claims to cultural and linguistic exclusiveness. The post-colonial experience of Singapore has been dominated by the attempts of the state—an artifact of British rule—to surmount these constraints and to create a national community bounded by a common culture and a sense of place, and bonded by individual allegiance.

In Singapore, the construction of nationhood has been a major state-driven project since independence (Hill and Lian, 1995). The pressures of creating a nation of 'one people' belonging to 'one place', and associated manoeuvres to secure political legitimacy, build ideological consensus, discipline its industrial workforce and mould the consciousness of its new citizens have been important imperatives threaded into all major state policies—housing, education, language, community development, national service, economic development—governing various aspects of social and political life. The current vision to secure and enhance Singapore's position as a global city has further added a new dimension to these endeavours.

Singapore's leaders have chosen to frame the new challenges of globalisation in terms of the need to navigate between the countervailing pulls of transnationalism and localism. This is clear in the terms of reference of a high-level, Minster-led Singapore 21 Committee commissioned recently to address the

challenge of, on the one hand, making Singapore a city with global reach—international, cosmopolitan and creative—and, on the other hand, "the best home for Singaporeans" (*The Straits Times*, 20 October 1997). Five more specific "dilemmas" have been crystallised, including the critical issue of mediating between the contradictory pulls of "internationalisation/regionalisation vs Singapore as home" and that of "attracting foreign talent vs looking after Singaporeans".[1] The framing of these dilemmas as irreconcilable dualisms is intended, in the words of the Prime Minister,

> to drive home the point that many of these issues we face as a nation are really issues of choice … We can't have everything that we want. We have to choose (*The Straits Times*, 20 October 1997).

However, the Minister heading the committee is of the more optimistic view that these

> may not necessarily be dilemmas, but there may well be solutions which can enable us to achieve both objectives in some cases (*The Straits Times*, 20 October 1997).

Incidentally, the determined strategies of the Singapore government to ride the crest of globalisation and yet continue to shape the local arena demonstrates that the ongoing remapping of the world in terms of global–local tensions does not render the national arena irrelevant. Instead, as Oncu and Weyland (1997, pp. 11–12) point out,

> it does not follow that national identities have now become a chimera, or that the state élite have lost the capacity to develop and pursue strategies which are contiguous with, albeit transformed versions of, older nationalisms. On the contrary, the rapid integration of national economies into global markets sets limits upon the viability of projects the state elite may initiate, but … [does not diminish] the significance of the state élite as key actors in reshaping

metropolitan space [space interpreted as both material and ideological].

In the case of Singapore, as Yeung (1998, 1999) has argued, the state involvement in the push to venture beyond nation-state's territorial limits is paramount, not simply through using government-linked companies as primary instruments to spearhead the regionalisation drive, but also by engaging in 'political entrepreneurship' through which the state opens up overseas business opportunities for private capitalists and negotiates the institutional framework for such opportunities to be tapped by Singaporean firms. Conversely, the state's choice to pursue the strategy of global reach has been relatively uncontested in the local arena,

> in part because the state has generated a political discourse of survivalism and ruthless competition … which implies the deferral of political options to the global scale (Yeung, 2000, p. 145).

In this paper, we explore recently constructed and ventilated discourses and debates around the issue of transnational flows shaping the social and cultural fabric of the city, using Hannerz's (1993) four categories as an organisational scheme. For each category, we discuss the government's notion of best practice in drawing in and negotiating with these transnational 'outsiders' whose economic or social itineraries have converged, at least momentarily, in Singapore as a place. Each arena of debate has provoked new ways of thinking about the local, whether this be a questioning of the meaning of citizenship or a revalorisation of 'local' or 'traditional' heritage, or simply a concern for community benefits. Beyond examining the four different arenas of debate, we also give attention to the way discourses overlap, interconnect and reshape the parameters and contours of discussion. The paper points to the challenges to be addressed in Singapore's bid to develop a 'cosmopolitan and creative' global city epitomising the essence of transnationalism while at the same time remaining a 'home' dis-

tinguished by a strong sense of local identity and community.

2.1 The Business and Professional Class: Creating an 'Oasis of Talent'

As "the most powerful manifestations of the internationalization of capital in the world space economy", global cities distinguished by a high concentration of corporate head-quarters, advanced telecommunication and R&D infrastructure and international financial services also contain disproportionately large clusters of high-waged professional and managerial expatriate workers (Beaverstock, 1996, p. 424). In aspiring towards global city status, the Singapore state has not only emphasised building up Singapore's total business and human resource capabilities to attract global transnational corporations to the city-state, but also has promoted Singapore as a major engine of foreign direct investments into the rest of Asia through its "Regionalisation 2000" programme (a re-imaging of the city-state from "Singapore Inc. to Singapore International") (*Business Asia*, 25 March 1996). As a space of flows, the vision for Singapore involves criss-crossing circulatory streams of people moving in multiple directions: not only is the city-state to draw in élite professionals and specialists from all corners of the globe, it is also to become a springboard for venturing into the region. The latter applies not only to expatriate workers, but also to Singaporeans who are continually exhorted to develop an entrepreneurial spirit and a global and regional outlook while remaining committed to 'home' (*The Straits Times*, 20 October 1997). Another related initiative in the rhetoric of promoting Singapore as a global player is the promotion of Singapore as a 'wired' world city, one deeply embedded in global circuits of information flows and equipped with advanced telecommunications facilities and the integration of widescale information technology strategies. Transforming the city-state into a knowledge-based economy and information society is a key strategy in Singapore's regionalisation

drive not only to become a 'brains service node' for the region, but also in order to create a 'virtual state' in which citizens abroad can remain 'hooked up' to the nation (Low and Kuo, 1999, p. 58).

The corollary of these major strategies to position Singapore as a significant node in the global space of flows is the development of a highly skilled human resource base on the premise that the "key success factor" in confronting a global future is not only the "hardware" such as technological infrastructure, but also the "software—the ideas and knowledge of its people" (the words of the Prime Minister, Goh, 1999a). Besides investing heavily in information technology and human capital to meet global competition, the state has emphasised the strategy of "gathering global talent" and "making Singapore a cosmopolitan city" (Prime Minister Goh, quoted in *The Straits Times*, 30 August 1997). At the 1997 National Day Rally, the Prime Minister (*The Straits Times*, 30 August 1997) explained in some detail:

> Gathering talent is not like collecting different species of trees from all over the world to green up Singapore. It is more difficult but absolutely crucial to sustain Singapore in the long term. Singapore depends on a strong core of talent, in business, government and politics. We need this core, to be an exceptional country and to operate the way we do—rational, forward-looking, adaptable … In the information age, human talent, not physical resources or financial capital, is the key factor for economic competitiveness and success. We must therefore welcome the infusion of knowledge which foreign talent will bring. Singapore must become a cosmopolitan, global city, an open society where people from many lands can feel at home.
>
> We need strong links with every major economy, not just our close neighbours. Therefore we must incorporate into our society talent from all over the world, not just Chinese, Malays, or Indians, but talented people whatever their race or coun-

try of origin—East Asians, South East Asians, South Asians, Arabs from the Gulf and Middle East, North Americans, Europeans, Australians, even Latin Americans and South Africans. They can be businessmen, bankers, lawyers, entrepreneurs, engineers, architects, musicians, academics, technicians, or skilled workers. They will bring with them the migrant's spirit and vigour to strive and build a better life. Our economy and society will benefit from their vibrancy and drive. Some will integrate into our society and settle here. For them we hope this spirit will eventually evolve into one of loyalty and rootedness to Singapore. But even those who do not stay permanently will make a contribution while they are here.

In short, the vision is to create 'an oasis of talent' in the city-state which will serve as a hub for business, information and knowledge skills anchoring global networks linking the world's three economic growth engines of Asia, Europe and the Americas (*The Straits Times*, 16 October 1997). The kernels in the Prime Minister's speech have been very quickly translated into strategic policy thrusts and implicit 'best practices' for Singapore, even though the debates it had sparked in public discourse have yet to reach clear resolution. First, even with the economic downturn in the region, the state has reiterated its stand that Singapore is "determined to remain open and to welcome foreign talent" (*The Straits Times*, October 1998). Some of the incentives put in place recently to attract foreign talent include fast-track employment pass applications (two to three weeks) for foreign professionals, easing restrictions on measures such as allowing foreign husbands to qualify as dependants and offering subsidised state housing to foreign professionals and skilled workers.[2] Other strategies include the launch of the Contact Singapore programme which involves establishing Singapore centres in major cities around the world as contact points to encourage an inflow of foreign talent into Singapore. Foreigners holding employment passes have increased from 50 000 in 1996 to about 100 000 in 1999, a considerable rate of increase comparable with the doubling in overall foreign worker population from 300 000 to 600 000 during the same period, bringing the total foreign population to 700 000 out of a total population of 3.9 million (*The Straits Times*, 1 May 2000).

Secondly, the state continues to press the point that, despite the regional crisis, 'going regional' remains a strategic thrust in expanding the reach of the Singapore economy and may even "find its second wind as local banks, private companies and government-linked companies snap up bargains in neighbouring countries" (*The Straits Times*, 28 September 1998, 12 October 1998). According to Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, it remains an important 'best practice' to build upon Singapore's global city capabilities—investing in infrastructure and information technology, education and training as well as strengthening Singapore's position as a hub for financial services—so that when the region "picks up" in three to five years, "Singapore will emerge with its competitiveness and capabilities strengthened" (*The Straits Times*, 12 October 1998).

Thirdly, globalising strategies of drawing in foreign talent on the one hand and encouraging Singaporeans to 'go regional' on the other inevitably bring into play a whole series of presences (of foreigners in our midst) in and absences (of citizens abroad) from the nation-state. As a result, not only are the spatial boundaries of the nation-state rendered permeable, the national ideology of 'one people, one country' needs to be recast anew to take into account new spatialities. While the project of nation-building and forging national identity among Singaporeans—which has been a key prong of state programmes since independence—has not been diminished, the cultivation of 'an oasis of talent' requires a reorientation of outlook from internal concerns to outward visions. In the words of George Yeo (1997, pp. 59–60), Minister for Information and the Arts, the

mental and cultural spaces of Singaporeans need to be reconfigured:

> What we need … is a culture that is outwardly oriented. What we need is a Singapore mentality that is global and cosmopolitan. This requires Singaporeans to feel secure about themselves. If we are big-hearted, we will welcome foreign talent into our midst. If we are small-hearted, we will always find reasons to be unhappy with them … If Singapore is reserved for Singaporeans alone, we would have a very small Singapore. In a Small Singapore, Singaporeans who are talented would emigrate to greener pastures. If, instead, we promote the idea of a Big Singapore, then even the Singaporeans who live many years overseas would not want to give up their citizenships. The opposite would happen. Others would clamour to join our ranks. What we must strive for is a Big Singapore mentality.

These 'best practices' to globalise the city-state have been the subject of public discussions in the press as well as in forums spearheaded by the Singapore 21 Committee. The need to welcome more foreign skilled workers into the country to fuel the engine of growth has generated considerable debate as to whether migrants will "make the pie bigger or take away the icing" (*The Straits Times*, 30 August 1997). Proponents argue that the logic of importing talent is "irrefutable" given that Singapore's small size will never produce enough to maintain a competitive edge in the face of escalating regional and global competition. The strategy is to "draw foreigners to help us compete against others" (*The Straits Times*, 16 October 1997), erasing the divides between nationalities to fuel the competition between places. Others point to the country's roots as an immigrant society, extending the argument either historically by locating Singapore's success in the ancestral genealogy of "immigrant forefathers" on whose toil the country was built, or by pointing to the number of former non-Singaporeans (i.e. 'immigrants') who now hold leadership positions in various fields in Singapore society (*The Sunday Times*, 27 July 1997). A related strategy is to extrapolate from the experience of other "immigrant societies" such as that of the US where success is attributed to "immigrants and their inherent values of thrift, diligence, family cohesion, innovation and God-fearing beliefs" (*The Straits Times*, 29 October 1998) or even the Warring States Chinese kingdom of Qin which drew on capabilities of "many talented people from other states, called guest officials" (*The Straits Times*, 8 October 1998).

According to a newspaper survey (*The Straits Times*, 6 June 1998), while most (76 per cent) Singaporeans supported "the Government's drive to bring in talent from abroad while encouraging local firms to go regional" on the grounds that it will "bring economic benefits" and make Singapore "more exciting culturally" and " more interesting to live in", a minority (23 per cent) were against the policy for fear of economic, social and political problems. It has been argued that the onslaught of alien values will fray the country's social fabric; competition for space and amenities will heighten; and that policies intended to attract such talent will result in preferential treatment of non-citizens. Citizenship will not only lose its advantages, but citizens will lose out altogether. Furthermore, if foreigners admitted are mainly skilled workers able to command high salaries, there will be no room for the local population, especially "those stuck permanently at the bottom" of the socioeconomic ladder (*The Straits Times*, 30 August 1997). In short, not only would expatriate workers with skills and qualifications bring competition right to the doorstep at a time when Singaporeans are losing jobs as a result of the Asian crisis, incentives to woo foreigners would erode, if not obliterate, the difference between citizens and non-citizens. In particular, some have argued that "foreigners" who become Permanent Residents enjoy "all the privileges of citizenship and none of the responsibilities" (*The Straits Times*, 27 June 1998).

While surveys have generally indicated

that Singaporeans supported the government's call to "go regional" (*The Straits Times*, 6 June 1998), there are also a number of obstacles to regional mobility. The Committee to Promote Enterprise Overseas (1993, p. 20), for example, attributed Singaporeans' reluctance to work overseas to "the disruption this will cause to their family life". The most immobile groups include those with children of school-going age where key concerns include disruptions to the spouse's career and children's education as well as readaptation to Singapore society on return. Willis and Yeoh (1998) also argue that while the economic motivations for the regionalisation programme are well understood and accepted, its 'social sustainability' is more questionable given the current parameters of national development which emphasise lifestyles accustomed to high standards of living in Singapore, low tolerance of failure and aversity to risk-taking, and a rigid, highly competitve education system with little room for variation in learning styles and experiences. These become practical day-to-day issues which act centrifugally to bind Singaporeans to the safety net of remaining at home rather than chance the regional beat.

2.2 Unskilled Immigrant Workers: The 'Underbelly' of Global Cities

To date, 'foreign talent' which deserves a place in Singapore society is defined primarily by their ability to fill particular economic niches—that is, they must be "the right kind of people who can contribute to our economy" (Wong Kan Seng, Minister for Home Affairs, quoted in *The Straits Times*, 13 September 1997). The government has been careful to add that this call to absorb 'foreign talent' to create a more creative, cosmopolitan Singapore is not tantamount to opening the floodgates, but will be a highly selective process. Of the categories of foreigners to be brought in to fill the gaps identified in government pronouncements, selectivity is also exercised in terms of the degree of permanence accorded to each group. At the bottom of the pecking order, unskilled workers such as domestic workers and construction workers are relegated to the most transient of categories—work permit holders—subject to the 'use and discard' philosophy. In the words of Wong Kan Seng, Minster for Home Affairs, these are "low skilled workers … they only come here to earn a decent living, go home and have some savings for their family", thus obviating the need to create any form of social support facilities which may encourage a more permanent presence (*The Straits Times*, 13 September 1997).

However, it must be noted that the global city is not only a crucial node in the development of new geographies of skilled professional and managerial workers (Findlay *et al.*, 1996), but also is sustained by low-skilled, low-status migrants, the new 'helots' in Cohen's (1987) words, who service the needs of the privileged in both residential and commercial settings (Sassen, 1991). Indeed, it has argued that low-waged immigrant-sector labour is not a residual category in the economy of the global city, but a basic precondition, enmeshed in processes which represent "the under-belly of globalisation" (Chang and Ling, quoted in Stasiulis and Bakan, 1997, p. 121). As earlier noted, the number of foreign workers (the term usually applies to the unskilled and semi-skilled as opposed to 'foreign talent' which is reserved for the highly skilled) had escalated at the same rate as skilled expatriate workers.

State policy with regard to foreign workers is conceived to ensure that they are no more than a transient workforce, "a buffer to even out the swings of the business cycle" (*The Straits Times*, 17 November 1988) and subject to repatriation during periods of economic downturn. To dampen the rising demand for foreign workers, stringent legislation has been put in place not only to restrict their number and ensure their short-term migrant status, but also to govern their employment.[3]

First, all employers of foreign workers must pay a monthly levy, which has risen rapidly over the past few years to stand

currently at S$345 for a domestic worker and S$470 for a construction worker. A second mechanism through which migrant workers are regulated is through a stringent allocation system which also puts the onus of responsibility for surveillance to ensure acceptable behaviour by the workers on the employers as opposed to the state. In the case of domestic workers, allocation is based on criteria such as employers' household income and, for second maids, adequate justification in terms of the need for care-givers for children, invalids or the elderly. For foreign maids, 2-year work permits are normally renewable up to a maximum of 8 years; renewals after 8 years of employment in Singapore are considered on a case-by-case basis. The work permits are issued on the condition that the women do not marry Singaporeans or become pregnant; furthermore, they must undergo a 6-monthly medical check-up to test for pregnancy and venereal diseases. Every employer is required to pay a security bond of S$5000 to the government; the bond is forfeited should the maid fail to comply with any of the conditions. Since 1 March 1997, employers are also required to purchase a personal accident insurance policy of at least S$10 000 for the maid (with beneficiaries being the maid or her next-of-kin) (*The Straits Times*, 24 January 1997). In the case of construction workers, the government has expressed concerned over the low productivity of the construction sector and its heavy dependence on foreign workers. It has recently introduced a package of measures aimed at reducing the demand for foreign construction workers. This includes legislation for 'buildability' for construction projects (measured by efficiency and labour productivity) as a requirement for building plan approval and a new work permit allocation system whereby permit entitlements are given to main contractors. Main contractors will then manage allocations to sub-contractors and undertake to provide accommodation and find alternative employment for foreign workers abandoned by sub-contractors. Employers found to have abandoned their workers would also forfeit the security

bond of S$5000 for each worker while those who have defaulted on levy payments would forfeit an additional security bond.

Clearly, much of the state rhetoric about the creation of a cosmopolitan society with a 'Big Singapore mentality' which welcomes foreigners is not intended to be all-encompassing. There are definite limits to cosmopolitanism in Singapore's vision of a global city. To date, public discourse on foreign workers has focused on issues such as the social problems of foreign worker enclaves, the impact of maids on the Singapore family and the need for quick solutions to repatriate foreign workers found abandoned in the streets to avoid the "issue of vagrancy" from tainting "clean and green" Singapore (*The Straits Times*, 16 July 1998) rather than their incorporation into the social fabric of the global city. In the case of domestic workers who are sequestered in the confines of their employers' homes for most or even all days of the week, their

> exclusion from the material spaces in the public sphere … also signals the lack of a foothold on the metaphorical spaces opened up in recent public discourse on potentially more inclusive notions of citizenship and civil society (Yeoh and Huang, 1999, p. 1164; see also Yeoh and Huang, 1998).

Foreign construction workers have been in the public limelight in recent times as a result of the large numbers who have been abandoned as a result of the downturn in the construction industry. Again, there is little in public discourse to suggest that they are considered anything more than a transient workforce with little role to play in Singapore's globalising vision. In a recent case, motivated by the need to "give them a place to congregate during their free time, and quell complaints from residents in the area that they were becoming a public nuisance", a Member of Parliament attempted to renovate a constituency sports club and open it to Thai construction workers (*The Straits Times*, 10 September 1998). Not only did this attract public complaints that resources intended for

Singapore citizens were being alienated to foreigners (*The Straits Times*, 15 September 1998) but, apparently, few of the Thai workers in question actually made use of the facilities offered (*The Straits Times*, 29 September 1998). Even as the dynamics of a globalising world challenge traditional concepts of citizenship and problematise the relative access of citizens and non-citizens to rights and responsibilities, public discourse is highly uneven across the skills divide.

2.3 Tourists: Visualising a Tourism Capital

A third category of transnational people are tourists. Singapore's quest to be a global tourist centre is encapsulated by the STB's (Singapore Tourism Board) vision to develop Singapore as a 'tourism capital' (STB, 1996a). The STB explains that all great cities acquire the status of a 'capital' by exerting their hegemony in fields like finance, business, communications, fashion and religion. In the new millennium, Singapore aspires to a pivotal position in tourism by serving three roles: a destination for visitors, a location for tourism investments and a tourism gateway to south-east Asia (STB, 1996a, p. 4). To be a tourism capital, three interrelated 'best practices' are undertaken requiring Singapore to redefine its urban and tourism planning philosophies and realign its regional policies.

The first best practice is to redefine the very parameters of 'tourism'. In the new millennium, tourism will refer not only to the business of attracting visitors, but also attracting capital and entrepreneurs to invest in the country. Although it has successfully served as a destination for over three decades, Singapore's tourism future is less assured because of regional competition and local resource constraints. An ambitious plan is required where economic wealth is generated not just through the capricious flows of visitors, but also through stable investment streams. Transnational flows of visitors are therefore to be augmented by the transnational flows of capital, expertise and corporate élites. Singapore is thus to be developed as a destination, tourism business centre and tourist hub.

The redefinition of tourism to include 'investments' as well as 'people' has implications for local urban planning. A second best practice, therefore, is to reconfigure Singapore's tourism base to be dually attractive to visitors, investors, capitalists and tourism-related enterprises. To make Singapore both "visitable" and "investable" (Kotler *et al.*, 1993, p. 2), the urban environment will have to develop what Zukin (1995) calls symbolic landscape cues of urban vivacity and cultural dynamism. In the light of this, the STB has outlined a wide-scale urban enhancement scheme in which 11 "experiential themes" were selected to accentuate Singapore's cultural and aesthetic resources, while also focusing urban redevelopment in strategic sites. For example, the "Night Zone" theme highlights the need to develop Singapore's nocturnal food and entertainment spots, while "Ethnic Singapore" emphasises the importance of multicultural diversity through the revitalisation of Chinatown and Little India (STB, 1996a, pp. 30–31). A total of S$300 million has been committed to thematic development over the next 4 years (*Property Review*, 1998, p. 21).

Developing a tourism capital also entails repositioning Singapore's role in the regional urban hierarchy. In this third best practice, the STB adopts a transborder tourism approach by "going beyond her physical boundaries, to participate in the growth of the Asia Pacific region" (STB, 1996a, p. 17). Through this strategy, Singapore will no longer be just a beneficiary of tourism inflows, but also its primary generator. The transborder approach encourages businesses in Singapore to expand to the rest of south-east Asia and it also encourages visitors to travel to neighbouring locales after visiting Singapore. As the gateway to the region, Singapore positions itself as a primal node in the regional hierarchy of south-east Asian cities. Presently Singapore hopes to harness its strengths in air and sea port development to serve as a cruise hub for the region (Kumar and Lee, 1991; Peisley, 1993). By at-

tracting international visitors to south-east Asia via Singapore, the city-state benefits from the influx of cruise tourists as well as the chance of becoming an investment centre for cruise- and shipping-related companies (Hsu, 1995).

Singapore's tourism best practices above are cogently summarised by the STB's stated intentions to "redefine tourism", "reformulate the tourism product" and "reconfigure new tourism space" (STB, 1996a). However, we argue that this vision of a tourism capital is highly contested and that there are inevitable challenges to be considered. First, the notion of urban thematic development has been negatively perceived as a form of tourism promotion rather than as an avenue to enrich Singaporean lifestyle. Indeed, thematic enhancement is not a new phenomenon as witnessed by past conservation efforts in the Civic and Colonial District in the 1980s. Much of the fruit of earlier thematic programmes has been the subject of research, and a disconcerting finding from these studies is that both tourists and Singaporeans feel the government's efforts have been mainly dictated by tourist demands. This has resulted in élitist landscapes devoid of a local sense of place (see, for example, Kong and Yeoh, 1994; Teo and Huang, 1995; Chang, 1996, 1997).

Recent debates on the STB's proposed plans for a revamped Chinatown exemplify deep-seated antagonisms towards tourist-linked projects. Unveiled in 1998, the STB's plans to create themed streets (such as Food Street or Tradition Street); elemental gardens (featuring the five elements of Chinese mythology); and a village theatre featuring staged operas and performances have been vociferously attacked in the press and public forums for creating an Orientalist caricature of Chinatown, sanitised for foreign consumption. Against an upswell of local criticism, the STB was forced back to the drawing-board to reconceive a blueprint that speaks directly to Singapore's immigrant Chinese past. Under its new plans, the elemental gardens have been erased and an interpretative centre celebrating the stories of the local inhabitants—

including disenfranchised coolies and immigrants—will be constructed. The STB explains that the new Chinatown will be a "magnet for locals" and ongoing consultations with the public will be conducted to ensure that the place "delivers an experience that is authentic and heartfelt for Singaporeans and residents here" (cited in *The Straits Times*, 29 December 1998). This approach of consciously integrating local needs in tourist projects must similarly inform the development of other thematic sites like Pulau Ubin and Little India in order to be accepted by Singaporeans (Begam, 1997; Chang, 2000).

Secondly, Singapore's ambition to be a tourism gateway presupposes an unchallenged hegemony which is clearly not the case given the tourism–politics of the region (Low and Toh, 1997; Chang, 1998). Rival cities like Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok, and those afar like Hong Kong, are investment centres in their own right and compete aggressively as spatial sponges for tourism investments. For example, under its 'Amazing Thailand' policy, one of Bangkok's professed roles is to be a tourism gateway for Indo-China. Bangkok is already a popular investment node for travel-related companies with investments in Cambodia and Vietnam, and its central location along international air routes rivals Singapore's as a transport hub. With the opening of new airports in 'secondary cities', alternative gateways are constantly being churned up in the forms of Kuala Lumpur, Macau, Hong Kong and Bangkok (Bailey, 1996). Indeed, Singapore's quest to be a nodal city in the urban regional hierarchy is highly contested because of the constant threat of 'dehubbing' by rival localities, and the fluctuating fortunes of neighbouring countries.

The challenges sketched above compel us to acknowledge the local repercussions of Singapore's global tourism ambitions. The desire to attract tourists to the country and to serve as a gateway to the region certainly engenders widespread transformations of local landscapes and a reconfiguration of Singapore's position in the regional hierarchy of cities. As a tourism capital negotiating the

transnational flows of people and capital, the Singapore state must be prepared for the challenges of regional competition from other would-be tourism capitals, as well as the voices of dissent emanating from the grassroots. Reconciling local and regional tensions with Singapore's international ambitions becomes an imperative in a globalising city-state.

2.4 Creative Specialists: Creating a Symbolic Economy through the Arts

The STB's goal of attracting tourism investments constitutes only one aspect of the EDB's (Economic Development Board) larger goal of spearheading a 'lifestyle services cluster' in Singapore. According to EDB, five sectors constitute this cluster:

(1) tourism and leisure services;
(2) the arts;
(3) media services;
(4) medical services; and
(5) education services (EDB, 1995, p. 34).

The aim is to develop Singapore as a 'global city with total business capabilities' in tertiary sectors while simultaneously promoting the 'softer aspects' of life. These 'software' businesses serve as a form of 'cultural capital' which imbues places with an image of social vibrance and a high quality of life (Bianchini, 1991; Zukin, 1995). Developing a thriving cultural industry is also key to fulfilling the symbolic function of projecting the country multifariously as a global city, an exciting tourist destination, a viable investment venue and a good home in which to live. Three interrelated best practices are implicit in Singapore's quest to cultivate a creative lifestyle industry.

The first best practice is to market Singapore as a 'Global City for the Arts', targeting sophisticated cultural tourists. In an era of niche marketing and tourism specialisations (Poon, 1989), arts tourism allows Singapore to focus on a particularly high-yield and long-staying market, a niche group which futurologist John Naisbitt (1990, cited in Kotler *et al.*, 1993, p. 327) predicts will be-

come the world's largest leisure consumers. Towards this end, many arts attractions and events have been staged in Singapore such as Tresors—the International Arts and Antiques Fair; Broadway productions of *Cats*, *Phantom of the Opera* and *Les Miserables*; as well as popular entertainment events ranging from DisneyFest to pop, jazz and new-age music concerts. Marketing these events regionally has attracted Malaysians, Indonesians and other Asian tourists. For example, tourist presence at *Phantom of the Opera* contributed S$1 million in revenues alone (*The Peak*, 1997, p. 98) while Tresors 1996 attracted 50 tourist 'arts packages' constituting 200 hotel room nights (STB, 1996c, p. 38). Capitalising on Western art forms, Singapore hopes to attract a burgeoning Asian market by providing an alternative to Western cultural hubs such as New York and London.

Apart from targeting tourists, a second best practice is to develop Singapore as an arts business hub. Replicating its successful hub concept in manufacturing, finance, transport and communications, a similar ambition is envisioned for arts and culture. Hence, new incentive schemes, subsidies and infrastructure have been developed to fuel the arts as a source of jobs, revenues and investment (EDB, 1995; STB, 1995; Rajendra, 1998). Education in the arts was revised in 1998 to produce practitioners to meet the labour needs of the nascent industry (*The Straits Times*, 21 September 1998). Ambitious plans have been drawn up to develop new venues for the performing arts, museums and galleries.

The third but perhaps least obvious best practice is the EDB's deployment of the arts as a vehicle to negotiate transnational communities. This negotiation process takes two forms: attracting global talent and retaining local community. On the one hand, the arts function as a cultural magnet to attract all forms of foreign expertise, expatriates and talents to work and live in Singapore. This includes creative specialists as well as foreign talents in other sectors lured by Singapore's vibrant cosmopolitan ambience. On the other hand, a lively cultural scene also

serves as a social glue, retaining local residents by offering an improved standard of living rivalling the best of other global cities. The 'global city for the arts' vision therefore fulfils economic goals and socio-political agendas. In an era where people flows are as fluid as capital flows, the cultural industry takes on the symbolic role of "strategic place marketing" to satisfy the needs of its key constituencies comprising citizens, investors and workers, as well as to attract potential new businesses, tourists and residents (Kotler *et al.*, 1993, p. 18).

The material bases of Singapore's cultural production have provoked two main strands of local debate. The 'symbolic economy' of the arts is criticised because the arts and culture are being nurtured in Singapore for their economic worth rather than for their own intrinsic value. For example, the concept of arts hubbing emphasises massive infrastructural development, the import of foreign cultural specialists and recognises the needs of tourists. The benefits to local practitioners and experimental arts groups, and the attention to smaller-scale development projects are less visible. A vocal critic of the hubbing concept is T. Sasitharan, then Artistic Director of The Substation who explains (cited in Rajendra, 1998, p. 10):

> The hub model works for sea and air ports. It will not do for culture and the arts. It will retard the growth of our indigenous arts development and in the long run will be detrimental to Singaporean artists. Adoption of the hub model has led to the development of infrastructure over the development of manpower and skills—it emphasises hardware over software. And I believe it will not be sustainable.

One example of hardware emphasis is The Esplanade—Theatres by the Bay, which is the most expensive infrastructural development in the arts. To be completed over several phases from 2001 onwards, The Esplanade comprises several theatre and performance spaces costing an estimated S$400 million. The goal of this massive undertaking reinforces the country's keen interest in host-

ing hallmark events and foreign entertainment acts, but locals question the benefits that Singaporean practitioners will enjoy. Emphasising infrastructure ('hardware') without a concomitant cultivation of local manpower ('software') will run the risk of developing a city with all the trappings of a global hub but without a bedrock of local talent to fuel the ambition. Jonathan Benavides, Director of Andres Contemporary Art, had this to say of the government's mindset:

> I think the problem in Singapore is that they [the government] see art as trade, the way you see watches, furniture or plants. So, it's just a trade and everything goes through the same procedure and I think that's wrong; that's wrong because art is culture. I always think Singapore is like a human body that is done up—all the buildings are there, the money and the infrastructure and the security and so forth and then the arts come to fill a part of this body. And I think that's one of the problems; the art business is not the same as selling watches (personal interview, 12 March 1998).

Cynics regard The Esplanade as the government's way of boosting the arts scene by attracting blockbuster foreign acts rather than providing a seedbed for home-grown artistes. For example, the cancellation of plans to build the smaller theatres, according to Guarav Kripalni General Manager of Singapore Repertory Theatre (SRT), is an unfortunate slap in the face for local arts practitioners:

> It is a shame that they [the government] scrapped those smaller theatres, as they are needed to build up a vibrant local arts scene. So what you have now is the 2,000 seat auditorium. How many local theatre groups can fill a 2000 seat auditorium? SRT and maybe Action Theatre. Of these two and only over an extended period of time can we fill the 2000 seat auditorium. SRT can only do this once or twice a year. We need to do smaller shows the rest of

the time because of our budget (cited in Lee, 1999, p. 26).

The rush to develop Singapore as a global city for the arts has therefore prioritised mega events, hallmark infrastructure and the 'borrowing' of international artistes. More must certainly be done at the grassroots level to stimulate local talent and to provide modestly scaled infrastructure.

A second area of debate pertains to the 'local peculiarities' of a 'global city'. As an entertainment hub, Singapore is expected to conform to international norms in artistic and cultural practices, a requirement which many creative specialists feel the government has been slow to adhere to. Recently ventilated debates on the NAC's strict rulings on public busking, the Police Authority's unconventional regulations on pop concerts and the government's censure of local writer Catherine Lim for her political views provoke questions on Singapore's readiness to be a vibrant cultural hub. The policing of pop concerts offers an illuminating case in point. Prior to the relaxing of regulations in October 1998, concert organisers had to follow strict rules such as not allowing performers to interact with the audience, preventing dancing by members of the public and installing barricades in front of stages. These regulations are hostile to international performers and tourists, and conflict with Singapore's ambition to be an entertainment hub. They have also given rise to criticisms that pop concerts in Singapore are 'sub-standard' because performers are cowed by police regulations to practice self-censorship (*The Straits Times*, 23 March 1998). Hence Michael Roche, formerly of Lushington Entertainments, spoke of the difficulties in negotiating between locally peculiar government dictates and the demands of performers like Rod Stewart, Michael Jackson and Kenny G. In the field of the visual arts, Benavides of Andres Contemporary Art also articulated his fear of displaying works of nudes, even those by Picasso, for fear of receiving censure and fines.

The government's gradual programme of 'prudent liberalization' aimed at relaxing rules on censorship of films, media and live performances in the late 1990s is informed by its desire to compete internationally with other global cities and cultural capitals (Tamney, 1995, p. 155). Cynics, however, question whether "a vibrant arts scene could ever be the result of government blue-prints" and whether an artistic society can be fostered through an economics-driven programme of change (*Harvard Asia Pacific Review*, 1996/97, p. 80). It has also been questioned whether the current climate of liberalisation is the outcome of social progress or simply a knee-jerk response to the exigencies of tourism promotion and capitalist accumulation (*The Substation*, 1996).

The goal of developing Singapore as a cultural and entertainment capital peopled with creative talents, tourists and skilled migrant workers has certainly raised important questions of local identity in a globalising city-state. Indeed, the quest to embrace Western art forms and entertainment events as part of Singapore's cultural resource base has prompted many to question the place (or lack thereof) of Asian arts and creative expressions in the country. The desire to promote Western art forms may run the risk of marginalising local talents, rendering Singapore as a global city for the 'borrowed arts'. In its quest to be a global cultural hub, local best practices must be questioned anew and realigned along international standards. The direction taken by the government to liberalise is a prudent first step, but more should be done to give creative specialists a freer hand to shape Singapore's cultural and artistic landscape (Sasitharan, 1996).

3. Conclusion

In this paper, we explore the construction of Singapore as a global city and meeting-place of transnational communities comprising four groups: high-skilled managerial élites; low-waged immigrant communities; global and regional tourists; and creative specialists in the field of arts. As Singapore aims to be a 'global city' as well as the 'best home' for

its citizens, the tensions between its global aspirations and local assertions have to be constantly renegotiated. Amidst these negotiations, the Singapore state has been active in the forging of a vision for the future (often acronymised as 'Singapore 21') which continues 'the Singapore story' (a catchphrase which encapsulates another state construction tracing Singapore's trajectory of success from the past to the present) into the new millennium, envisaged as an age which brooks no retreat from the forces and consequences of globalisation.

In this context, the Singapore state has already begun engaging with a number of 'best practices' to further Singapore's globalising vision. To position the city as an international hub for business, information and knowledge, as well as a springboard for venturing into the region, Singapore's economic architects have developed a concerted effort to augment and develop the pool of transnational talent. This includes both foreigners and Singaporeans who are equipped and willing to respond to globalising and regionalising forces with the transnational finesse of navigating successfully between being 'home' and 'away' at the same time. Global cities, however, are not constituted solely by transnational élites; instead, the reproduction of the global managerial and professional labour-force is predicated on

> the low-wage service and manufacturing jobs that service both the expanding, highly specialised service sector and the high-income lifestyle of those employed in the specialised, expanding service sector (Sassen, 1991, p. 315).

While this is so, fears of the 'peripheralisation of the core' have meant that globalising cities such as Singapore have introduced stringent, finely calibrated policies regulating the inflow of low-skilled transnational migrants on a 'use and discard' principle.

Singapore's best practice in tourism has been to redefine the very parameters of 'tourism' such that both visitors and investments are being catered for. The planning implications are multifold as 'strategic tourism marketing' is no longer confined to beautifying the city, but also provides the requisite infrastructure to facilitate capital investment and wealth creation in the region. In the area of culture, Singapore aspires to be a 'global city for the arts'. An economistic approach is adopted, deploying culture as a multipurpose tool to attract niche tourists and skilled talent, to develop new service sectors and to upgrade the quality of lives of Singaporeans. The planning implications have been to develop the cultural infrastructure, to market Singapore as a pleasant place in which to live and work and to realign local rules of governance in tandem with international standards.

As mentioned earlier, the processes of globalisation and transnationalisation in Singapore are certainly not new. In fact, as King (1997, p. 8) asserted, colonial cities in the 19th century were the first globally multiracial, multicultural, multicontinental societies in the world. What are novel, however, are the particular configurations of activities and people in cities; the intensity of interconnections between communities; as well as the types of problems which are emerging.

Hannerz's (1993) paper on cultural flows in world cities presents a framework to identify different transnational activities and people in Singapore. The 1990s marks a dawning in the country's role as a global city in many areas—for example, in finance, business, tourism, culture and the arts. We argue that Singapore's global city status has informed its configuration of people and activities comprising corporate élites, immigrant populations, world travellers and creative specialists. This particular configuration is in turn the outcome of local policies, reflecting the government's overarching strategy of 'bringing the world to Singapore' (EDB, 1995) as well as its more recent efforts to create a 'better home' through the Singapore 21 initiative.

The distinctive character and problems of global cities emerge from their disparate communities comprising transients, sojourners, immigrants and citizens, and their interactions with each other. In many ways,

Singapore has always been a community of locals and cosmopolitans, of insiders and outsiders. As an immigrant society, the earliest challenge of independence was to create a cohesive community among disparate ethnic groups. As a transnational society in the 1990s, the challenge is to quell tensions between multiple local and foreign groups in what Short (1996) calls a 'new urban order', and what Appadurai (1990) describes as a fluid, fractured and shifting 'ethnoscape'. While not new, these issues have been thrown up in sharp relief by the rapid influx of 'foreigners in our midst': from 9 per cent in 1980, the proportion of foreigners has jumped to 14 per cent in 1990 and reached 24 per cent in 1999 (in other words, 1 in 4 residents in Singapore is a 'foreigner') (*The Business Times*, 21 March 2000).

Perhaps the most obvious tension lies in the local–foreign divide. While national identity is arguable in a nascent state in Singapore, it is clear that the onslaught of globalisation debates in recent years has honed a sense of who the 'locals' are, in counterpoint to the 'foreigners'. This is evident in the polarisation of 'local' and 'foreign' in the various debates on the privileges of the citizen *vis-a-vis* the non-citizen and the constitution of an 'ideal ratio' between locals and foreigners (*The Straits Times*, 1 May 2000) and is also clearly distilled in the portrayal of the 'cosmopolitan' versus the 'heartlander', terms which have gained currency as a means to define the 'local'. In the words of the Prime Minister, while 'cosmopolitans' are international in outlook, skilled in banking, information technology, engineering, science and technology, and able to navigate comfortably anywhere in the world, 'heartlanders' are parochial in interest and orientation, make their living within the country, and play a major role in maintaining core values and social stability (Goh, 1999b). Even as Singaporeans tussle with how to define themselves, they have also to come to terms with the foreigners in their midst. Singaporeans' attitudes towards foreigners have been expressed in three ways (*The Straits Times*, 21 September 1997): 'looking up to

them' (the colonial mentality that the expatriate is always right); 'looking down on them' (antagonism towards foreign domestic and manual workers); and 'fear of them' (fear of their physical presence and their 'taking our jobs, our children's places in schools, and marrying our daughters'). None of these attitudes helps to resolve the tensions between 'us' and 'them' or to provide a certain 'emotional thickness' (to paraphrase Amin and Thrift, 1992) to cope with the true breadth and depth of cosmopolitanism. The entrenched divides between insiders and outsiders have been most prominent in debates on how the economic pie is to be shared, but is also manifest elsewhere. For example, our discussion has shown how locals are sceptical of tourist-geared development projects and quibble over whether cultural changes are directed at them or towards attracting foreigners. Reconciling the goals of a 'global city' and 'best home' will be difficult if these tensions remain unresolved.

In envisioning a global city of flows, another issue which has to be grappled with is the whole notion of 'home/citizenship'. Marked by significant citizen-absences and non-citizen-presences, citizenship and the rights to participate in the public sphere within the global city-state can no longer be defined solely on the basis of presence in a residential community or place (Staeheli and Thompson, 1997). The category 'citizen' (and its converse 'non-citizen') has to be dismantled and reconstructed to remain relevant to the reality of the kaleidoscopic ethnoscape of the global city, perhaps by associating rights and responsibilities to different degrees of permanence rather than binary categories of citizen–non-citizen. This will be a difficult political manoeuvre, given the anxieties about foreigners who invade the terrain of citizenry (for example, those in the 'in-between' Permanent Resident category who enjoy certain 'citizen privileges', or foreign workers who are given access to 'community' resources) embedded in the Singaporean psyche. It is also unclear how notions of the 'global citizen' and 'cosmopolitan living' will dovetail with the on-go-

ing project of nation-building based on the racial arithmetic of the four foundation 'races' as closed categories, a formula with little room for foreign others.

At a different end of the spectrum, citizen-absences also have to be addressed. The idea of the 'virtual state' predicated on information networks binding Singaporeans wherever they are in the world to their 'home' has been mooted. Recent debates on the question of 'overseas voting', however, suggest that the teasing apart of 'nationality' and 'place' has yet to be resolved. Against the state's claim that "overseas voters are a small minority and do not justify having a complicated voting system for them to cast their ballots" (*The Straits Times*, 14 October 1998), several non-resident citizens have argued that not only does this amount to treating Singaporeans overseas as 'second-class' citizens, it also contradicts the state's go-regional, go-global push. Two such 'absent' citizens wrote:

> For the many Singaporeans who have responded to the authorities' call to go global and for the many who are thinking of it, official responses so far on overseas voting are of no help. If we leave Singapore, we will be considered lesser citizens. If we stay in Singapore, we will never be able to acquire the necessary knowledge and gain the relevant experience to help our country become an international player (*The Straits Times*, 21 October 1998).

Finally, an issue which lies at the heart of the global city vision which has been given far less attention in public discourse is the interconnections and interdependence of the different transnational streams whose itineraries meet in the global city. We have already argued that the social reproduction of the élite workforce including 'foreign talent' in the global city is predicated on the services of the low-wage, low-skilled sector which often comprised other foreigners. The failure to give emphasis to the interdependence of the two groups of transnationals is partly the failure to take into account the significance of the reproductive sphere in the production

and sustenance of the global city. The large inflow of foreign domestic workers into the global city is a response to the developing crisis in the reproductive sphere as more local women are encouraged to enter the paid workforce in a globalising economy as well to the demands for (lowly) paid domestic service by the global (highly paid) expatriate labour-force which sustains the multinational business space in the city (Yeoh *et al.*, 2000).

Earlier, we have also shown that the transnational business class and creative specialists in Singapore are two groups which the government wants to attract simultaneously to fulfil Singapore's goal as a 'global city with total business capabilities'. A pool of creative specialists in the arts and culture will in turn attract another group of transnationals, namely international and regional tourists. Corporate élites, immigrant communities, creative specialists and world tourists are all transnational communities which people the contemporary global city, and whose interaction with one another and with the local citizens constitute the greatest challenge for policy-makers. As Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (*The Sunday Times*, 8 November 1998) points out, for Singapore to remain "relevant to the world", it needs

> a continued inflow of talent; however [while] the logic is compelling, implementation will not be simple. Integrating a steady flow of newwcomers into our society will need methodical effort, to inculcate in them a shared Singaporean outlook and identity, while retaining the diverse strengths which they bring as immigrants. We seek the ferment of a new society, yet the cohesion of a mature one.

There is a need to acknowledge the different transnational flows outlined above as interdependent categories, and to understand global cities as meeting places for multiple communities whose intersection in place reflects their symbiotic though not always conflict-free relationship with each other. It is in this light that we conclude there is no standard 'best practice' for 'model cities' because the

configuration, intensity and problems of transnational communities are different from place to place. Nevertheless, as the Singapore case testifies, site-specific 'best practices' have been and will always be forged in cities with an eye towards being cosmopolitan, creative and humane all at the same time. How successful they are will provide the ground for further debates and analyses.

Notes

1. The other "dilemmas" are "less stressful life vs retaining drive"; "needs of senior citizens vs aspirations of the young"; and "consultation and consensus vs decisiveness and quick action".

2. In Singapore, a skilled worker generally regarded as belonging to the category 'expatriate' is differentiated from an unskilled worker in that the former is issued with an employment pass, while the latter obtains a work permit. To qualify for an employment pass, two main eligibility factors are used: first, the applicant should possess a recognised diploma, degree, or professional qualification and secondly, he or she should earn a basic salary of no less than $2000. Unlike unskilled workers, they are permitted to marry locals or to bring their immediate 'dependants' into Singapore. From 1 September 1998, the employment pass function of the Singapore Immigration and Registration under the Ministry of Home Affairs was transferred to the Foreign Manpower Employment Division of the Ministry of Manpower "to allow for better management of the employment of foreigners in Singapore". The Work Permit and Employment Pass schemes were reworked using a new framework comprising three categories: P passes for those holding administrative, professional and managerial jobs, entrepreneurs and investors, as well as specialist talent such as world-class artistes and musicians; Q passes for skilled workers and technicians; and R passes for semi-skilled and unskilled workers "whose employment shall continue to be subject to the full range of controls in place today for Work Permit holders" (*Manpower News*, August 1998).

3. Ethnographic studies giving emphasis to the presence of foreign workers in public space in Singapore can be found in Begam (1997); Yeoh and Huang (1998, 1999) and Yeo (1999).

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