Re-scaling home and world: Singaporean artists in New York City

An Honors Thesis for the Department of Anthropology

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Tufts University, 2019

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ... 3
INTRODUCTION ... 4
CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW ... 13
The nation as category ... 13
Diaspora and cosmopolitanism ... 17
Cultural production and culture workers ... 22
Global city and nation-state ... 25
CHAPTER TWO: HOW SINGAPORE BECAME SMALL ... 27
A history of nationalism and the arts ... 28
Singapore as un-home ... 33
CHAPTER THREE: CITIZEN-ARTISTS AND REGIMES OF VALUE ... 37
The citizen-artists ... 38
Stayers and quitters ... 39
A lack of coherence ... 41
Living and working in small space ... 44
“Freedom to” and “Freedom from” ... 47
Artists in diaspora as creators of value coherence ... 51
Value coherence in diaspora ... 51
Value coherence between state and artist ... 56
Representation as value coherence ... 60
CHAPTER FOUR: PRODUCTIONS OF HOME AND UN-HOME ... 62
Appropriating the idiom of “home” ... 63
“This” “Is” “Home” ... 64
Performing the home as un-home ... 68
Singapore by Night ... 74
Homes and worlds ... 77
CONCLUSION: RE-SCALING SINGAPORE ... 82
BIBLIOGRAPHY ... 88

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was only possible because of some dear friends, mentors, supporters, readers, interlocutors. Thanks must go first to my father for giving me the time and space to explore, and to my brother for his patient cheerleading. My professors have been a transformative part of my undergraduate studies; I am so fortunate to have Professor Amahl Bishara's support and mentorship for this thesis. Thank you for your reminders to trust in my own voice. Thanks also to Professor Alex Blanchette for introducing frameworks and theories that have been seminal for me. Grace Talusan read my first screenplay, and since then, her honest, compassionate criticism has shaped my writing and research. Professor Jean Wu's love and care made this thesis possible.

I have learnt so much from the communities that welcomed me – through you I know myself. Gratitude to my friends in the Tufts Asian Student Coalition for your tireless work and care for one another. Thank you for holding me and making me laugh through the downer that is senior year, Wilson, Ana Sofía, Jacqueline, Jules, Patty, Parker, Tiara, Claire. I celebrate all the meals shared, the debriefs and check-ins, the ups and downs. Ashlynna, you continue to inspire me, and this community misses you. Sukie and Alison, I am so lucky to have had your support throughout this endeavour. Ashley, your comments gave me the momentum I needed to finish my revisions, and I am glad to have come full circle with you.

Thank you Hong-Ling, Elizabeth, Jeremy, Kenneth, Elisabeth, Johanna, Aaron, Ruth, Mei-Ann, Geraldine, Kimberly, Jee Leong, and a few I cannot name here, for your generosity of time and feeling. Thanks must also go to Elizabeth (Dossett) for sharing that beautiful apartment, and to Wan Yii and Nivita for sharing your floorspace.

To my family at 15 Teele: this is so bittersweet. Thank you Emily, Emily, Madeline, and Marissa, for creating a magical place where all things are possible.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores different sites where the structures and strategies of nation-building are made visible in diaspora. I argue first that Singapore's smallness is not just geographical – it is a political and ideological project to uphold the state and compel a commitment to the futurity of the nation-state. This is naturalised through a discourse of nation-as-home; however, this discourse is open to subversion, through the representations of a plurality of homes that perform Singapore on different scales. Artists and writers in diaspora are engaged in producing the un-home, which disrupts the boundaries and exclusions inherent in how home and nation have been constructed. Throughout my research, I will continue to ask: What does the work of producing and reproducing the nation look like? What values are being contested and performed in cultural production? Is the space of Singapore large enough to encompass the plurality of values, ideologies, and lives? What about the space of New York City? This is thus a project of re-scaling and of re-examining what I (and perhaps others) have assumed to be true about what is possible "here" or "there."

My research begins with questions. In the pursuit of an undergraduate degree, I found myself part of a growing diaspora of Singaporeans living in the US. What brought us here? What did we expect to find? What had pushed us out of Singapore, and what pulled us to the US and to particular cities within it? The narratives I encountered in my education and from peers and family were full of contradictory discourses and feelings; they suggested that there was something worth exploring further, to make sense of.

I attended the 2016 Singapore Literature Festival in New York City as a first-year at Tufts, feeling alien in communities where I had expected to feel welcomed, uncertain of my place in campus politics that seemed to insist on my being person of colour, an Asian-American, international, all of the above and none of the above. I did not know what I could claim, although I liked the idea that I might have some agency in how I wanted to claim these

identities and communities – something that had felt absent growing up in Singapore. I arrived with some ambivalence towards my home country, hyper-aware of its problematic politics, especially in the eyes of my US-based peers. When I joined the festival's volunteer team, I imagined that I might meet others who felt the same. Hopping out of a taxi in Midtown, balancing a tray of curry puffs for the reception at the National Opera Centre, I ran into another volunteer who asked me if I was from Raffles' Girls School. She looked to be in her 50s, chirpy and excitable. I replied that I was and she started to reminisce about her school days, triumphant in the recognition that we shared an alma mater. Raffles girls recognised one another, and Raffles girls were everywhere. She meant this literally – this secondary school with a few hundred students in each cohort sent its alumni across the world to study, work, and live. I tested into the school when I was twelve, and have reaped the benefits of its name ever since.

Raffles Girls' School was named after Sir Stamford Raffles, often called Singapore's "founder." Raffles was a botanist who had been the first to propose Singapore as the ideal location for a British colony and port. My secondary school is one of many local institutions that are named for Raffles, a label that signals a pedigree of some kind because imperial, Anglocentric education was (and remains) a key to social mobility under colonial governance. Thus this was also a transnational education; it made the world feel accessible through knowledge, as I read English Literature and studied world history. It was also where it first occurred to me that I might go abroad for university, surrounded by peers who were told we were bound for a bright future, if only we worked hard enough to prove we deserved it. Raffles Girls' School, and the family of Raffles institutions, are not a norm in Singapore and are not accessible to the majority of Singaporeans, and we were told that we were exceptional for having made it.

Re-encountering Raffles in New York City has helped me realise the simultaneous smallness and largeness of Singapore and how often I have had to jump across those scales. I

was always told that Singapore was small, vulnerable, precarious. I was also told that Singapore was exceptional, infallible, irreprehensible. Those contradictory, oppositional discourses are co-constituted and rely on each other to exist. It is Singapore's success that makes it so precarious; it is Singapore's vulnerability that has pushed it to thrive. Having grown up in Singapore, I find myself trapped by these contradictory self-definitions, and I now attempt to see beyond them. This thesis is a project of writing about Singapore from a distance.

In the summer of 2018, I began to meet with Singaporean artists, writers, and theatremakers based in New York City to conduct interviews and fieldwork. All are the first in their family to have moved to the US, and all retain Singaporean citizenship. They seemed to be at once transient and settled in New York and shared their experience of the city with me with an intimate familiarity. They are thus a liminal group straddling the line between "here" and "there," although many would not describe themselves as rootless; in fact, place and locality remain common themes in their work and lives. I wanted to know how they understood Singapore and to think with them about what continues to happen in Singapore today. They are not just interviewees but interlocutors, and our respective imaginaries of Singapore are put into dialogue in this thesis. This is a group that does not fit neatly into categories of immigrant, diaspora, or transnational; these are complex and distinct categories that I will discuss in my literature review. I also draw on studies of nationalism and transnationalism, scale, diaspora and cosmopolitanism, and the legacy of colonial history in Singapore, all of which I will explain in greater detail in the chapter that follows. This will give an overview that will contextualise my arguments, as well as situate my research in different disciplines and explain why I have chosen to focus on these particular sites.

My second chapter asks how Singapore was scaled, beginning with the history of British colonial presence on the island – not because this is where the region's history begins, but because this marks the emergence of the post-colonial nation-state. Singapore as we know

it did not exist before British colonisation, which facilitated the settlement of immigrants from East and South Asia. I will then look at the trajectory of arts and cultural policy that are both premised on assumptions of scale and smallness and that perpetuate them by restricting the political participation of citizens and artists. Cultural policy has been wielded to perform the fantasies of the political elite (Chong 2010, 136); one part of that fantasy is that of the nation-as-home, which the state uses as a metaphor to articulate its ideologies of good citizenship (Velayutham 2007, 102). Moving away from this state-focused perspective thus requires a closer look at how Singapore is produced as "unhome" (Bhabha 1992, 141). Scholars have sought to read and understand Singapore society through its texts, including media production, common space, cinema, literature, and more; these provide an alternative mapping of the nation. My interlocutors are part of this mapping, and through their work and lived experiences, they were able to negotiate a different relationship to nation and home over time.

This scale of Singapore and of Singaporean citizenship produces a restrictive "regime of value" (Appadurai 1986, 4) which frames the work of art as a nation-building project. Within this regime, the only way art can be valuable is through its service to the nation-state. This creates the contradictory figure of the citizen-artist who is beholden to two disparate regimes of value: that of citizenship, and that of artistic production. I explore this contradiction in my third chapter through the narratives of my interlocutors; many of whom continue to participate in Singapore's political discourse despite their feelings of alienation; even as they critique the state, they also create value for the state. To be a good Singaporean citizen requires an investment in the success of the nation-state. To be a good artist requires freedom of expression and a freedom from the exigencies of the market. For some, the freedom to do both might be found in New York City, which motivates their choice to live and work there. Ultimately, I argue that artists in diaspora are tasked with creating value coherence across different regimes – in other words, they must clarify the value of their work across different systems of meaning.

In the fourth and final chapter, I focus in on "home" and "un-home" not as categories or containers of specific characteristics, but rather as lived, practiced, performed, and produced. I consider multiple, contradictory, overlapping productions of home and un-home through fieldwork at the 2018 Singapore Literature Festival and the 2018 National Day reception at the Singapore Consulate, both of which take place in New York City. Homi Bhabha uses the term "unhomely" to describe the disorienting, uncanny, terrifying sense of estrangement that comes with relocation. In relocation, the world "shrinks […] and then expands enormously," and "the border between home and world becomes confused" (1992, 141). Drawing on Bhabha's writing, I will analyse the mechanisms used at each event to create and entrench the construction of home. At the National Day reception, the nation was produced in part by suggesting specific criteria for Singaporean-ness and enlisting Singaporeans in attendance as citizen-workers to promote the nation abroad. On the other hand, at the Singapore Literature Festival, the nation became a signifier mapped out through idioms of culture, exchange, and plurality, evinced by theme "Say It Differently". However, my interviews inadvertently became a space where the "homely" was produced through the labour of home-making: this was home as mutuality, reciprocity, familiarity, and care. These three sites, then, blur the lines between public and private space, and between state and personal project. Rather than differentiate them as events taking place on national, institutional, and personal scales, I hope to locate them on the same scale to contest the assumption that a singular, exclusive imaginary of home should be privileged.

Singapore has always been a transnational project, as Appiah writes (2018). Singapore's history as a nation-state comprises rapid transformations from British colony to Malaysian Federation to Singapore in under a century, far too quick for a population to even begin to see itself as a discrete category of "Singaporeans" – especially an ethnically Chinese population that is largely not indigenous to the region. Like many postcolonial nations, its

citizens are "prisoners of a cultural ambiguity," (Fitch 1982, cited in Kong and Yeoh 1994). For the ruling party in the 1970s[1], identity and culture were bastions of morality that were assailed by "Westernisation" spurred by high economic growth and English proficiency. The "Western" was "a euphemism for individualism, hedonism and liberalism" (Chong 2010, 136), hence the struggle for the preservation of "Asian" culture and "Asian" values to retain committed citizens.

Before I begin my argument proper, it is necessary to characterise the political culture of Singapore as I understand it in order to situate cultural production in this landscape. Literature around nation-building in Singapore has often explained nationhood through phases marked by state-led initiatives (Velayutham 2007) (Kong 2012). Political scientists have categorised Singapore as semi-democratic and semi-authoritarian, a style of governance that has been described as "the perfect model of political rationalism and social modernization" (Nasir and Turner 2013, 341), where good citizens – those who can be trusted to uphold the ruling party's values – are cultivated, and bad citizens are cast out. Historically, activists and opposition party politicians have been arrested, detained, and/or sued by the ruling party in order to undermine the power and legitimacy of government opposition in any form, and this has more recently targeted human rights activists like Jolovan Wham[2] and Leong Sze Hian[3]. Censorship as one form of restriction on freedom of speech has become a national and cultural emblem that although widely satirised[4], also works more insidiously to suppress revisionist

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[1] The People's Action Party, which has dominated politics since 1959.

[2] Jolovan Wham was formerly the executive director of the Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics, which advocates for migrant workers in Singapore. In November 2016, Wham was involved in organizing a public discussion titled "Civil Disobedience and Social Movements," with Joshua Wong, a leading member of Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement, as well as local journalist Kirsten Han and activist Seelan Palay. Wham was charged in January 2019 for organizing an illegal assembly. This comes after his contempt of court charge in October 2018 for making a Facebook post that alleged that Malaysia's judges were more independent of political influence than Singapore's. (The Straits Times, Oct 9, 2018) (The Straits Times, Jan 3, 2019)

[3] Leong shared an article on Facebook in November 2018 which said that Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong was involved in money laundering from the 1Malaysia Development Berhad fund. A government agency told Leong to remove the post, which he did. In December, PM Lee sued Leong for defamation, with a letter that Leong made public calling for an apology as well as a written offer of damages. (Channel News Asia, Dec 7, 2018)

[4] Such as Royston Tan's *Cut* (2005)

historiography.[5] From independence, the state has restricted the space for discourse about what the nation is and can be, and this space has only narrowed over time; thus restrictions on political discourse are made to be elements of good citizenship and nation-building. In 2018, Ashlynna Ng, a friend and fellow Tufts student, wrote her thesis in American Studies about the survival and strategies of activism in Singapore, in the context of this history of authoritarian governance. I hope that my own thesis will continue Ashlynna's work by turning my focus to artists living in diaspora who attempt to speak to Singapore's political climate.

The arts in Singapore have offered a space of subversion to challenge this climate of fear and silence, despite attempts by the ruling party to harness artistic production for its own political and economic needs. Political theatre in Singapore originated when immigrants arrived during colonial rule, often segmented along racial and religious lines (in part because of language differences), and popular local writers are also known for their critique of state ideologies (Kok 2016, 44). The recent history of artistic production, suppression, and contestation show that the arts are also a site where the boundary of acceptable expression and good citizenship is being continually reaffirmed; as Chua Beng Huat writes, "art haunts the state which seeks to harness it" (cited in Loon et al. 2016). My interlocutors – all of whom still had family, friends, and engagements in Singapore – were well aware of this history, although they took different stances on political suppression. In contrast with this hegemonic narrative of nation-building, they often saw their work as a contest of the values and qualities of Singaporean-ness, and balanced the conditions of state funding with their own political aims.

On the two occasions that I attended the Singapore Literature Festival – 2016 and 2018 – I was struck by the fierce commitment that attendees have to talking and writing and performing "Singapore." What was the value of the festival to them? How did they understand

[5] Such as narratives of Operation Spectrum in 1987 when alleged Marxist conspirators were accused of plotting to depose the government and were detained; upon release, many went into political self-exile. (Teo and Low 2012)

the value of their Singaporean-ness, or other forms of identity? I knew, anecdotally and from my own experience, that much of what drove their movement to New York was dissatisfaction in Singapore – with life, work, space, expression, politics, culture – but they remained affixed to this imaginary of home and continued to perform it through these events and activities. It was easy to be cynical about their work and to write this off as yet another branding exercise that would extract economic value from artistic and cultural activities, an assumption underlying Singapore's approach to the creative economy (Kong 2012, 292). However, thinking of festivals as "productive of social meaning" (Frost 2016, 573) offers another reading wherein the Singapore Literature Festival and its organisers are re-inventing and re-articulating Singapore on their own terms, through a festival that is entirely volunteer-run, crowdfunded, and always free to attend. My aim is not to "evaluate" whether the festival is radical or subversive or to what extent, but to read meaning into its project in the context of Singapore politics and diasporic space.

I interviewed fourteen Singaporeans living in New York City. The majority were ethnic Chinese women, and the vast majority of Singaporeans in New York are Chinese, which speaks to the racial inequities that determine one's socioeconomic and spatial mobility.[6] Most were freelancers or worked multiple jobs while pursuing artistic projects on the side. Three worked, broadly, in literature and publishing; five worked in theatre; two worked in photography and visual arts; and one worked in sculpture. Three were students in MFA programs for playwriting and photography. Their time in the US ranged from eleven years to six months, and their ages ranged from their late 20s to late 40s. Some of these descriptions will be vague to protect the privacy of individuals who did not want to be identified. I will be naming individuals only by their first name, or with a pseudonym if they requested to be anonymous.

[6] As of June 2018, Chinese made up 74.3% of the resident population, Malays 13.4%, Indians 9.0%, and "Others" 3.2%. (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2018) The Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others (CMIO) model is based on British classification of racial identity and difference as a means of governance.

The wider relevance of this research is manifold and conjectural – in many ways this is exploratory and builds on the work of others. Singapore, as I explain above and will elaborate later, is a repressive and authoritarian state that governs through the consent of its citizen-subjects. It is a machine that works even without the enthusiastic acquiescence of its civil servants – I know this as someone who will, after graduating, be required to work in the Ministry of Communications and Information. It is thus vital to think about ways of speaking through and past that tight governance. My own location in this research has shifted, from a curious, cynical onlooker to someone engaged and hopeful. I have friendships with some of my interlocutors which I hope will last long after I finish this thesis; I have learnt from them alternative ways of being that deliberately and thoughtfully veer away from hegemonic ideals of family, personhood, work, and values. Singapore is not small, despite what we have been told. I come away from this with a sense of possibility.

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

The nation as category

Studies of the nation – which have by now expanded to address studies of transnationalism, diaspora, and movement – span various academic disciplines, including political science, anthropology, literary studies, and geography. These studies map out a contour of how the nation is conceived by different publics, and how we might conceive of it otherwise. They have sought to challenge the "naturalness" of the nation by looking at "phenomena that transgress "the national order of things" (Gupta 1997, 181, Malkki 1995, 516). As Benedict Anderson writes in his seminal work, nations are imagined communities, given that "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). That imaginary leads to further questions about who is doing the imagining, and how. This thesis seeks to build on that project by looking at creative and cultural workers in diaspora, who belong to national and non-national collectivities.

The nation has been the subject of increasing academic interest following decolonization movements from the 1970s, prompting questions about nationalism and nation-building. While early academic writing on globalization often imagined a world of free mobility and the transcendence/transgression of state borders, more contemporary literature has argued that that individuals "do not operate in free-flowing circumstances, but in environments controlled and shaped by nation-states and capital markets" (Ong 1999, 135). Neither the nation nor the globe are totalising categories, but both are sites for communities to be borne and imagined. My research privileges the nation in order to challenge it, with the intent of understanding why it has come to be such a potent category, and how the production of locality relies on a national idiom to mask increasingly transnational relations of production (Appadurai 1990, 306).

This is not to say that non-national forms of imagined community are less important. Gupta looks at examples of non-national and transnational collectivities such as the Non-Aligned Movement, which reinscribe space beyond geographical limits. By looking at non-national forms of imagined community, Gupta asks, "What is it that distinguishes and privileges nations as an imagined community, that makes them so compelling to the hearts and minds of their citizens?" (67) Yet the Non-Aligned Movement is still tied to the goal of protecting the nation-state; its materiality, the geographical and bounded space, is part of its discursive power, and reinforced by processes in which "certain spaces become enshrined as "homelands," through which ideas of "us" and "them" come to be deeply felt and mapped onto places such as nations" (76). For Gupta, it is only possible to understand nationalism "in the context of other forms of imagining community, other mechanisms for positioning subjects, other bases of identity" (74).

Similarly, Malkki's formative work in the anthropology of refugees disrupts the "natural order" of nationhood wherein diaspora, movement, and displacement are perceived as "a problem" or non-normal. Studies of displacement and movement are premised on "the supposedly normal condition of being attached to a territorialized polity and an identifiable people," (516) but we might instead locate displacement, movement, and diaspora as the "normal," and acknowledge that the regime of nation-states necessarily generates this kind of movement. Malkki and Gupta both engage with problems in the history of anthropology that rely on essentialist definitions of culture, locality, and indigeneity; they offer an important entry into problematizing the regime of nation-states.

Yet the nation seems to be the site and the category for so much political life. Robbins, citing Anderson, notes that "the very concept of politics develops in relation to the nation-state," and asks, "Can a primary concern with interests not defined by or restricted to the nation-state even count as political?" (1998, 4) I turn to Graeber's definition of politics here as the

struggle over value and values; society is an "imaginary totality" where value is realised, because value is always socially determined, and so "the ultimate stakes of political life tend to lie precisely in negotiating how these values and arenas will ultimately relate to one another." (2013, 227) For Graeber, the role of imagination is critical in political life, thus I would argue that our imaginary of the nation and the national is central to our conception of politics.

Taking the nation as a "category of practice" (Winegar 2006, 20) allows us to think about how narratives become attached and ascribed to the nation. Across Egypt, Tanzania, Venezuela, Taiwan, and elsewhere, research has demonstrated the importance of cultural politics and performance in "shaping the cultural imaginary of the nation;" through art, the nation is at once reproduced and subverted (Winegar 9; Askew 2002, 270; Guss 2000, 10; Wang 2000, 99). Art is thus a nexus where representation and expression reflect the tussle over the narratives – and therefore, the values – that consolidate the nation. For Appadurai, this contest is located in the embattled relationship between states and nations: "while nations (or more properly groups with ideas about nationhood) seek to capture or co-opt states and state power, states simultaneously seek to capture and monopolize ideas about nationhood" (1990, 303). However, this contest is not always between nation and state; it could also take the form of competing imaginaries of the nation-state, which have their own discursive power. One example might be the genre of the *bildungsroman* in postcolonial activist literature (Cheah 2003, 240) which produces a particular imaginary of the postcolonial nation. Art and literature are not merely articulations of the nation-state and its ideologies, but are also generative of its power.

Nations as projects of scale

I use the analytic of scale throughout this thesis to understand nation-states as practiced, performed, and constructed. Tsing defines ideologies of scale as "cultural claims about locality,

regionality, and globality; about stasis and circulation; and about networks and strategies of proliferation" (Tsing 2000, 347). Projects of scale-making involve contests over what scales count as relevant in different contexts; thus, for Tsing, it is inadequate to privilege globalism as a scale of analysis. Scales do not exist without being made through comparisons and contrasts, through parallels and analogies. We understand the contents of categories like the local and the global, the large and the small, through scale-making. Tsing asks, "Through what social and material processes and cultural commitments do localities or globalities come, tentatively, into being?" (348). I take up Tsing's question later in this thesis to discuss how the nation is scaled, and the implications of this project.

Scale-making is certainly a strategy of colonial governance; Lowe uses the concept of intimacy to observe colonial divisions of labour. For Lowe, this means drawing connections between sites and histories that have been conceived "in terms of vast spatial distance" geographical and conceptual, and relating histories of colonial violence across the world (2015, 18). Colonial regimes managed the contradiction between "liberal aspirations to universality" (36) and the need for labour through racialisation and modern hierarchies of race, which is one kind of scale-making project that warps the categories of universal and individual.

Scale is not reserved as a strategy for the powerful, however. Scaling, as an "inherently relational and comparative endeavor" (Carr & Lempert 2016, 3), permeates our perceptions of selves and others, us and them; we also engage in scale-making through language, work, community, and life. I draw on Susan Gal's writing on "fractal recursivity" (2016, 92) here, and later in this thesis, to discuss the political and moral implications of movement for the artists and writers I met, and how movement shaped the value of their work. Gal writes that comparison is an ideological project, such that categories are set up to be opposed and analogous, containing contradictory clusters of qualities that are then associated and mobilised in different contexts. Cultural production involves a negotiation of those contradictions. Given

the moveability of these categories, I hope to give space in this thesis for a nuanced analysis of different regimes of value.

Diaspora and cosmopolitanism

This research is based on the work and life practices of Singaporean artists, writers, and theatremakers based in New York City. Frameworks of movement, immigration and diaspora are thus central to this thesis, and the related body of literature shows the importance of the attention to diaspora in anthropology and elsewhere, and I will endeavour here to connect these themes with writing on citizenship and cosmopolitanism. The proliferation of movement around the world – temporal, geographical, affective, economic, cultural – has required new and plural (re)conceptions of citizenship and belonging. Different terms and categories are used to bring particular characteristics of citizenship and subjectivity to the fore, often calling for a "move beyond the nation" (Schueller 2009, 5) to imagine citizenship as transnational.

An understanding of citizenship as category might be developed through the rights accorded to the citizen, which is the approach of liberal political theory wherein "citizenship rights need to be differentiated in order to treat as equals individuals whose structural positions or opportunities in society are in important ways unequal" (Bauböck 2009, 477). Bauböck suggests that external citizenship has concomitant rights and duties, where "external" refers to individuals living outside the geographic space of the nation. Rather than imagining this category through rights and duties, however, I would like to turn to different conceptions of citizenship that focus on how it is articulated and claimed by connecting it to literature on cosmopolitanism.

The concept of cosmopolitanism was first articulated by Kant as a regulatory idea to protect people from the "anarchic behavior of states" in the name of common humanity (Cheah 2003, 24). Other literature has since challenged the idea that cosmopolitanism is inherently

opposed to nationalism, or that it transcends nationalism, or invokes an "uncommitted bourgeois detachment" (Cheah 31; Feld 2012, 201; Robbins 3). Bhabha and others use the term "vernacular cosmopolitanism" to negotiate the contradictions in the dichotomy evoked earlier of the rooted "local" and the floating "global." The term, like Appiah's "rooted cosmopolitanism" (Appiah 1998, 91), is an "attempt to come to terms with the conjunctural elements of postcolonial and precolonial forms of cosmopolitanism and travel" (Werbner 2016, 496). It is thus necessary to explore the ways in which that "common humanity," that membership in a particular collective termed "citizenship," is enacted and lived, beyond its legal definition.

Ong describes cultural citizenship as "a dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society" (Ong 1996, 738). This emphasises the idea that cultural citizenship is not just a category, but a claim. Drawing a comparison between affluent Chinese immigrants and Cambodian working-class refugees, Ong notes that individuals' locations in the global economy shape their access to institutions in state and civil society. Meanwhile, Rosaldo's use of "cultural citizenship" offers a category that relies on inclusivity: "the right to be different and to belong in a participatory democratic sense" (1994, 402). Cultural citizenship is vernacular in that it is experienced in material and affective ways based on one's social location; as conversations with my interlocutors will show, one's social location in one place is translated into different possibilities in another. Beyond legislative definitions, cultural citizenship highlights the social and cultural construction of the category and considers how citizenship works for marginalized groups in spite of their legal status. Both Ong and Rosaldo highlight this dimension of citizenship as lived and as produced through other structures, such as the concept of "flexible citizenship" wherein individuals with different forms of capital are subject to different forms of governmentality (Ong 1999, 136).

In a similar vein, Malini Johar Schueller, writing about local and place-based understandings of racial oppression and resistance, looks at the "asymmetries of effects and therefore obligations" in citizenship which are "engendered by imperialism" (2015, 5). Schueller uses the concept of "post-colonial citizenship" to contest the universal idea of the human and the cosmopolitan, and to critique the way in which a postcolonial approach has been "coded as a safe site providing the universalized language of hybridity and difference" and thus neglects racial formations in the US (106). The ambiguous distinction between Asian and Asian American as categories are an example of the way cosmopolitanism is raced, and engendered through racial and imperial apparatuses (Schueller 77). Particular racialized groups are subject to different oppressions, and Schueller points out that "as we continue to privilege border crossing, migration, and cosmopolitanism in order to challenge fixed identities and a hegemonic nationhood, there is a danger that the disciplinary imperatives of the racialized nation-state will be minimized" (166). How might we then conceptualise citizenship today, along porous borders, and continue to ground it in these disciplinary imperatives? How do individuals lay claim to these categories and use them strategically, to create new kinds of value and to engage in the political sphere? I will explore this further in my chapter on productions of home, and how the negotiation of racial politics in different contexts is part of a strategy of finding home-in-the-world (Bhabha 1992, 141).

I now turn to writing on diaspora as category, as identity, and as a particular kind of relationship to the nation-state. The citizen-subject and the diasporic subject are not opposite or mutually exclusive categories; both are made subjects through state apparatuses, and both lay claims to various forms of membership and belonging. All diasporas are impossible in the eyes of the nation-state, which requires a bounded kind of citizenship and a singular commitment to the interests of the nation: "Diasporas always leave a trail of collective memory about another place and time and create new maps of desire and of attachment" (Malkki 1995,

516). This makes diaspora difficult to grapple with for the nation, which operates on the assumption of an internal coherence and homogeneity - what Sassen terms a “unified spatiotemporality” (2001, 260). Délano and Gamlen, in their discussion of the relationship between “state” and “diaspora,” call diasporas “Janus-faced” because “they can be at once good and bad in the eyes of the homeland regime that reaches out to them” (2014, 45). This process of ‘reaching out’ they term “transnational governmentality,” an attempt to institutionalize this relationship across borders and oceans, and to “reproduce the citizen-sovereign relationship” (46).

On the other hand, this conception of diaspora might be unhelpfully broad. Brubaker muses on the overuse or “stretching” of the term “diaspora,” such that “every more or less dispersed population” is described in such terms. “Diaspora,” Brubaker writes, is a “category of practice” in that it is “used to make claims to articulate projects, to formulate expectations, to mobilize energies, to appeal to loyalties” (2005, 12). This echoes Cho’s argument that diaspora is a condition of subjectivity; diasporas are not simply “collections of people, communities of scattered individuals bound by some shared history, race or religion… they emerge in relation to power, in the turn to and away from power” (2007, 15). The “turn to diaspora” is an insistence on clarifying power and the legacies of colonial displacement in how we understand transnationalism and movement today (28). These histories structure the movement of my interlocutors, who work within particular imaginaries of Singapore and of New York City. Drawing on Cho again, they are both diasporic and transnational, if we understand that “[t]he difference between the transnational and the diasporic lies in the difference between those whose subjectivities emerge out of the security of moving through the world with the knowledge of a return and those whose subjectivities are conditioned by the knowledge of loss” (20). These manifest in my interviews as common threads of dissatisfaction and alienation from the nation. Rather than trying to categorise Singaporeans living in New

York City as diasporic or non-diasporic, I would like to reflect on diaspora and transnationalism as experienced, focusing on those themes of loss, distance, memory, and uncertainty.

Artistic production is a way of articulating an impossible subjectivity, a subjectivity that cannot fit within the boundaries of the nation-state. For example, queer diasporic subjects are excluded and rejected by categories of citizenship because non-heteronormative sexuality is perceived as a threat to the "familial and domestic space of the nation" as it undermines the ability of the nation to reproduce itself (Gopinath 2003, 132). Heterosexuality is a prerequisite of good citizenship. Here, Gopinath looks at South Asian diasporic narratives of sexuality in literature and film, and how nostalgia is used as means for "imagining oneself within those spaces from which one is perpetually excluded or denied existence" (151). In these narratives, queer creators "displace… heteronormativity from the realm of natural law" and launch a "critique of hegemonic constructions of both nation and diaspora from the vantage point of an 'impossible' subject" (151). The nostalgia evoked is an imagined one, a constructed idea of home. Similarly, Fortier examines narratives of queer migration in which the desire for home figures prominently; home is not only remembered or retrieved from the past, but created and inhabited. Instead of taking for granted the ideal of home as familiar and comforting, Fortier suggests that home is about motions of attachment that try to intimate and imitate "imagined homey experiences" (2003, 131). Ultimately, however, "home is never fully achieved, never fully arrived-at," because home is continually being re-conceived as "a contingent product of historical circumstances and discursive formations" (131). As I will argue later in my thesis, these (re)productions of home are also political projects, and compete with one another for discursive power.

Through literature, these "impossible subjects" produce and reproduce home. Alongside that process is the production of cosmopolitanism - not as counter or corollary, but

as simultaneous and overlapping processes. We might call this "diasporic intimacy," to borrow Boym's term, an affective experience of diaspora constituted by uprootedness and defamiliarization (Boym 1998, 499). Cosmopolitanism is not detachment, but "(re)attachment, multiple attachment, or attachment at a distance" (Robbins 1998, 3). However, because these productive processes take place within a global market for the arts, diasporic intimacy is also produced as a value, something that can be commodified. I now turn to artistic and cultural production as sites where the above ideas – of citizenship, diaspora, and nation – are articulated.

Cultural production and culture workers

Art history as a discipline has laid out its argument for the importance of art for political discourse. Art, as we understand it today, as been "safely domesticated" by its institutions; as Preziosi points out, Plato was afraid of art and its implications for the republic, because art calls attention to the artifice of representation.

> If we believe that a particular made thing - an artwork or poem or a dance or an entire built environment - represents (i.e. re-presences, or makes present again) some essence - either metaphorically 'contained' in some thing such as this text, or something absent and elsewhere - for example, things like the 'soul' or 'spirit' or 'character' or 'mentality' or 'intelligence of a person, people, time, or place - then it is obvious that the essence purportedly 'represented' *might also be represented in other ways* thereby *problematizing* the existence of that essence itself (2008, 505).

The work of art is to denaturalise representations that we take to be inherent or essential, because to read the world as one kind of representation is to recognise, implicitly, that it can be represented otherwise. It could also thus be argued that art produces "the very real world in which we actually do live our daily lives" (Preziosi 505). This leads to a dilemma for Plato, and for other political systems:

> [H]ow do you instil a securely unquestioned belief in one's city or state or nation or culture or ethnicity or identity (and not so coincidentally in one's rulers and lords) that is *amnesiac* with regard to its fabricatedness? How do you design amnesia? […] [t]he uncanny power of artistry or artifice to *both fabricate and problematize mooted* social realities and institutions; to both

> empower and disempower; to delight and thwart, simultaneously entertain and contain (508).

I quote Preziosi at length here because he demonstrates how on one hand, art is put to work by the state and helps to secure its legitimacy; on the other hand, art can undermine the monolith of state discourse and subvert entrenched institutions and realities. The idea of an amnesiac nation-state, which forgets its own fabricatedness, is especially pertinent in Singapore, where history is so quickly and collectively forgotten through gaps in education and in the physical landscape of the city. This contradictory and simultaneous function of art is thus fundamental to my thesis.

I interviewed artists for my research because they are culture workers; they participate in cultural industries. Culture workers write, design, produce, photograph, film, act, translate, theorise, imagine. Banks defines cultural industries as "those involved in the production of 'aesthetic' or 'symbolic' goods and services; that is, commodities whose core value is derived from their function as carriers of *meaning*…the production of meaning is seen to be deliberate and self-conscious, designed to appeal to aesthetic preferences, or related to existing or emergent economies of taste, style and distinction (Banks 2010, 252). The work of Bourdieu, Becker, and others has been seminal to understanding cultural production as a political project, shaped by one's social location with the field of production.

In that vein, a culture worker is also a "creator of value" (Bourdieu 1993, 164) since cultural production must not only produce a material object, but also the value of that object. Bourdieu locates the field of cultural production as "the site of struggles in which what is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer and therefore to delimit the population of those entitled to take part in the struggle to define the writer" (42). Art and aesthetics present a tussle over authority and self-definition, because the definition of an "artist" determines what work is worthy of funding and appreciation, and what kind of meaning-making is worth recognition. The field, Bourdieu writes, is "neither a vague social

background nor even a *milieu artistique* like a universe of personal relations between artists and writers…It is a veritable social universe where, in accordance with its particular laws, there accumulates a particular form of capital and where relations of force of a particular type are exerted" (163). The lives and practices of artists reflect their habitus, their dispositions and position-takings, and these are made possible only within the particular field(s) they inhabit.

I would argue that part of the political vocation of culture involves what Mazzarella calls "mediation." Where Cheah focuses on the reproductive capacity of national literature, Mazzarella looks at "the processes by which a given social dispensation produces and reproduces itself in and through a particular set of media" (2004, 346). Through ongoing practices of mediation, new meanings and values arise. The assumption of a discrete "local" and "global" fails because "[t]here is no simple correlation between the spatiality of cultural production and the production of cultural space" (351). Instead, Mazzarella looks at nodes of mediation, where the structures of the global political economy and media management meet "the densely particular assemblages of practice and meaning that they depend on and reproduce" (351). These nodes produce intimacy, recognition, and identity alongside distance and difference; they mediate self-understandings. These places of mediation are "the places at which we come to be who we are through the detour of something alien to ourselves" (356). I focus on the Singapore Literature Festival in New York City as one such node; another is the National Day reception hosted at the Singapore Consulate in New York City. I hope to emphasize the works and life histories of individuals, how they engage in the production of locality, and how they use strategic definitions of citizenship and home to negotiate national and transnational governance. Going back to the idea of the political vocation of culture, to "articulate society into an organic community" (Cheah 2003, 235), begs the question of how cultural workers imagine the society and the community they want to articulate and the

ideologies that are (re)produced in it. I will now turn to address the particular context of Singapore, and why I have chosen to focus on cultural production within this context.

Global city and nation-state

This project begins and ends with Singapore. The tendency towards exceptionalism in studies of Singapore, as well as state-driven national discourse, has resulted in the imaginary of "an insular world enclosed within the borders of the island state, in ironic contrast to the material, political discourses of regionalism from which Singapore draws its economic vitality" (Lim 2003, 214). I will attempt to avoid that exceptionalism, while clarifying the interest of this paper in Singapore as a context and site. First, Singapore is both a city and a state, with contradictory exigencies of nation-building and security alongside aspirations to develop as a global city because of its spatial and geopolitical confines. The viability of the state requires its integration into the global economy, as well as citizens committed to its survival (Velayutham 2007, 102). This contradiction is best put by Shirley Lim, writing on the Singaporean discourse of home:

> The home is not imaged as resident within the global city but as its radical Other, the local. […] the global city has to be contained within the discourse of home, this despite the commonsensical understanding that cities are not about homes; homes are local, while global cities are about the world and the metropolis (Lim 217).

I use Sassen's definition of the global city here, as a site where capital and dense populations are concentrated in centers for international trade and investment. In the global city, processes of globalisation – increased socio-economic inequality and the informalisation of labour – become visible (Sassen 2001, 171-2). Beyond the global city as a financial center, however, Singapore set out a strategy in the late 1990s to develop into a "global city for the arts" (MICA 2000) which reflects the state's valuation of artistic production for economic vitality. It also binds the state in a particular contract with artistic production, and with Singaporean artists – or, as I will later describe them, citizen-artists.

A second component of this paper's interest in Singapore is its history as a British colony, a theme that I will not be able to develop comprehensively in this argument, but it is an important thread nevertheless. The traces of this colonial legacy have outlasted colonialism, and as Chun argues, postcolonial critique is necessary to understand state and society in Singapore and historicise "the façade of rational modernity" of how it is governed today (2012, 684). Structures of difference, particularly racial and ethnic categories, have been inherited from British colonial rule and have become "the blueprint for postcolonial imagination" (Chun 2012, 680). Cultural products created within and around Singapore, from William Gibson's 'Disneyland with the Death Penalty' to *Crazy Rich Asians*, have used it as a signifier to build on the idea that modernity can only be truly grasped by the West (Sim 2011, 363). State-driven development of the arts landscape has also taken an increasingly "colonialist" approach (Koh 2014, 65) in its reproduction of arts infrastructures from major arts capitals in Europe and the US. I hope to understand how Singaporean artists in diaspora see themselves as situated within this discourse of postcolonialism, and how they might speak to that context through their positionality.

CHAPTER TWO: HOW SINGAPORE BECAME SMALL

In this chapter, I use the analytic of scale to think about the history of Singapore, with attention to strategies of colonial governance and post-colonial nation-building. The smallness of Singapore figured into my interviews and fieldwork as a motivation for movements outside of the nation-state; it was also rhetoric I grew up hearing, that Singapore was small, lacking resources, isolated as a majority-Chinese state among mostly Malay-Muslim nations. I write this chapter with the aim of explicating how Singapore has been "scaled," drawing on anthropological readings of scale:

> For *to scale* is not simply to assume or assert "bigness" or "smallness" by way of a ready-made calculus. Rather, and as we have seen above, people use language to scale the world around them. […] As an inherently relational and comparative endeavor, scaling may thus connect and even conflate what is geographically, geopolitically, temporally, or morally "near" while simultaneously distinguishing that nearness from that which is "far" (Carr & Lempert 2016, 5).

Singapore was not always small – it was made to be small through discourses with varied motivations, controlled by different means; thus it is not just small but *too* small to afford certain ideologies and values.

In critiques of Singaporean nationalism, it is easy to center state-led discourse that maps out Singapore's past, present, and future, and studies of national identity have "confined their analysis to a state-imposed ideology" (Teo 2014, 10). However, the state's imaginary of Singapore is not monolithic, and the rhetoric of smallness should not pervade the space to imagine national identity and history otherwise. Singapore's art world is certainly full of people who disagree about practices, representations, and politics. They are often tasked with performing the nation, to borrow Askew's term (2002) for "the eyes of imagined others" (Rutherford 2012, 16), in order to make Singapore legible to different audiences. The task of this chapter, then, is to provide an overview and a context for the development of Singapore nationalism and the role of local arts institutions in scaling the nation; it will consider the

different Singapore imaginaries that subvert and/or reproduce this nationalist narrative, and the performance of Singapore for distinct audiences. Taking the nation as a "category of practice" (Winegar 2006, 20) requires attention to the processes of constructing and imagining the nation. Thus this chapter will explore the narratives that have been ascribed to the nation, beginning with colonial history as a kind of place-making and scale-making in Singapore. I will then draw on studies of Singapore's cultural and arts policy, and how art has been appropriated for state-building purposes through scalar assumptions about the nation-state, and what kinds of art the state can "afford." There are other ways to read Singapore society beyond state-driven discourse, however, so I will also involve other texts that reflect non-state imaginaries.

A history of nationalism and the arts

The history of Singapore, as I learned it in public primary school, brought together threads of mythology and "great man" history to establish a narrative that was, as a result, full of gaps. My educational experiences are not identical to those of my interlocutors, but we do share a familiarity with the gaps in the hegemonic narrative of national history. In this section I will consider this narrative as an "inquiry into the operations through which such absences are created" (Lowe 2015, 99). There is the figure of Sang Nila Utama, the Srivijayan prince who ventures to the island Temasek in the late 14th century and sees a lion, which becomes the city's namesake – *Singapura* means "Lion City" in Sanskrit. The next great man to encounter Singapore would be Thomas Stamford Raffles in 1819, and in 1826, Singapore becomes part of the British Straits Settlement. Critical historians have worked to piece together Singapore's pre-colonial past through fragmentary archives, often relying on old maps and records of trade and movement; however, historiography and national education have had a "tendency to read pre-colonial Singapore history in terms of a lack, an absence, or incompleteness" (Velayutham

2007, 21). The moment of colonisation is not one of "discovery" but of production, in which Singapore becomes produced and conceived of as a "knowable and distinct place in history" (Velayutham 22). Lowe writes about liberal freedom in the imperial center made possible through and in relation to labour and colonisation elsewhere; within a "colonial division of intimacy" (18), individuals have differentiated access to personhood, free will, property. This intimacy conceives of a particular spatial dynamic produced through colonisation, and I would argue that the "knowability" of colonised peoples is one way in which intimacy manifests. Prior to the arrival of the British, the island was already a destination for merchants and traders, and inhabited by a small group of fishermen who were mostly Malay with a few Chinese families. Colonisation makes the island into a nation-state, as Velayutham writes: "The colonial moment therefore allowed the possibility for the articulation of a single and unified sense of place despite the different and diverse histories of its immigrant population" (22).

After Singapore became the capital of the British Straits Settlements, migrants streamed in from other parts of Asia in growing numbers, drawn by the prosperity promised by a port city; many were traders and indentured labourers from Malaya and China of Han Chinese descent. The Chinese population grew to outnumber the indigenous Malay population by 1826, although many ethnic Malay residents also migrated from Malaya and Indonesia. Colonial archives show the strategic division of indigenous Malay "natives" and ethnic Chinese or South Asian migrants; for example, English-language newspapers described Malay people as childlike and lazy, whereas the Chinese and Indians were workhorses of the local economy that had been civilized through British influence (Tofighian 2017, 28). The categories of "colonizer," "colonized," "native," "other," and "migrant" are thus complicated by the movement of labour, and hierarchies of language and race are naturalized through colonial regimes of governance.

Singapore's colonial history is thus also its history of globalisation, although the two cannot be conflated. The ambivalence here lies in the awareness that Singapore "has a history of being greatly dependent on foreign hegemonies that threaten its cultural autonomy" (Sim 2011, 360). If colonialism is a project of division, and globalisation is one of flattening, Singapore has experienced both. Cultural production in the global economy is still bound by these two premises: one that relies on difference, division, or even "diversity," and another that claims to transcend, flatten, homogenise, and reduce. On these two axes, forms of value emerge that inform later approaches to governance through "multiculturalism" as ideology. These values also manifest in how my interlocutors assign value to their own work; in the early years of Singapore's independence, however, arts policy and the question of "values" was never really addressed.

Independence from British rule came in 1963 when Singapore merged with Malaysia, with its elected leaders – the People's Action Party – determining that the nations combined would create a larger common market and shared natural resources. Political and economic differences between the two governments led to racial riots between Chinese and Malay Singaporeans[7] which eventually led the Malaysian Parliament to vote unanimously to expel Singapore from the federation in 1965, in a session where no Singaporean delegates were present. Singapore politicians reluctantly approved the separation agreement (National Library Board, 2014), and Singapore became an independent nation-state in August 1965. This prolonged, reluctant process of attaining sovereignty reflects the fact that up until 1965, the boundaries of the nation-state were permeable, and the nation itself was expansive, more city than state. After independence, however, the state took precedence, evident in the ideologies of the People's Action Party. Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's first Prime Minister and often called

[7] This is a gloss over an important moment in Singapore's history. A more detailed overview of national history can be found in *Singapore: A Biography* by Mark Ravinder Frost and Yu-Mei Balasingamchow.

its founding father, is the last "great man" to mention. His life history and political project are not for this paper, but it must be noted that it is Lee's vision of modernity, rationality, and progress that have dominated both the development and the imagination of Singapore. Lee and his generation of politicians, in the 1970s and 1980s, were concerned with the survival of the nation. Then Prime Minister, Lee praised France's cultural achievements in the arts and literature, but stated that "Singaporeans can aspire to no such heights […] we are a small society struggling to achieve some measure of security in our basic needs" (The Straits Times, 6 April 1985, cited in Kong and Yeoh, 2003). He would go on to say in 1986 that "[p]oetry is a luxury we cannot afford." Teo reads this statement in two ways which reflect the state's conception of the arts: first, Singapore cannot financially afford to support the unproductive work of poetry; second, poetry (and the arts more broadly) present a threat to the vulnerable and nascent nation-state. The arts thus held the potential to be dangerous, as seen from the policing of "yellow pop culture" from the West, including banning rock concerts through the 1970s, where "yellow" implies immoral and corrupt influence (Teo 2014, 52).

The mid-1980s saw a shift in cultural policy that co-opted cultural traditions and regulated artistic production, perhaps proving that the state now recognised the untenability of trying to ban rock music. Yeoh and Kong, among other scholars and artists, suggest that this change was motivated by "the state's appropriation [of art] for economic gain" (2003, 179). This was marked by the formation of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts in 1988, and the National Arts Council in 1991, which exists today and is responsible for the majority of direct state funding for artists. The 1985 Economic Review Committee's report saw the "cultural and entertainment" sector as one that had potential for economic growth (Chong 2010, 140). However, the motivations were not only economic – the performance of ethnic culture and traditions became a greater priority for state sponsorship, and "the arts and culture became performance sites of the ruling elite's multicultural fantasies" (Chong 137) such as Chinese

opera. This, Chong argues, shows that the Singapore government has never accepted the concept of "art for art's sake" (137). The motivations for arts and cultural policy notwithstanding, the 1990s saw a turning point in the industry as new policy directions "put the onus for arts funding squarely on the government's shoulders, and articulated its importance as a driver for development in the arts and culture industry" (Chong 141). This period thus saw the regulation, co-optation, appropriation that gave the state a monopoly on "arts" and "culture" and their productions.

As I wrote above, however, I would like to de-center state-led narratives about what the nation is. Studies of Singapore have turned to other texts to answer this question. Phillips, for example, states that urban space is the "chief mode of representation" of the city-state, such that "Singapore is already a response, an interpretation and reconstruction of a set of conditions that are readable and can thus be reconstituted" (1999, 188). For Yeoh and Kong, the different constructions of "nation" are mapped out on physical and material landscapes, because they reflect the clashes over the production, definition, and use of space by different parties. How the state conceives of Singapore's landscape, and how civil society conceives of it, show that different groups read and imagine Singapore differently. In cinema, literature, visual arts, education, and policy, researchers and writers have found rich material for exploring various imaginaries of the nation. In conducting research for this thesis I found a dissertation by Bee Kim Koh on ways of perceiving and constituting the work of Singapore's arts practitioners outside of a canon inherited from colonial history. I take up Koh's questions here: "How else can we imagine Singapore apart from nation and state? What are the limits of state cultural policies and state power in determining culture of an imagined community? How do we conceptualize a national imaginary beyond, or apart from, the boundary and power of the state?" (2014, 48) This move beyond might require an approach to Singapore and its

representations that is re-scaling, and that might disrupt scales of the nation-state that have become entrenched through policy, education, work, and other institutions.

The discourse of home being wielded by the state is one example that I will explore in the fourth chapter of this thesis; using the metaphor of nation-as-home, the state can produce citizens committed to the imagined community of the nation. For context, however, it is important to note that for many who live, work, and engage in Singapore, the nation has always been an un-home.

Singapore as un-home

> The pressures of nation-building and protection apply in Singapore in a unique measure that set up disabling forces to its development as a global city. […] In much Singaporean discourse of home, the world or outside the home continues to be figured as the *Unheimlich* - the unhomely or the uncanny - and therefore the feared Other to be avoided. The home is not imaged as resident within the global city but as its radical Other, the local. (Lim 2003, 217)

Lim draws on Freud here to discuss the construction of home in opposition to the un-home, in order to maintain the contradictory, simultaneous needs of nation-state and global city. Rather than conceiving of the Singaporean citizen as a sort of global denizen, the citizen is a local project, opposed to and fearful of the world outside the home. This is evident in the policing of "yellow pop culture" from the West, as mentioned above. However, this state-driven imaging of locality does not necessarily correspond with the feeling of citizens. Scholars writing on Singapore society often draw out themes of un-homing and alienation. Theatrical productions about life in the city reflect an anxiety, an "incompleteness" of national identity that manifests in everyday life (Yeo 2003, 252); film representations make their subjects small and disenchanted, "portraying a modernity in which its citizens do not belong" (Sim 2011, 361). A particular experience of un-homing occurs for queer Singaporeans, who are the state's impossible subjects because they cannot contribute to its reproduction, and are often associated

with “Western” values and ideologies, where the “Western” is “a euphemism for individualism, hedonism and liberalism” (Chong 2010, 136).

Queer Singaporeans are thus the citizen’s “other” even as they exist within the bounds of citizenship, a contradiction that Yue and Zubillaga-Pow term illiberal pragmatism: “the ambivalence between non-liberalism and neoliberalism, rationalism and irrationalism that governs the illegality of homosexuality in Singapore” (2012, 2). Section 377A remains in Singapore’s Penal Code, a colonial inheritance that prohibits anal sex which is the subject of perennial debate that flares up on occasion. One such occasion was in August 2018, around the date of the Penal Code review which would submit proposals to repeal particular laws; reports said that the review proposed changes to archaic laws including marital immunity for rape and the criminalisation of attempted suicide. Local LGBTQ activists began to call for 377A to be among these laws, a call that gained momentum when it was successfully overturned in India. Meanwhile, petitions circulated – one calling for a repeal, another to “Keep Penal Code 377A in Singapore.”

Much like the questions I ask about how Singapore became scaled in particular ways, Aaron Ho ponders the question of how Singaporeans become straight. Ho notes that state governance of sexuality has its legacy in British colonialism and Victorian models of compulsory heterosexuality and masculinity. This governance can only mean an un-homing for everyone:

> […] every Singaporean - men, women, Chinese, Malays, Indians, heterosexuals, and homosexuals - suffered under such a regime. Since no one could fit perfectly into the State's normative narrative of neo-Victorian model of compulsory homosexuality and masculinity, everyone must already have been queer (Ho 2012, 42).

To negotiate state governance of sexuality, queer and trans individuals can claim citizenship “within the gender platforms of community organisations and in the everyday negotiation of non-heteronormative identity within the family, the army, and the nation-state” (Yue and

Zubillaga-Pow 21). These claims cannot empower constituencies or collectives, but allow queer and trans individuals to survive and thrive within this regime. Within these strategies of claiming citizenship, individuals can also engage in a "reverse discourse," as Shawna Tang writes from her interviews with queer women in Singapore, who drawn from global and local resources to "embody a particular transnational sexual subjectivity that enables them to re-fashion their sexual selfhoods […] against the powers that define them. Singapore lesbian practices may very well be the realistic undercurrent of queer liberalism in non-Western contexts" (2014, 95). This turn to global queer discourse to enable queer survival is perhaps a strategic un-homing in order to make home more viable.

Many of my interlocutors identify themselves as queer, lesbian, gay, and/or bisexual. One told me that he moved away from Singapore so that he would not have to constantly negotiate the parameters of his own existence, especially as a (then) teacher in a public school. I will discuss specific experiences of my interviewees in later chapters, but it is important to note how the space between Singapore and New York has been one where queer existence is possible. In the next chapter, I will write about the annual celebratory dinner for National Day organised by the Singapore Consulate in New York. Only Singaporean citizens and family members are allowed to attend; you have to register in advance through a strict process that requires your NRIC[8] number, and you have to show your identification card or passport at the door. One of my interlocutors attempted an "experiment" (his word) where he registered for himself and his husband, a US citizen; when they arrived at the dinner, no one was particularly shocked. He sounded a little disappointed at the lack of scandal surrounding this incident. What is also interesting, however, is the contradictory policy that does not recognise non-heterosexual partnerships, but accepts the legitimacy of kinship claim in a gay marriage in the

[8] The National Registration Identity Card is a compulsory identity document for Singaporean citizens and permanent residents.

US. This same individual pointed out that queer professors from the US at Yale-NUS College were allowed to bring their partners with them on the same visa, a sort of deliberate oversight that might be afforded by the relationship with a prestigious college in the US.

There was thus a kind of liminal space in these multi-sited institutions where queerness could exist "safely," perhaps an olive branch from the state that has so fiercely denied the rights of citizenship to its queer citizens. However, one still has to rely on the space of the un-home and its associations – the economic, geopolitical and cultural capital of the US, for example – in order to ensure the safety of one's home. In this co-constitution of home and un-home, Singapore is again made to be small, but in particular small in contrast to New York City, as a queer capital as well as an arts capital of the world. In some ways New York City is an aspiration for Singapore. During my interview with a researcher and former curator, I learn that Singapore will become the size of New York City by 2030 through land reclamation – a literal, material project of re-scaling. The two cities are not necessarily co-constituted, but the discourses that produce them are premised on overlapping and contrasting values. The next chapter expands on these values as regimes that my interlocutors move between, and in that negotiation, how citizenship and art might be conceptualised outside of these regimes.

CHAPTER THREE: CITIZEN-ARTISTS AND REGIMES OF VALUE

In the previous chapter, I explained the scaling of Singapore as a project of colonial governance that was inherited and reproduced by the state at the end of colonial rule, in order to justify rationalist and pragmatic ideologies through a rhetoric of precarity. This is evident in the history of arts policy in Singapore, which instrumentalises cultural production for nation-building. Reading the history of cultural policy along with labour relations, Terence Chong writes,

> For the Singapore artist, worker and journalist the underlying unspoken logic was clear – Singaporeans should be mindful of the uncertainties of national survival or the need to be sensitive to the interests of a multicultural society, and be receptive to government intervention, which is presumed to be partisan and neutral. The orthodox Singapore artist, for the PAP government, was a discursive object who succeeded in expressing broader nation-building concerns artistically, resulting in a pragmatic harnessing of the creative ethos to dominant (or higher) interests as defined by the state (2010, 140).

Here Chong describes the "orthodox" citizen-artist imagined by the state who fulfils particular state-building needs, who embodies the values of the state and promotes "mainstream" ideals in art. In this chapter, I would like to think about the citizen-artist differently; beyond being a "discursive object" of the state, Singapore artists I spoke with understood this "unspoken logic" of state ideologies, but found ways to depart from it in their work and life, deliberately situating themselves outside of orthodoxy.

In this chapter, I will discuss citizenship and artistic production as two disparate regimes of value. Appadurai uses the term "regimes of value" to recognise that the "value coherence" of objects might differ across situations – different parties might have different ideas of what is "valuable" and how something should be valued. For example, a work of art could have different connotations and resonances in different cultural contexts, taking culture here to be "a bounded and localized system of meanings" (1986, 15). The state's system of meanings produces a regime of value that would be different from that of the arts market. A Singaporean audience could have a different regime of value from that of a New York audience

in approaching the value of a work of art. My interlocutors must negotiate the contradictory regimes of value that they are located in, as citizens and as artists, moving and working across geographical spaces.

The citizen-artists

I interviewed a group of artists and writers living in New York City as research for this thesis because I was interested in their sustained engagement with Singapore politics despite having moved away. All had retained Singaporean citizenship, and were thus bound to the desires and needs of the state. Yet they saw themselves as maintaining distinct values, and many of them deliberately distinguished themselves from other Singaporeans in New York – the lawyering and banking set that worked in Midtown, for example. "Just because we're living such different lives, it's difficult to have much of a relationship," said Ruth, a playwright. "Not just different lifestyles, but different values. Like the things that are important to me aren't important to them and vice versa. And then we often end up disagreeing about politics as well, so." This suggested that the artists perceived the lawyers and bankers to be more comfortable aligning themselves with the values of the state and of capital. Many of my interlocutors spurned events such as the National Day reception, deciding that they were ways for the government to surveil Singaporeans in the US, or trite displays of patriotism. Geraldine, a visual artist pursuing an MFA at the New School, pointed out that even the name of the Overseas Singaporean Unit sounded scary – "Like some military contingent."

Geraldine went on to observe that the artist trope diverged from the set of Singaporeans in New York who attended OSU events, who were – to my knowledge – mostly families. "And all the artists are single. But also childless. It really says a lot, because who can afford to have families? Not artists… unless your partner has a steady job." In many of my interviews,

comparisons were made along lines that contrasted the values of the artist with "typical" Singaporean values and the values of the state.

My interlocutors are artists who have decided to move to New York City, often driven by professional reasons for wanting to live and work in the capital of so many arts industries. However, other motivations surfaced in our interviews that were often related to questions of value, and how "Singaporean" values differed from "New York's" values. This distinction sets up two geographical regimes of value. Often this implied that artistic practice had a greater inherent value in New York City, where a history of great art-making was recognised and institutionalised. New York City has a powerful presence in the imaginary as a space of freedom, possibility, and power; it has a specific presence in the younger Singaporean imagination, which tends to find its "other" in the "West," partly due to our history of colonisation. Shirley Lim notes that in contemporary Singaporean writing, the "globalised other" is often constructed as "strictly Western" (2003, 214) rather than being found elsewhere in Southeast Asia or Asia. The un-homely, the other, the freedom, is in the West, in contrast with the homely, restrictive East. For my interlocutors, speaking on the comparison between Singapore and New York established the sense of "here" and "there," as certain kinds of life and work are possible "there" but not "here."

This chapter will discuss the different geographical regimes of value, as well as citizenship and artistic production as two distinct, disparate regimes. To lead into that discussion, I will focus on how citizenship is a narrow category that uses comparative mechanisms to govern the movements and practices of citizens.

Stayers and quitters

As I discuss in the previous chapter, the production of Singapore's smallness also implies narrow, bounded conceptions of Singaporean citizenship. Returning to Chong's

description of the citizen-artist above, good citizens should uphold the interests of the nation-state and reproduce its ideologies. Within this regime of value, the state must make sense of its diaspora, its "impossible subjects" (Gopinath 2003, 151). It does so through the comparison of stayers and quitters, in order to attribute moral and political implications to diasporic movements. I draw on Susan Gal's writing on comparison here: Gal argues that comparison is an ideological project which sets up clusters of opposing qualities that come to constitute each other.[9] This evokes the comparative mechanism used by then Prime Minister of Singapore, Goh Chok Tong, at his National Day Rally speech in 1999. Goh made a comparison between "heartlanders" and "cosmopolitans" as, broadly, two different kinds of Singaporean based on their mobility. Cosmopolitans are "highly educated, skilled and mobile," while heartlanders are "less mobile and bounded to Singapore." The Heartlander, says Goh, "play[s] a major role in maintaining our core values and our social stability. […] Without them, there will be no safe and stable Singapore, no Singapore system, no Singapore brand name" (Goh, 1999).

Goh and his government were responding to the anxiety that increasing numbers of Singaporeans are emigrating, hence the implicit argument for the importance of the "heartlander." In the imagination of the state, the heartlander enables its reproduction and survival. Meanwhile, the use of the term "cosmopolitan" seems to appropriate and repurpose a concept emerging in discourse around globalisation to address newly situated individuals, collectives, and attachments outside of the nation (Robbins 1998, 3). Thus these two categories implicitly conflate mobility and social class, and serve to uphold the state's regime of value.

[9] Gal uses the example of the "farmer" and the "artisan" in Bóly, Hungary, which organised social life and politics: "Artisans were understood to display and value a cluster of qualities: elaboration, novelty, and worldliness in their sartorial, culinary, architectural and affective styles. They were expected to value skill in communication and familiarity with the world outside the town, acquired through apprenticeships in cities far and near. By contrast, farmers were typified as restrained, plain, austere, and valuing traditions and land; they were considered *echt,* authentic. Farmers, even rich ones, were imagined to eat the same, familiar menu every day, while (some) artisans famously varied their food and even collected recipes." (Gal 2016, 97)

Three years later, Goh sets up another comparison at the 2002 National Day Rally speech, this time using the words "stayers" and "quitters." The former are "fair-weather Singaporeans" who "will run away whenever the country runs into stormy weather;" Goh provides, as an example, Singaporeans who emigrate to Australia where the cost of living is lower. There is an implicit moral rebuke in his description of "those fair-weather Singaporeans who, having benefited from Singapore, will pack their bags and take flight when our country runs into a little storm." The latter are committed to Singapore, including:

> […] Singaporeans who are overseas, but feel for Singapore. They will come back when needed, because their hearts are here. The Singapore nation is not just those of us living here, but also the thousands of loyal Singaporeans who live around the world (Goh 2002).

Goh suggests that to be a "stayer" within the category of the Singapore nation is to remain loyal to the nation-state; for Singaporeans living overseas, "They will come back when needed, because their hearts are here." The "quitters," on the other hand, are "fair-weather Singaporeans" who warrant criticism for choosing to abandon the nation-state in times of trouble. Stayers and quitters are not analogous to heartlanders and cosmopolitans; rather, it is the comparison between them that is analogous.

This comparison is driven by the ideological project of the state, and – as I wrote earlier in this thesis – a way to negotiate the contradiction of "global city" and "nation-state" by compelling its diaspora into categories based on their commitment to the nation. However, Goh's statement does not take seriously the reasons why people might "quit" Singapore, which shows that the state cannot make sense of its "quitters," its belligerent diaspora. To stay is Singaporean; to stay is good citizenship. To quit to abandon the national project in selfish pursuit of one's own aspirations; to quit is unjustifiable. My interlocutors do not fit within this regime of value, and this results in a lack of value coherence in how they engage with the state.

A lack of coherence

Hong-Ling had lived in New York for seventeen years; she arrived in the US to work at NASA before her famous career switch to become a sculptor and ceramicist. I say "famous" because multiple Singaporean newspapers have featured her work and made her into something of a role model for being academically, professionally, and artistically successful. The Overseas Singaporean Unit (OSU) and other government agencies have invited Hong-Ling to cities across the US, as well as back to Singapore, to talk about her life and work; she was never paid for this. In this sense she modelled the values of the ideal Singaporean abroad, who "stayed" in Singapore despite having moved away.

In 2015, Hong-Ling organised a festival to celebrate Singaporean artists in New York called Something To Write Home About (STWHA) to coincide with celebrations of the 50th anniversary of Singapore's independence. Despite her connections with the OSU and the NAC, she struggled to get funding and saw herself as being misunderstood and maligned by the state: "Is this how a citizen should be treated when I am trying to do something good for my country?" Hong-Ling vacillated between enthusiasm and bitterness, simultaneously re-affirming a patriotic love of country and a frustration with "Singaporean" qualities of hyper-pragmatism, a gesture that seemed to identify the state as the source of "Singaporean" values. Because the NAC would not front any money for her expenses, Hong-Ling had to pay for most of the festival costs and hope to be reimbursed later. The OSU refused to provide money for any events that would include non-Singaporean citizens. "How much do I have to love my country to do that?" She asked, incredulous. "What arts festival director would do this? You think Ong Keng Sen will be mopping the floor?"[10]

The unpaid work of planning this festival – in fact, work that could have cost Hong-Ling large sums of money if the NAC had not provided a reimbursement – was a labour of

[10] Ong Keng Sen is the director of the Singapore International Festival for the Arts, the successor of the Singapore Arts Festival run by civil servants. Since Ong took the helm, SIFA's funding and programming has prioritized accessibility as well as "exchange" of ideas. Ong himself is known as a visionary and rigorous theatre practitioner, and frequently speaks out against restrictions on freedom of expression in the arts.

love. The citizenship modelled by Hong-Ling and her volunteers, which the state continues to draw on to remind overseas Singaporeans that they should "give back" to their home country, is one that is moralised through its voluntary, sacrificial nature, much like Goh's categories of "quitters" and "stayers." Yet Hong-Ling continues to grapple with how she should be treated as a citizen and how her work is valued by the state.

Several of my interlocutors were recipients of state funding in one form or another, which is one site where the lack of value coherence becomes an obstacle. Johanna, a costume designer, received a scholarship for the National Arts Council to study costume design at Ithaca College; she met with a different manager every year, and "the turnover rate is so high they can't even keep track of the scholars they have." Her impression of the NAC was that "they seemed more interested in art in Singapore than Singaporean artists, so even if it was foreign artists doing art in Singapore, they were happier to fund that than to support Singaporean artists overseas and abroad." I continue this discussion of state funding in the following section about the work of making value coherence. For now, it is important to note the confusing apathy of the state towards artists abroad – confusing because it actually makes it even more difficult to "stay," using Goh's definition of "staying" as remaining committed to the future of the nation.

Geraldine could also be a "stayer," because she intended to stay in New York for the duration of her graduate program and return to Singapore. Her work uses photography to present the precariousness of life for migrant workers in Singapore, often in domestic space, while thinking about the ethics of representation; her project is thus heavily dependent on place and locality, something she had to grapple with when she had to over-contextualise and defend her art in front of her classmates. Geraldine also said that she wanted to remain in Southeast Asia in order to "build better relationships there, as opposed to continually seeing another art node as a form of authority or legitimacy so I just want to – do your thing, where you're from."

To “stay” thus had less to do with contributing to the local economy, and more with her understanding of Singapore within a regional and global art world.

However, how does the state treat its “stayers”? Geraldine told me that when she exhibited her pieces on migrant workers in Singapore, she suspected that a plainclothes policeman or agent came to investigate her work and asked unusually probing questions. Artists who are trained or work abroad for a period of time are often viewed with suspicion upon returning home – they are viewed as competitors, or mercenary. Yet if the task of the artist is to critique, challenge, subvert, and call into question, there is a degree to which the work of art and the work of the good citizen are at odds – a tension that Jee points out when he tells me, “I think I can annoy the Singapore government by staying Singaporean.” If Singaporean citizens based in Singapore make art that critiques the state, are they stayers or quitters? This comparison collapses because it is based on a single regime of value – that articulated by the state – and thus cannot cohere with other regimes of value. This comparison is thus ultimately about desirability and the reproduction of state values through art.

The people I interviewed sought to move beyond the limited sense of possibility that Singapore offered – its smallness – and perhaps that makes them “quitters.” However, they continue to engage with political discourse about Singapore, and to labour under and with a Singaporean identity. The misuse of state funding and arts infrastructure – putting up an exhibition that might reveal failures in regulating working conditions for migrant workers, or contesting the very historical narrative on which the state’s legitimacy is founded – is bad citizenship, as I have elaborated above. To “quit” is the only way to be a citizen-artist on one’s own terms.

Living and working in small space

Within the regime of value articulated by the state, the project of the citizen and the project of the artist seem irreconciliable. A common sentiment that came up in interviews was that artistic production was the only path for them. "I just couldn't imagine myself doing other things," Mimi said. "Anything else. I couldn't – couldn't bear the thought of it. You know? I cannot bring myself to do it." Similarly, Hong-Ling told me that she advised people to think twice about becoming an artist, unless the prospect of *not* being an artist seemed even more difficult. What happens when your only path cannot fit within the bounds of good citizenship? Mimi, among others, brought up the generational change that she observed, as a former teacher at a theater program in Singapore, where enrolment had been rising. "I feel very worried – what are my students' opportunities? What are their opportunities after they graduate?" Mimi felt that theater institutions had not developed at the pace of arts education in Singapore, meaning that aspiring theatre practitioners had no choice but to work abroad.

There was often an allusion to a "smallness" that restricted their work in Singapore – geographically, but also imaginatively and critically. Singapore's geographical smallness is reiterated in public education and is the foundation of the survivalist discourse that drives economic and foreign policy, as I explained in the second chapter. Physical movement beyond geographical borders, as my interlocutors have done, simultaneously troubles and perpetuates that very smallness. Beyond geographical and physical scale, there was also a perceived small-mindedness, an unwillingness to imagine otherwise. "I would be a much – much smaller, scared person if I'd stayed [in Singapore]," one interviewee said. That smallness is also evident in the dominant, almost suffocatingly narrow ideal of one's personal trajectory. Another explained that she wasn't "on the same wavelength" as her peers.

> They just – they care a lot about money and getting married and BTOs[11] and stuff… that just isn't my thing, or that isn't my priority. […] It's just this

[11] Built-to-Order flats, a type of subsidised public housing typically available to newlywed cisheterosexual couples; this is often an allusion to mainstream middle-class aspiration.

> feeling of there being a defined path, and you not being on it. And not really caring that you're not it, but, you know, just knowing that there's this – thing.

These were ideologies articulated through social and cultural norms of work, life, and family; they were produced and felt in an affective way, and, as she added, people were afraid of doing otherwise:

> I don't want to call it a lack of imagination, I don't think it's true. But I guess people are just scared […] I feel it when I'm there, I'm just like, "Oh, you can't do this, or you'll get in trouble. You can't do this, otherwise people look at you weird." […] I'm sure those norms exist here, but I feel like in Singapore they exist to such a great extent that – yeah, that you can feel it.

How does a norm become so affectively enforced? This singular path was defined early in life, based on one's race, class, gender and educational background, categories that were ascribed to you and impossible to break out of, because – as Elizabeth put it – "you know, Singaporeans, everybody knows everybody. You can't really get away from the, "Oh, which JC[12] did you come from?"" Decisions and locations from childhood continued to figure into the scope of one's future. Furthermore, incidences of surveillance and censorship narrowed the space for political participation, through the arts and other platforms. There is an extent to which people are made to "quit," or rather that "quitters" are made through state discourse. I mentioned above that Geraldine saw plainclothes personnel at her exhibition; other interlocutors also shared their experiences with censorship. Jeremy's funding from the National Arts Council for his first novel *State of Emergency*[13] was withdrawn once he submitted his first draft, because it "deviated" from his original proposal – which is the extent of the rationale provided. Ruth recounted the story of a friend who wanted to stage a play about two gay characters, one of whom was a politician, and sent the script to a seasoned playwright in Singapore. His response was "Sorry, this won't pass NAC." These moments of rebuke or of drawing the bounds of

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[12] Junior College

[13] *State of Emergency* explores a period in Singapore's history that has been largely erased from mainstream nationalist narratives: the purge of Marxist 'influences' and 'conspirators' in the 1960s through detention, interrogation and torture.

acceptable representations are also moments where certain acts and ideologies are attributed to "quitting."

At the end of my previous chapter, I noted that Singapore is not only produced as small – it is also imagined as small in comparison to New York City. The "globalised other" of the Singaporean citizen is constructed as "strictly Western" (Lim 2003, 214), hence the powerful presence of New York City in Singaporean imagination as a space of freedom, possibility, and power; it is constructed as Singapore's opposite. My interlocutors have made the choice to live and work in New York City, for temporary or extended periods of time. There is thus a double motivation here that must be explored: the push away from the "small" space afforded by Singapore, and the pull towards the larger space of New York City. This movement also marks the cross from one regime of value to another.

"Freedom to" and "Freedom from"

Elizabeth is a freelance set and lighting designer, with experiences writing and directing her own work. At the time of our interview, she had lived in the US for nine years, going from graduate school to New York where she has been based for the past two years. The large-ness of the US appealed to her – so many places were cheaply accessible, and so were opportunities to work in those places. She had always wanted to move away from Singapore. "I'm here to find my own voice outside of that [Singaporean] identity," she said. This meant that she had fiercely avoided Singapore-centered student spaces as an undergraduate, unlike her peers who "very much stuck with their Singaporean gang." The implication is that it is possible to move "outside" of one's national identity – to achieve some degree of autonomy from it.

I was curious about how Elizabeth and her partner had experienced Singapore's education system in different ways. She explains, "Even though I felt like the system didn't work for me, I ended up dating and marrying someone who – the system really worked for

him." The system described here is one of meritocratic education, which her partner saw as his path from a lower-income family to Harvard University. Elizabeth shared something her partner had said, comparing Singapore and the US:

> It's about choosing the freedom to versus the freedom from. That's how he describes living in Singapore versus living in America. Living in America, you have *freedom to* do a lot of things. In Singapore, you have the *freedom from* a lot of things. So I think it's just a delicate compromise and negotiation between what you're willing to give up – which of your 'freedom to's you are willing to give up for your 'freedom from's. […] And again, it's so complicated, because maybe if you lived in New York you would be fine, but like – I know that it's illegal for two guys to be kissing in Singapore, but in America you could be shot. Because those people have the freedom *to* choose to shoot you. So – I don't know. I don't think everybody finds what their right answer is.

Elizabeth might be speaking from her own experience of dating a woman in junior college, when schoolmates followed them down the hallway to catch them kissing; someone even tried to take photos of them together. "I feel like if I only dated women, I would not want to go back to Singapore," she said. That was a "freedom to" she would have been unable to give up.

On the other hand, Elizabeth sounded jaded when she described her experience of living in New York. "Everything is governed by how much money you have. […] You take care of yourself and you don't really take care of your neighbour." One incident, she explained, clarified her relationship to both Singapore and New York City: soon after graduating from Yale, she got into a bike accident and received no treatment at the hospital because she did not have any insurance. Conversely, in Singapore, "if you walk into the hospital, you know that the first question is not, "What's your insurance?" Because we need to treat you right now," Elizabeth said. She thus saw Singapore as a space of *freedom from* also in the sense that her basic needs of care and protection would be met.

This negotiation of "freedom to" and "freedom from" was a common motif in my interviews. This comparison might originate with the ideas of positive and negative liberty and is also mentioned in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, which famously explores themes of

autonomy and gendered labour. Gilead is the space of "freedom from" in *The Handmaid's Tale*, a dystopic imagining of the US in the future, which makes this transposition in Singapore's context incriminating. Instead of privileging either kind of "freedom," I would like to examine in greater detail the way in which "freedom to" is attributed to New York City or the US, and "freedom from" to Singapore. How are these "freedoms" co-constituted through the two locations? What are the implications of positioning these two "freedoms" as oppositional and mutually exclusive?

Here New York is implied to be a place of *freedom tos*, and therefore a place with a wider scope of possibility. There was simply more, Ruth told me – a wider variety of arts institutions, bookstores, museums, genres, ideas, which shaped the scope of discourse in everyday life. "At least, being able, you know, to say, talk about a wider range of things, things than there are in Singapore. In Singapore I feel like there are certain things that you know you just can't talk about. Like not even – not even the government or whatever; just on a social, cultural level, there are things we don't talk about." Geraldine echoed this sentiment, as she told me about running into another Singaporean in Astoria who said: "You know Singaporeans, we don't talk about politics, we just talk about food." She laughed and added, "You're the exact kind of Singaporean I don't like. [...] In American small talk – like, you actually express opinions in small talk." Both Geraldine and Ruth imply that everyday engagement in political discourse is a cultural characteristic, one that is absent from Singapore's culture.

For Geraldine, the advantages of living in New York City were also based on its art world – specifically the arts institutions and markets that were available, flourishing at every level; "you have these sorts of very established, bonafide, more intellectual type of art spaces and then you have your huge art market circuit, and then you have like, the more grungy stuff, and then you have home apartment galleries." It was this plenitude that made New York a space of possibility and opportunity, beyond just its economic viability. Jee, having lived in

New York City for the past fifteen years, joked that he had become a "teenager" in the city; it presented a period of coming of age, where he had been able to participate in "the gay life, the creative life, the teaching life, the political life." Another freedom afforded by New York City was thus the freedom to explore this diversity of ways of working, living, and being, and this freedom is explicitly tied to scale. It is the combination of a concentration of talent and capital alongside a plurality of spaces and infrastructures that makes such plenitude possible.

This plenitude is contradicted, however, by writing about the city that laments years of hyper-gentrification and entrepreneurialism. Jeremiah Moss, a longtime observer and blogger about changes in the cityscape, documents a vanishing New York, such that the streetscape has been reconstructed for a transient population of tourists and out-of-towners (2017). My interlocutors – and myself – are part of that transient population, who might experience "freedom to" because so much of it has been designed around our needs and aspirations. It is necessary to reconfigure these categories into questions: who gets the "freedom to" and the "freedom from"? These freedoms also have to do with one's positionality within the cityscape, be it Singapore or New York City.

The full history of censorship in Singapore is outside of the scope of my thesis. However, the moral implications of choosing to "stay" or to "quit" work to naturalise restrictions on freedom of expression; they also imply freedom of choice when the decision to move is fraught with pressures on artistic production, and on queer and political life. Individuals "quit," then, because it grants access to the space of "freedom to," driven in part by the comparative mechanisms that set up contrasting clusters of qualities: on one hand there is "staying," "freedom from," silence, restriction, smallness, and orthodoxy; on the other hand, there is "quitting," "freedom to," capaciousness, unorthodoxy, and plenitude. I am not arguing that these comparisons are accurate or objective mappings of Singapore and New York City. They are the result of internalised imaginaries driven by colonial history, nation-building

projects, and authoritarian governance; they are structured through racial and class differences. For all that they are imaginary, these comparisons have great discursive power, and reinforce the boundaries of good and acceptable citizenship.

Artists in diaspora as creators of value coherence

In the section above, I argue that citizen-artists do not cohere with the state's regime of value, and disrupt the binary, comparative categories that it establishes. I suggest that artistic production is a separate regime of value with low value coherence with the state regime. However, the artists and writers I interviewed are active participants in shaping value coherence, negotiating these different regimes in order to produce the value of their own work. In this section, I discuss two ways in which this negotiation plays out: first, artists in diaspora must locate and re-locate their work in geographically and culturally distinct regimes of value. In each, their work takes on different kinds of value which they must manage. Second, artists who rely on state funding must clarify the value of their work to the state while continuing to retain independence from it. Thus artists in diaspora produce value coherence between different regimes, and I would argue that art itself is a project of making value coherence.

Value coherence in diaspora

Elisabeth is an actor, director and scriptwriter who, in her five years living in New York City, had a hand in creating theatre communities for artists of colour with the aim of promoting multiracial casting. She described the growing interest in site-specific theatre in New York as one that was borne of necessity – theatre space was so expensive, sometimes reaching $4,000 a week, that many practitioners decided to use their home spaces. This raised particular difficulties, as Elisabeth elaborates:

> It's not like a theatre where you're in a black box and you have nothing, you can create something to suit your needs. In an empty space, you can imagine.

> But when you do site-specific you cannot ignore your site. So you really have to figure out how to work your text with the space you have, and incorporate it without ignoring the audience you're going to have.

Thus the people I interviewed did not reach New York as an empty space, but had to use the existing market structures in theatre, publishing, film, and arts industries, and to interpellate different audiences for their work. How did they make the value of their work coherent across different contexts?

For Mei Ann, the answer to this question is based on her own identity and positionality within US racial politics:

> I know why I make what I make here. I'm an Asian American woman, I'm a queer Asian American woman. […] Name the artistic directors who look like me. [laughs] Exactly. Name the freelance directors that look like me! I can name you ten. But that's it. Right? So there's a reason – I know why I, and my perspective and my life here, I know why it makes a difference and it shifts the culture. I know why, I'm very clear about my positioning as a way of decentering whiteness and white supremacy, and maleness. Now when I go back to Singapore, 24 hours later, I'm part of the majority. So for me I ask myself, why am I there? Am I taking the place that a Malay or Indian director should be taking up?

Mei Ann spent her childhood between Singapore and the US; from the ages of 9 to 16, she lived in Massachusetts, and moved back to Singapore for Junior College. She spent a year in a university in Singapore, but left because of intolerance towards her religious beliefs, and went to a small college in the US where she started to do theatre while working on a finance degree. Mei Ann went on to intern at a theatre company and teach and direct at her alma mater before entering graduate school at Columbia. Eventually she was hired as a professor of directing and dramaturgy at a college in Massachusetts for three years, until she decided to resign and take up her current position as the artistic director of a New York-based theatre company. At the time of our interview, she had just returned from working on a piece for the Singapore Theatre Festival. Despite having taken up more opportunities to work with Singapore's theatre community, she chose to remain in the US because she had a clearer sense of the value of her work, which was produced through US racial politics. In an industry dominated by White men,

Mei Ann understood the necessity of her voice as someone outside that dominant group. Conversely, if she occupied the same role in Singapore's theatre industry, she would be part of that dominant group and therefore complicit in silencing non-Chinese Singaporeans. Re-location thus transformed a position of suppression to one of significance.

Elizabeth's experience as a director and set designer was similar. She had recently worked as an assistant director on a show about Japanese American experience, where "my identity as an Asian person is valuable to them." For Mei Ann, Elizabeth and others, their work and voice became "valuable" in a way that was impossible in Singapore, where they would have been speaking, writing and working as members of a racial majority. Value came from movement and the resultant change in one's social location.

On the other hand, in entering another regime of value, artists and writers also faced uncomfortable misreadings of their work and identities. Some found themselves labouring under "Asian American," despite not identifying with the category and not creating work about the politics and history of Asian diaspora in the US. Jeremy, a writer and translator who had worked in London and New York, compared this to the category of "postcolonial writing" which was often used in essentialising and reductive ways to pigeonhole diasporic writers. Ruth, a playwright and director, echoed this ambivalence, explaining that if she were to try and make work about her identity:

> …it's going to be perceived as Asian American work, which it isn't, exactly. But that's the political context that is understood here when you want to do that kind of national identity work. And that's fine, because it's a completely different context. And it doesn't mean that people shouldn't try […] to do that kind of work, but I just feel like it's a lot harder and it isn't necessarily as interesting as it could be because you're always laying the groundwork, and you're explaining, and it's beginner's stuff, and you need to establish that before you can move further.

In contrast with Elizabeth and Mei Ann, Ruth found that the potential significance of her work was undermined because of how it might be categorised. While Mei Ann's self-identifying as Asian American gave her work a new relevance, Ruth felt that she was being misunderstood,

so she avoided doing "national identity work." This shows that moving away from one regime of value is also entering another: in moving away from Singapore, where the state seeks to use artistic production to uphold its own interests, my interlocutors enter another regime of value where racial politics might determine, limit, or expand the significance of one's work.

However, value coherence in diaspora is not unequivocally good. This raises questions about artistic production for different audiences: why is it desirable to make work coherent to an audience in New York City? Who is being addressed? Jeremy had lived outside of Singapore for fifteen years now, and found it difficult to attribute "home" to a single place. He acknowledged the "pitfall" of being away for a long time. "I've had the experience of reading books by certain Singaporean writers where I sort of go, "You're not writing for me. You're describing Singapore for an outsider," he said. This experience of being interpellated, of being hailed and addressed as an "outsider," was jarring. Similarly, "authenticity" has its problems, as a mechanism of creating value coherence for different audiences. Ruth felt that authenticity was performative, and not so a "yearning for a culture" but rather "this need to demonstrate specific aspects of culture." She had recently written and directed a ten-minute play called *Bad Chinese*, about the pressure to identify with the culture of one's ethnicity despite feeling alienated from it.

Similarly, for Geraldine, the ethics of representation was always central to her artistic practice; audience was inevitably part of that ethical question. When she showed her project on migrant workers in a group critique, she was accused of being exploitative. "That's a heavy accusation," she said. "Other people were like, "This looks like a series that some rich guy who feels bad about the issue would buy to support you." […] It's surprising to me that what I was so hard on myself about was also being articulated here [in the US] but in a much more accusatory way." The faculty member in the room responded with a question for her class: "Why don't we expect the same thing of an abstract painting? Why photographs, and why do

people who address these issues have to take on these responsibilities but not everybody else?" Geraldine felt that, in Singapore, there was a more nuanced understanding of the politics of advocacy for migrant workers' rights, and how visual art could fit into that project. What changed in the movement across regimes of value was the need for context to make her intentions coherent. Geraldine, in this case, had to explain activism and advocacy for migrant workers in Singapore to her largely US-based audience of classmates.

This is not to say that value coherence is impossible, or not worth pursuing. In making work across different contexts, locality is a source of value coherence; as Appadurai writes, locality has become "a fetish which disguises the globally dispersed forces" of production (1990, 306). In this context, localism and the local are understood to be qualities that make work coherent to different audiences. Instead of turning to locality for value coherence, I draw on Boym's concept of "diasporic intimacy," a kind of relationship that is not valued through "transparency, authenticity and ultimate belonging," but through "uprootedness and defamiliarization" (1998, 499). Boym writes that "it is precisely the common experience of dislocation that makes intimacy possible" (502). Thus diasporic intimacy is useful here in challenging the fetishism of locality; the focus on diasporic movement exposes the "globally dispersed forces" that have been disguised. Jeremy explains, for example, that many of his short stories were about "Singaporeans living outside of Singapore, or people in Singapore not considered Singaporean, not considered to belong there." Rather than pursuing value coherence across disparate regimes of value, we might look more closely at the movement itself that takes us from one regime to another, and what meaning is produced in that movement.

In the next chapter, I will look at the Singapore Literature Festival as one event where diasporic intimacy manifests, through its staging of themes of alienation, marginality, and movement. For now, however, I would like to address state funding as another site where artists must negotiate different regimes of value.

Value coherence between state and artist

State funding frees artists from financial constraints, especially given the lack of institutionalised arts patronage in Singapore, but comes with political constraints. It gives artists the freedom to do more, to make theatrical productions on a larger scale or to publish novels or rent studio space. In all my interviews, no one shared a common view of funding and censorship; some expressed the critique that it was entrenched in Singapore to a degree that made creative work near impossible. I discuss state funding here as one site where artists, writers, and organisers must find strategies to make the value of their work coherent across different regimes. Rather than making an argument for or against state funding, I explore in this section how state funding is the site where different regimes of value meet and rub up against each other, and how artists might negotiate that.

For the second iteration of the Singapore Literature Festival in 2016, Jee Leong decided that he would not get funding from the National Arts Council to support their events. He wanted to divest from state funding because of recent incidences of censorship, which I will detail as part of the history of the festival in the next chapter. Epigram Books, a local publisher that had previously given financial support to the festival, also lost the chance to get a grant from the NAC because they "got into trouble with the government," in Jee's words. "There's always a price to be paid for going against the government." He pointed out another literary non-profit organisation that had received a seed grant from the NAC.

> "The seed grant is for three years – next year, it's coming to an end. So they're now applying for major grants. So they can't afford to antagonise NAC, right? […] But you will never find them doing what we do – for example, coming out with a statement condemning – and that is exactly the limit of dependence on Singapore financing. So, you know, it all appears very, very free. It all appears like everything is hunky dory until you realise – no, there is boundaries that, you know, if you're getting money from NAC, you cannot cross."

Jee offers a critique of the state's approach to arts funding which aligns with Chong's description of the "orthodox" artist. If a grant recipient steps out of the bounds of orthodoxy, this warrants a rebuke from the state. This approach to state funding sees citizenship and artistic production as incommensurable regimes of value.

Mimi was a former artistic director of a Singaporean theatre company. She had also taught at a few drama programs in Singapore. She started to work in local theatres when she was eighteen, and her process of 'job-hunting' is indicative of the independent arts economy at the time; she would hang out at a coffee shop that was also a local haunt, where "all the theatre people will hang out there at night. So I will go – 'You got job, you got job?' I just wanted to work, and I'm very cheap! You pay me $200 also I happy, $500 also I happy, $300 also – just because, to me, it's just very exciting to be involved in theatre."

When she became an artistic director for a young theatre company, Mimi wanted to change their trajectory. Given the limited size of a Singaporean audience, Mimi saw quality and professionalism as crucial to the creation of value. "By increasing the professionalism, we give something to our audience. Our audience comes and our audience knows that they're paying x amount of money - $30 for a ticket, they're going to get a show that's worth $30, so they'll be like, "Okay, this is great, I will spend another $30 for the next show." Professionalism was something to be articulated in work ethic, staging, and quality of productions. The racial diversity of the audience was a measure of success to the state, because it showed that the company's work had a broad appeal, and so merited more support from the National Arts Council in the form of commissions and grants. "That was very important to me […] because of that, NAC would see that you guys are putting your money where your mouth is, delivering the goods." This evinces what Chong writes about the arts as "performance sites of the ruling elite's multicultural fantasies" (Chong 2010, 137), where what is fantasised is the racially diverse audience interpellated by this work, rather than work that lacks universal relevance or

appeals only to one racial category. Work with a "multicultural appeal" thus fits within the state's regime of value.

Mimi felt that as the provision of money through arts funding was necessarily conditional. She acknowledged that her opinion on government funding for the arts was unpopular.

> I'm a big believer in "don't bite the hand that feeds you." I think – you have to be quite – be – like, if NAC gives you money, don't go and do things that is […] disrespectful of that trust that NAC gives you. So – let's say, for example, if I'm staging a work and NAC says, "We are concerned that this work talks about race issues." And I will say, "Okay, we will be responsible, where we will have a dialogue and talk about this. We will be responsible for our work." And I think it's very important that we are artists are responsible for our work, we don't just say – like – for shock only, but you're not responsible for your work.

Mimi had, in her time as an artistic director, cultivated a good working relationship with the NAC, and sympathised with the managers, who were continually having to "uphold these rules, uphold these KPIs." The use of KPIs, or Key Performance Indicators, shows the state's engagement with yet another regime of value, as it borrows from a corporate strategy of measuring "performance." KPIs are indicative of how state bureaucracy understands the value of artistic production instrumentally. Mimi was thus engaged in the work of making value coherent across two different regimes, one being the state and the other being theatrical production.

Jeremy had a similar experience in writing with state funding, such as grants form the National Arts Council. Applications required a timeline, usually within two years; to get funding for a theatre piece, you had to submit a script, despite the fact that scripts tend to change throughout the rehearsal process. At the end of one writing residency, sponsored by the NAC, he was asked to report back the number of pages he had written. "That's not really how you measure how useful a residency is," Jeremy said. "But because it was a number they could put down, they asked for it. In Singapore, arts funding is run by bureaucrats, and here it tends

to be run by the artists themselves, or at least in combination." Artists and bureaucrats thus belong to, and uphold, incommensurable regimes of value, but artists are tasked with negotiating them by using the language and metrics of the bureaucracy.

For Mimi the greater challenge was in getting Singapore society on the whole to see the value of art. She compared this to New York City, where arts institutions benefited from patronage. "There's no sense that, if I'm a patron of this company, I'm supporting the Malay arts. There's no thinking like that. So we have no build-up of patronage." Mimi recounted a conversation with a sculptor from New York who moved to Singapore to live with his partner. "He said, you know, it's very weird. Singapore is the only country in the world where he has met artists looking like the government owes them a living. Artists thinking that the government should give them money to do – to create art." Mimi suggested that this might be due to the perception of the "nanny state," which perpetuated a sense of entitlement among Singaporean citizens, and manifests particularly among artists as an entitlement to funding. What needed to change, Mimi felt, was culture – the culture of censorship and suppression of freedom of thought, the culture that devalued the work of art – which was not under the purview of the National Arts Council, or any government-related body. Theatrical productions were hampered because there was no culture of patronage, unlike in New York City. "When I talk about things like artistic freedom," Mimi said, "It's more of a cultural thing. […] That is a huge cultural thing that is separate from the work that NAC does."

The real problem of value coherence, for Mimi, was between Singapore society and artistic production. Many of my interlocutors discussed Singapore culture as one that did not believe in the inherent value of artistic freedom and political participation. Geraldine and Ruth, as I wrote earlier in this chapter, observed that Singaporean small talk is apolitical; Jee suggested that there was a "conditioning" among Singaporeans, such that we internalise the idea that "politics is for the politicians." However, Singapore "culture" is not distinct from the

state; I would argue that Singapore "culture" has been produced to be at odds with the values of artistic production and freedom of expression. The comparison of stayers and quitters I explore earlier in this chapter is one way in which qualities of good citizenship are made to be "cultural," since the stayer is constructed as the "moral" position and coincides with the state's desire to mobilise its diaspora for political and economic gain.

Representation as value coherence

This chapter builds on the recognition that citizenship and artistic production are two disparate regimes of value, because the Singaporean citizen-artist is called to both uphold and critique the state. Artists in diaspora experience a lack of value coherence in moving between these two regimes; they are neither "stayers" nor "quitters," and have an ambiguous value to the state. This results from the narrow definition of Singaporean citizenship, which is governed through comparative mechanisms. Many of my interlocutors, and their movements and practices, must negotiate the contradiction of being a citizen-artist given this limited conception of good citizenship. They are drawn to New York City as an imagined space of "freedom to".

However, artists are not merely subject to a lack of value coherence; their work also produces value coherence across different regimes. Some of the Singaporean artists and writers I interviewed felt that living and working in diaspora gave their work new relevance in a different regime of value; however, others found the project of their work limited by its incoherence in a different context. Instead, the movement between these regimes became the source of meaning and value, as Boym suggests in her writing on diasporic intimacy. Artists and writers are also tasked with creating value coherence between the regimes of the state and of artistic production, which involves drawing together seemingly incommensurable metrics. This might speak more broadly to the function of artistic representation as itself a way to create value coherence across different regimes and institutions.

In the next chapter, I argue that a plurality of representations of home and un-home challenge the idea that any one party should have a monopoly on "home." I focus on the discourse of home because it features prominently in the events I attended, namely the National Day Reception at the Singapore Consulate and the Singapore Literature Festival. Home is complicated. It is used as a metaphor to make value coherent across regimes of value; it is also used as a signifier to by disparate regimes of value to produce a plurality of homes. Home is at once universal and particular; so is the un-home, which is produced as its opposite.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRODUCTIONS OF HOME AND UN-HOME

In the previous chapter, I sought to trouble the comparative mechanisms used to manage the work of citizen-artists, and how other qualities became conflated with them. Comparison is a project of scale-making, "in which a particular way of seeing and being is socially enforced" and power enters into the pragmatics of scale since "some positions and perspectives are privileged at the expense of others" (Carr & Lempert 2016, 9). This chapter turns to home and un-home, not as comparison or as category, but as practiced, performed and produced. I explore festival and celebratory spaces as "productive of social meaning as well as (or instead of) representative of it" (Frost 2016, 573). Two key sites for fieldwork were the Singapore Literature Festival in 2018, and the National Day reception at the Singapore Consulate in the same year. At both events, attendees sought to re-affirm certain ideological commitments and affinities with the nation-state. Both are liminal sites where boundaries are reinforced and re-made, where the meaning of the nation and imagined community reaches a limit and begins to fray. Home is a central operating metaphor for these events and their organisers; their articulations of home co-exist, and compete with one another. In wielding the discourse of home, they implicitly map out the un-home; regimes of value thus shape the contents of these categories of home and world.

This chapter will begin with a state-driven narrative of home produced at the National Day reception at the Singapore Consulate. The Singapore Literature Festival is a reaction to this narrative in the sense that it explicitly distances itself from the Consulate and other government-related events; it thus performs a kind of un-home, while still using the metaphor of home and homey-ness. I end with a closer look at the private space of home, which privileges domesticity, insularity, safety, and care. This chapter is also in part a work of re-scaling home, and contesting the idea that any one party can have a monopoly on the category of home. By

drawing events and spaces out on the same scale, I hope to contest the assumption that a singular, exclusive imaginary of home should be privileged.

Appropriating the idiom of "home"

The reproduction of home involves labour, and for the Singapore government, has a history in policymaking. Through the late 1990s and early 2000s, policy direction articulated "citizenship-building strategies centred on the idea of place connection, participation, community-building and ideas of reciprocity" (Velayutham 2007, 102). The metaphor of nation-as-home is a government response to the anxiety that increasing numbers of Singaporeans are emigrating, as I explain in the previous chapter; the concept of "home" works to domesticate citizens and maintain a commitment to the nation, to borrow Velayutham's use of "domestication." I engage with Velayutham's writing at length because he closely observes the argument implicit in official government texts, such as then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's 1999 and 2002 National Day Rally speeches, which establish the broad categories of "heartlanders," "cosmopolitans," "stayers" and "quitters." Velayutham observes that the Heartlander is "appropriated to act as Singapore's locality and its boundaries, while the cosmopolitans represent the ability to connect beyond those boundaries" (108). The Heartlander is rather clearly mapped out for the listener – "taxi-drivers, stallholders, shop owners, production workers and contractors" (108) – evidently attributed to a particular social class, and certainly associating class, labour, wealth, and locality.

In the section that follows, I will examine the annual National Day reception hosted by the Singapore Consulate in New York City, which imagines as its audience Goh's overseas "stayers" who retain some kind of commitment to the nation. They have myriad reasons for leaving Singapore, but perhaps have in common the idea that a "'home has to be a space open enough so that one can perceive opportunities of a 'better life'; […] the opportunity of

advancement, whether as social mobility, emotional growth, or in the form of accumulation of symbolic or monetary capital" (Hage 1997, p. 103, cited in Velayutham 105). The event illustrates the contradiction noted in the previous chapter between the discourse of home and the discourse of global city, such that in the discursive production of Singapore, "the global city has to be contained within the discourse of home" (Lim 2003, 217).

The Singapore Consulate in New York City hosts an annual National Day reception, organised by the Overseas Singaporean Unit, sometime around August 9 – the recognised date of Singapore's independence as a sovereign state. This event came up in a few of my interviews, and I was told to register with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to get an invitation. Located close to the United Nations office, the Consulate is a trek from the subway to East 51st Street. This year the dinner took place on August 24, fairly late in the summer, and the invitation by email arrived on July 25:

> *In celebration of our nation's 53rd birthday, the Permanent Mission of Singapore to the United Nations, Singapore Consulate, and Overseas Singaporean Unit in New York are pleased to invite you and your family to a dinner reception. Details of the event are as follows…*

When I asked Jeremy if he planned to attend, he laughed and told me that the people who go to these things are always the same crowd, and the ambassador, or whoever, always says the same things – but the food is always good.

"This" "Is" "Home"

At the entrance, I am asked for my NRIC and proof of identity, and have to pass through a metal detector while my backpack is inspected. The interior of the lobby feels like a doctor's office, but as I climb the stairs to the reception, bursts of red and white flags and streamers come into view. Hong-Ling, a sculptor I interviewed in June, says a quick hello before turning away to hobnob. I feel like a misplaced teenager at someone's baby shower at a community center, a space where everyone seems to know everyone else. I say as much to Elizabeth, a set

designer in attendance with her husband, and she replies, "There's something strange about Singaporeans' ability to make any place feel like Singapore." National Day songs are playing as people mill around, waiting for the programming to start. It eventually does, with consul Jasmine Wee taking the small stage at the front of the room. Her introduction emphasises the imagined community of Singaporeans: "It could be the neighbourhoods we grew up in, the schools we attended, the organisations we worked for, our ethnicity, food, language, culture, that binds us all together in this common identity. And I see here this evening – it's really heartwarming that we've all come together to celebrate our nation's birthday, and as we embrace this strong sense of identity that is larger than all our differences."

In this emphasis on commonality, however, there is also a kind of boundary being drawn. What does commonality really mean to this crowd, whose very presence in the room signals a geographical dis-affinity with Singapore? Hong, writing about the protagonists of *Crazy Rich Asians*, identifies a "transnational class of elite Asians whose wealth and cosmopolitanism allow them to disregard the usual limitations of national boundaries and local mores" (Hong 2018, 109). The novel might not be an accurate representation of Singapore's transnational upper-classes, but Hong's description is much closer to the mark. Why would this group choose to attend this reception? The event is a form of mediation, "the process by which the self recognizes itself by returning to itself, renewed and once removed" (Mazzarella 2004, 357). Jovie Tang, chargée d'affairs and permanent deputy representative to the United Nations, takes the stage to give updates that pertain to Singapore's diplomatic relations. "All of you are here – you are actually ambassadors of Singapore, representatives of Singapore," she says. "I met somebody who lived in Warsaw, Indiana – and I don't know where the heck Warsaw, Indiana is, you know? You're probably the only Singaporean that someone in Warsaw, Indiana will ever meet. And so, you know, you're out there, and you're representing Singapore, and that's what all of you do. So it's incredibly important that we thank you for

doing that." Through the "work" that Singaporeans do to represent the nation, they become reclaimed by the state – prodigal children who re-affirm their citizenship and reinforce particular boundaries of the imagined community of the nation. Here, "home is not imaged as resident within the global city but as its radical Other, the local." (Lim 2003, 217) The state subjects produced through this event are not cosmopolitans, not "quitters," but firmly local despite the geographic distance – a powerful leap through time and space.

At the end of the speechifying, someone announces the National Anthem, and almost everyone stands at attention. The version that plays is an old, choral version, grand and booming – the version I would sing along to during morning assembly at Primary School.[14] Everyone claps at the end, and then Michelle brings a group of children up on the stage; they lead a recital of the national pledge. People seem to be getting antsy, anticipating the food, but the OSU has something else in mind as they jump into a sing-along of all the National Day songs.[15] Everyone sings along gamely, especially when *Home* comes on – the perennial favourite[16] that, more than any other song, reinforces the metaphor of nation-as-home.

This is home, truly, where I know I must be
Where my dreams wait for me, where the river always flows;
This is home, surely, as my senses tell me
This is where I won't be alone—for this is where I know it's home.

What "home" is the song calling to? Its refrain speaks to the immediate, "this" and "is" suggesting here and now, despite the fact that it is meant to revive memories of a past home;

[14] Morning assembly may have been an inheritance of British colonialism, and works to centralise education. Every morning, students from kindergarten, Primary, Secondary, and Junior College levels will gather to sing the National Anthem while the national flag is raised, and sometimes the school song. Students, teachers, or the principals might make announcements.
[15] These are songs by local artists that are usually composed specifically for that year's National Day Parade, commissioned by the Singapore government. Through kindergarten and primary school, we were taught that year's National Day song in class, and the songs are broadcast on the radio leading up to the celebration itself. Memorable titles include *Count On Me Singapore*; *One People, One Nation, One Singapore*; *Five Stars Arising*; *Stand Up For Singapore*; *Singapore Town;* and the popular *Home* sung by Kit Chan and composed by Dick Lee. This practice originated in 1980 with the National Folk Songs Committee, a government initiative to promote community singing.
[16] According to the report in The Straits Times, "National Day Song 'Home' celebrates 20th anniversary." August 7, 2018.

the song, like the reception's other activities, works to remember "home" by 'membering' the reception space with "ghosts revived from the past or presences envisaged in an imagined future" (Fortier 2003, 124). Michelle, who heads the Overseas Singapore Unit, tells me later that the Singapore Consulate is technically sovereign territory – in a geopolitical sense, then, this *is* home, a piece of land where only the Singapore government has recognised jurisdiction. This is complicated first by the claim to sovereignty on land that was seized from Lenape people by Dutch colonists, a history only half-remembered in the name *Manhattan* which is derived from a Lenape dialect. Second, what are the implications of this sovereignty? Does it make for a more comprehensive reproduction of the nation outside of its geographical borders? While these questions would merit their own argument in a separate paper, I bring them in here to note the incoherence of value in the use of home as a metaphor, because claims to "home" are complicated by sovereignty and settler colonialism.

Finally, everyone gathers at the front of the room to take a group photo; children are asked to stand in the front, and then they cut into a birthday cake for the nation, decorated with the Singapore flag. As people eat and chat, children are once again enlisted to perform for the crowd in a "How Singaporean are you?" quiz game. Questions flash on the screen, and people exclaim over adorable little kids answering questions like, "What does *kopi C siew dai* mean?" "Lion City or Garden City?" They get everything right, of course, but these are not questions about recent developments in Singapore's landscape, infrastructure, politics, and assume national identity is apolitical. Nostalgia is strategic in this particular reproduction of Singapore, calibrated to reflect Singapore as experienced by the attendees, most of whom are young or middle-aged parents. This is not just a reproduction of place, but also of time, and the sustained focus on children – many of whom might grow up with ambivalent relationships to Singapore – also involves the reproduction of the nation and the family.

In my introduction, I mentioned that the Singapore government wields a hegemonic narrative of home that precludes other definitions and possibilities. This hegemony is always being contested, however; I first realised this when I searched "home Singapore" on Google, and the first result was the HOME, the Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics, led by activist Jolovan Wham[17] from 2004 to 2015. HOME is an advocacy and empowerment group for migrant workers, dealing with cases of wage theft, work injuries, poor living conditions, and physical, verbal and psychological abuse; the organization operates helpdesks, shelters, legal aid, skills training, and also engages in policy research and lobbying. Its name, and its mission, implicitly challenge the dominant narrative of what "home" is, who might call Singapore "home," and the rights entitled to someone living and working in Singapore. In the next section of this chapter I look at the Singapore Literature Festival as a kind of resistance to this appropriation of home, not by claiming another kind of home but by performing an un-home.

Performing the home as un-home

> To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the "unhomely" be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and the public spheres. […] In the stirrings of the unhomely, another world becomes visible. It less to do with forcible eviction and more to do with the uncanny literary and social effects of enforced social accommodation, or historical migrations and cultural relocations. The home does not remain the domain of domestic life, nor does the world simply become its social or historical counterpart. The unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the home, the home-in-the-world (Bhabha 1992, 141).

Bhabha draws on Freud's concept of the uncanny to explore the confusion and estrangement that emerge as the lines between world and home blur, and the public and private spheres become inextricable. To be un-homed is not to lack a home, but to recognise that one's home is not quite one's own. Drawing on Bhabha's "unhome," I suggest that the Singapore

[17] I also mention Wham in my introduction; he is currently under investigation for organising an "illegal assembly."

Literature Festival calls for re-investigation of the projection of nation-as-home that has been established through state-led narratives of nation-building. The festival and its participants take that "shock of recognition of the world the world-in-the home, the home-in-the-world" (Bhabha 1992, 141), and reconfigure home as un-home, un-home as home.

I will begin with a summary of the history of the festival as told to me by Jee Leong, one of its co-founders and current organiser. In 2013, his friend and fellow writer and publisher Paul Rozario broached the idea of starting a festival. Jee Leong was reluctant; he saw himself first as a writer, and not an organiser, but Kenny Leck – at the helm of independent bookseller BooksActually, and its publishing arm Math Paper Press – continued to encourage Paul to start a festival. "We were so bold," Jee told me. "We thought that Kenny Leck promised us $10,000. Which in the end he did not give us." That same year, Jee spent the summer in Singapore and attended Pink Dot[18]; fellow writer Christine Chia invited him to join her friends at an after party, where he met younger Singaporean artists, writers, and curators. "They're no longer like, my generation, whereby you do writing, you do art on the side. Now we have people who actually want to devote their lives to it, who have found a way of supporting themselves with it. […] So that's why there was this idea that maybe, actually, there's enough going on to present it." This festival thus begins with Jee's re-recognition of home as a place where artists, writers, and creators were thriving; it involved his realisation of the space of possibility. The first Singapore Literature Festival took place in 2014, with a lineup of fourteen celebrated Singaporean writers and theatre-makers[19] who had built their careers and reputation in Singapore. A few were based in New York City, but most flew in from Singapore and stayed for the weekend. Part of their airfare was covered by the National Arts Council, but they had had to cover the rest, and find their own lodging. The festival team paid the authors for each

[18] An annual event in support of Singapore's LGBTQ community that started in 2009 with the tagline "Supporting the freedom to love".
[19] Haresh Sharma, Pooja Nansi, Tania De Rozario, Colin Goh, Yen Yen Woo, Cyril Wong, Verena Tay, Alvin Pang, Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan, Jason Erik Lundberg, Kirstin Chen, Wena Poon, Joshua Ip, Christine Chia

appearance, enough to cover the rest of their airfare. This seemed unsustainable in the long run, so Jee decided to bring fewer Singaporean authors and pair them with American authors for events. This also aligned with the aims of facilitating dialogue and exchange across national and cultural boundaries, which remains one of the festival's key objectives.

That was the project of the second Singapore Literature Festival, two years later. Alfian Sa'at and Ovidia Yu joined from Singapore. By this time Jee had made the decision that he would refuse to ask the National Arts Council for funding, because the NAC had withdrawn a publishing grant for *The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye* by Sonny Liew, and the Media Development Authority had banned Tan Pin Pin's *To Singapore With Love* from public screening. Both incidents became flashpoints for public discourse about censorship and freedom of expression in artistic production, as well as critiques of the nation's state-enforced amnesia around the Marxist conspiracy of 1967. Jee reiterated he saw Singapore Unbound as an explicitly political project, using his platform to write statements condemning NAC decisions, and supporting local activists.

Thus in 2016 the festival had officially divested itself from state funding and direction – but what is Singapore without the state? Ideals of cultural exchange, diversity and plurality figure in festival paraphernalia, situating Singapore as a sort of universal signifier for these ideas. Its 2018 iteration, more so than past years, embodied artistic cosmopolitanism with a staging of the Greek classic *Medea*, coupled with panels featuring authors from Singapore, UK, US, Nigeria, and located in the National Black Theatre. Unlike the homogeneity of the National Day reception and the Singapore Consulate, the festival insists on entanglements with various "cultures." What kind of Singapore is produced in order to make those entanglements possible?

In 2018, the festival's theme was *Say It Differently*, and took place over three days in October. Many organisational decisions (location, catering, panellists, moderators, timing) were entirely up to Jee, but he also faced financial and logistical exigencies that determined

these outcomes. This balance between pragmatic and ideological reasoning would play out in different ways; at any rate, I hesitate to attribute the festival's implications to Jee or to any one party. The festival took place, for the most part, at the National Black Theatre. Founded in 1968 by Dr Barbara Ann Teer, the theatre sits on Harlem's famous 125th Street, and draws on artistic traditions of Black diaspora, including the murals created by a group of Nigerian artists. In over fifty years of history, the theatre has been a cultural incubator for artists like Ruby Dee, Maya Angelou and Nikki Giovanni. Its survival at that location has been precarious, threatened by foreclosure in 2013, facing serious debt, and trying to keep an Applebee's franchise from subleasing space in the theatre (The New York Times, June 6, 2012).

Fifty years after its founding, the National Black Theatre was filled with a group of mostly ethnic Chinese Singaporeans, eating curry puffs and spring rolls from Rasa. The reasons for this location are threefold, according to Jee: he lives walking distance away from the theatre; it is more affordable than anywhere on Broadway; it is available for the festival dates; it draws on connections between experiences of dislocation, marginality, and dispossession, and aligns the festival with those values of solidarity and justice. Upon entering the theatre, you took an elevator up to the third floor, where it opened onto a small museum space dedicated to the history of Civil Rights struggles, a sort of lobby to the theatre where the rest of the festival events would take place. Festivalgoers hung out in this lobby under the portrait of Dr. Teer, chatting and exploring the displays. This location offered possible ways of imagining solidarity and intimacy between African and Asian diasporic experiences, which were articulated best in the reading of *Malay Sketches* (which I will detail below); however, the co-location of these diasporic narratives set up a false equivalency between them that was never really addressed. The racialization of the Chinese in Singapore was that of a racial majority, and by this time "the Chinese Singaporean who goes overseas to study, becomes very 'woke' and then comes home" was something of a trope, as Ruth told me. Returning to Bhabha, this

is a disorienting moment of being re-un-homed, a moment of recognition that one's home might not fit so cleanly within the world one has arrived in; Singapore's racial politics cannot map so easily onto the US, despite the parallels in diasporic experience.

In this context, the staging of *Medea* seemed to me defanged. The festival programme pared the staging of *Medea* with a different event each time, usually an authors' panel.

Medea was striking, a one-woman performance starring Noorlinah Mohamed, who has worn many other hats in Singapore's theatre scene prior to this role as a producer, festival director, and arts educator. Cake Theatrical Productions first staged the Greek tragedy in Singapore in 2017, with a full cast that included the iconic Siti Khalijah Zainal as Medea. To bring the show to New York City, Cake used video projections of the other characters – a decision that feels both logistical, pragmatic, conceptual, and aesthetic – and sent Noorlinah, a stage crew, and director Natalie Hennedige. Noorlinah was physically trapped by three large screens; when she caressed Jason and her children, her hand cannot find purchase anywhere. The projections brought the living, breathing images of the rest of *Medea*'s cast to us, collapsing space and time – however, it feels like immediation without intimacy. While the projections made for experimental and interesting visual capabilities, the lack of a full cast makes the scale of the story daunting. *Medea* is high drama: betrayal, exile, murder, and of course, its success lies in convincing the audience to empathise with the outsider in all her rage and indignation. In this version of the play, which seems inspired by Euripedes', Medea is first cast out of her homeland Colchis because she kills her brother to stop her father from pursuing Jason. She brings Jason the Golden Fleece and wins his love, but when they seek refuge in Corinth, Jason abandons her for the king's daughter, Glauce. Medea poisons Glauce and her father, and in the most brutal scene of the play, she kills her two children in order to wound Jason as deeply as possible. The projections created fantastical backdrops using water and fire motifs and surprising geometric patterns, making every setting feel hostile and alien. The fact

that Medea remains moving and sympathetic – at least, to me – is testament to the strength of Noorlinah, Hennedige, and visual artist Brian Gothong Tan's collaboration. To my mind, it might not be a stretch to read Jason as the patriarchal state that reneges on its promises, and Medea as the slighted, betrayed citizen who meets the violence of the state with violence of her own making.

This recontextualising of Greek mythology might be an example of what Litvin called the "global kaleidoscope," referring to interpretations and stagings of Shakespeare in Egypt. Rather than the trope of the postcolonial writer struggling against colonial influence that is standard in postcolonial literary criticism, Litvin suggests that rereading and rewriting of Shakespeare takes place "in active dialogue with a diverse array of readings that precede and surround it" (Litvin 2011, 54). Similarly, Lim draws on the rhizome to develop her analysis of English-language narrative by Singaporean writers, "a uniqueness subtracted from a multiplicity of determinations, magnitudes and dimensions together with the evolution of the English language within a rhizome structure" (2003, 213). Both Litvin and Lim call for a greater awareness in literary studies that postcolonial artistic production, and its products, reflect a heterogeneous reality beyond the linear movement of the Anglophone canon outside of the metropole.

Hennedige and Cake also staged another Greek tragedy, *Electra*, in 2016, another tale of divine rage, grief, and struggle in the face of injustice. Hennedige explains that she is drawn to this figure of the perpetual outsider. "What is Singaporean to you about the myth of the perpetual outsider?" someone asks. "It's very easy to feel like an outsider," Hennedige replies, "It's very small… People constantly ask me if I'm Singaporean. I think there are many Medeas in Singapore." That smallness is suffocating, and makes other ways of living impossible; to be "outside" of the dominant ideologies, to reject well-trodden models of work, family, and value-making, is to choose difficulty, as my interlocutors bring out. However, Hennedige is alluding

specifically to a racialized outside-ness when she speaks about her experience of being questioned because she is visibly non-Chinese – the experience of being un-homed within your home. To face daily interrogation of one's identity is a racialized phenomenon, one that Singapore's ethnic Chinese are unlikely to face within the country; transposing this to the US results in a different kind of homing. Unlike the National Day reception, which seeks to reproduce as much as possible the local-ness of home, the Singapore Literature Festival is the pursuit of home-in-the-world through flexible claims to racialization and diasporic experience.

The festival programme paired the staging of *Medea* with a different event each time, usually an authors' panel. The two panels were moderated by US authors Jenny Xie and Naomi Jackson, and brought together writers and poets from Singapore and elsewhere, with the aim of finding resonances of universal themes in varied contexts, returning again to the idea of "unhoming" as the site of expansion – "In the stirrings of the unhomely, another world becomes visible" (Bhabha 1992, 141). For its final staging, *Medea* was preceded by a dramatic reading of excerpts from Alfian Sa'at's *Malay Sketches*, directed by Zizi with her partner Izmir handling the lights and cues. The reading complemented *Medea* because its narrative is more explicit about Singapore's racial politics, but deals less with violence and pain of marginality; Alfian's writing centers Malay characters, Malay music, and Malay history, while Zizi's direction is interested in the intersection and layering of marginal experiences. Jee told us volunteers excitedly before the show that Zizi had cast a Korean-American man and an African-American woman; the effect, he explained, upon seeing it, was comedic but also moving, the fact that people could read these stories without the context, mispronounce the words, but still make them compelling and relevant.

Singapore by Night

I am sitting in the dark theatre, waiting for someone to tell me to open the big doors. The actor is doing vocal exercises. He asks Zizi questions, like: "What's the emotion I have during this line?" Otherwise, it is silent, anticipatory darkness. Izmir, behind the scenes, gently transitions from one lighting setup to another. The projections in the background are soft blurs of light that move, slowly, and recall streetlamps viewed from the window of a passing car, evoking the city by night. The actress reads a line about the Malaysian R&B singer Dayang Nurfaizah trying to sound like a Black woman, and the irony of this draws laughter as much as the line itself. Somehow, this is the moment I have been waiting for – this reading ties the loose threads of place and text together, and helps me to make sense of our surroundings. As Zizi points out, we are in Harlem, in New York City, listening to old Malay songs from oceans away.

One of the excerpts being read is from *Singapore By Night*, one of Alfian's short stories in the collection: Bob works in a sound crew for gigs, meets lead singer Suzanna, and falls for her. He starts to send her his favourite songs, mostly Malay singers from the 1950s singing about yearning and loss. Still, he longs for a bygone time, before digitised music existed, so that he might have an excuse to meet with Suzanna in person. Conversely, Suzanna likes singers like Cat Power and Feist; closer to home, she likes Yuna and Zee Avi, both young women who mostly sing in English, with an international audience. The keroncong is explained in sthe story as an "Indonesian musical style consisting of intricate, interlocking melodies made by a flute, guitar, a pizzicato cello, or string bass, and of course the keroncong itself, a ukulele-type instrument" (Alfian Sa'at 171). For Bob, it was "the meeting point between two maritime peoples, the kinship between the Portuguese *saudade* and the Malay *rindu*, both words which express a longing inexpressible in other languages" (Alfian 2012, 172). There are double yearnings here – the first is Bob's unrequited love for Suzanna, but Alfian also alludes to the merger between Singapore and the Federation and Malaysia in 1962 as the yearning of one

nation for another, one people for another. When Bob tells Suzanna the truth, she replies, "I don't even know your real name. […] I think that says it, all right? If I felt the same way about you, I would have asked right from the start" (Alfian 175).

People ask questions of the actors in the Q&A about taking on these roles; about how Singaporean-ness is something you might take on. To my knowledge, Zizi and her family were the only Malay Singaporeans in the theatre. Would Chinese people in the audience still be laughing if the actors were Malay, or would it have felt too close to home? The (Black) American accent is distancing; this is an experience of being a minority that we relate to differently, whereas at home, Chinese Singaporeans dominate. Zizi, standing on stage, says that the importance of *Malay Sketches* was its empathy, and how it gave voice to Malay people without necessarily requiring Malay people to be here, a kind of immediation and movement; the story is "a house where the unhomely can live" (Bhabha 1992, 142). There was a universality and specificity to this all at once, as one of the actor points out: "I've been there before." Zizi explains that she ordered the sketches to give a sense of old to new Singapore, a very deliberate production of home at a particular time. The title *Malay Sketches* is shared with the ethnographic writing of Frank Swettenham, the British Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Straits Settlements, who wrote his observations of the Malay community in 1895. Alfian is thus engaged in a kind of writing back and writing against. But the Singapore Alfian writes is not the same one I grew up in, and the performance of these multiple Singapores is made possible because of the festival's insistence of moving away from state-led discourse around this category. Knowing this, meaning layered upon meaning, something frays; the uncomfortable conflation of different ways of being a minority, of living in marginality, shows itself to be a false one.

Another way of imagining home-in-the-world surfaced through my interviews, which offer not a contest for the power to define "home," but a renegotiation of home that is made

possible in private space. If the National Day reception is the performance of home, and the Singapore Literature Festival entangles home and un-home, then what I found in these private spaces was a kind of re-homing. As Bhabha points out (citing Carole Pateman), domestic life is a vital and easily forgotten part of the way private and public life are differentiated; "[d]omestic life becomes, by virtue of its disavowal, a problematic boundary of civil society" (Bhabha 1992, 151). Thus in the section that follows I focus on the domestic life of my interlocutors, taking private space not necessarily as physical household spaces, but the space created in our interviews, a homing through vulnerability.

Homes and worlds

In July 2018, I call on Mimi and her family. My first point of contact is her partner, Isa, but as a freelance lighting designer, he is always preoccupied with the next upcoming show. He invites me to lunch at their home, a narrow apartment provided by the university where Mimi is a graduate student. I offer to help Isa with the salad, but it looks like the kitchen is barely wide enough to fit two people standing, a common problem in Manhattan apartments. Instead I look at the shelves that line their small living room – theatre books, a Singapore literature anthology, the Qur'an, their daughter's drawings on the door, and the letters H-A-P-P-Y strung up on the wall. Mimi immediately launches into a conversation about Singapore's theatre scene, the community and career she left behind. Isa cooks as we chat and chimes in every now and then. Neither are inclined to laugh easily at my small talk. Both throw out statements about their experiences in Singapore arts productions, and both disagree often. Sometimes they finish each other's sentences, but more often it is Mimi who paraphrases Isa to clarify his argument. At one point, Isa disparages the tendency in Singapore theatre to be political for the sake of controversy or attention. I don't quite agree, at first, but then Mimi jumps in - "I think what Isa is trying to say is that - it ends up being that theatre is valued for

being political and for nothing else." They self-consciously differentiate themselves from Singaporean artists who are "angry" with the government; there are other things to worry about. Oppression, they suggest, means something different in the US than it does in Singapore – restrictions on freedom of expression cannot compare to the daily occurrence of physical violence and brutality, which evokes Elizabeth's analogy in the third chapter on "freedom to" and "freedom from." We sit down to lunch and their daughter insists that I get the best chair, closest to the fan, on a sweltering day, as Isa piles my plate with chicken curry and rice.

My fieldnotes are full of food, in part because it invariably came up in my interviews. Isa and Mimi were not the only ones who cooked for me. Jeremy, on our second meeting, made an elaborate meal – at least, to me – a four-dish spread of sliced potatoes with ginger, cold tofu and soy sauce, tomatoes and eggs, and spicy cucumbers with Sichuan peppercorns. He poured me iced Japanese bami tea, perfect for the heat, and insisted that I sit down and play with his cat when I offered to help. Then he gave me pistachio ice cream with bananas he'd caramelised himself. His apartment in Brooklyn was close to a Chinatown because, as a translator, it helped to be able to practice his Mandarin on a regular basis and stop in the Chinese bookstore when he wanted. I loved the openness of his space, the living room and bedroom blurring together, the photo of himself with his partner by the bathroom. The study had its own corner room where Jeremy's cat lounged on his desk chair. He showed me his bookshelves, which lacked a clear organisational pattern: Judy Blume, Lee Kuan Yew, Tennesee Williams, Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Singapore: A Biography*, S. Rajaratnam, *And Tango Makes Three*, a copy of *Mynah* magazine, and many titles in Mandarin. I left his home with my backpack weighed down by four new books, including the lovely gift of one of his translations.

If the Singapore Literature Festival was a project of making the home-in-the-world, these domestic spaces offered a kind of world-in-the-home because of the plural possibilities for home that existed within them. The "impossible subjectivities" of diaspora, and queer

diaspora in particular, are made possible. Not everyone cooked for me, of course, and not everyone invited me into their home, but other forms of sharing were involved – particularly sharing place. Ruth introduced me to her favourite food cart in Washington Square Park; Elizabeth sat with me outside of Lincoln Center; Jee Leong and Kimberley treated me to dinner at Rasa; Mei-Ann showed me her underground hair salon. These gestures reproduced, for me, a feeling of home. I would sometimes buy a coffee for an interviewee, or vice versa, but this was a different sort of intimacy. To be welcomed into the homes of my interviewees allowed me to see their counter-constructions of home, speaking back to a home that was often exclusionary, where they felt out of place. I had not expected to be squired around New York City in this manner, and it was exciting to see what my interlocutors had come to love – what made them feel at home within an un-home.

To return to Natalie Hennedige's comments, it is easy to feel like an outsider in Singapore, and this came up frequently in conversations; these feelings are not without implications if we think states as affective bodies. The affective attachments of individuals to particular categories have implications for power and about access, and often to prove membership in one category you have to distance yourself from another; the feeling of being at home or "no longer at home" is structured and structuring (Stoler 2008, 7).[20] This had a specific and critical implication for Singaporeans who identified as queer, and who have experienced an un-homing within Singapore, which I introduced in the previous chapter. Fortier describes the common narrative in queer writing of "queer migration-as-homecoming" (2003, 118), something that surfaced in my interviews, especially when I asked why they had left Singapore and whether they planned to move back. "I just don't think I'd fit in anymore," said Johanna, a costume designer who told me she was bisexual. "I think insofar as my

[20] Stoler is writing here about the context of Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia which enforced a policy where children of mixed European and Indonesian parentage could access European legal status if they could prove that they felt "distanced" from the "native part of one's being," that they felt "no longer at home" in a native milieu."

emotional happiness is a key priority for me, I don't think I will ever go home." The contradiction she brings out – feeling unhappy and out of place somewhere she still considers "home" – was also specific to her family, a conservative Christian household, from whom she would have to hide herself: sexuality, tattoos, piercings. "I never want to have to hide my truth of who I am again, and going home would mean that – for the sake of my parents – I have to do that." Mei-Ann, a dramaturge, said something along similar lines: "I had a hard time. But there were so many people I loved back there. So I would go back but I never really thought about working, and I also felt like I didn't know anyone, I felt like a stranger in my own country."

Both said, definitively, that they did not want to move back to Singapore; underlying these statements is the image of home as "a site which is attached, fixed into place, in acts of remembering 'what it was like', so that I can move on, into another place, another becoming" (Fortier 2003, 124). For Johanna, Mei-Ann, and others, to move away, to express the truth of themselves, that conception of home has to stay in place, as a particular exclusionary ideal. It seems then that the goal is not to return home, or to make a new home in line with the image of the enshrined homeland (Gupta 1997, 197), but to find home in un-home.

Johanna observed "Singaporeans are the kind that like, when you see each other overseas you run away from each other, as opposed to everyone else who would be like, "Oh, a fellow --- " You're like, "No, Singaporeans, run far away!" This was anecdotal, but reflects an ambivalence towards home and the imagined community. Elizabeth, an actress, drew this comparison: "Americans, I find, are very insular; everything is about how it will affect my country, whereas as a Singaporean I feel like when I see something in the world, I'm like, "How is it going to affect the wider picture?" These responses came from a particular standpoint of thinking about travel as "an expanded field of transnationality," which is to say that transnationality is produced not just through location and dislocation, but also from

mobility itself (Kaplan 2003, 220). The smallness of Singapore resulted in a dispersed, mobile notion of home, one that Schueller notes is used as an "incorporative strategy" for multi-national corporations – this is "the logic that everywhere is home, that instead of "us" and "them" there is only the "us," in "world of hyper capitalism that interpolates people through consumption rather than production" (Schueller 2015, 74).

The queer and/or migratory narratives of my interlocutors thus align with Bhabha's world-in-the-home, if we consider that queerness for Singaporeans is a kind of worlding and un-homing. I end this chapter on the note from Schueller, because it gestures towards home-making as a political project; it also returns us to the bounds of "us" and "them" that were drawn as a means of colonial governance, and inherited in how the world is mapped today. My goal has been to explore productions of home at different scales, and subsequently, the space available for the negotiation of regimes of value. The National Day Reception, I argue, uses the metaphor of the nation-as-home to interpellate its "stayers," exercising a state monopoly over the category of "home." Outside of that monopoly, the un-home offers a new space of possibility which the Singapore Literature Festival takes up, with its focus on locating Singaporean writers and artists within the un-home, and building a discourse of the home-in-the-world. It would be oversimplifying and reductive to suggest that spaces of the interior – private, domestic space, interview spaces – are where one might begin to reclaim home. I want to suggest instead that we attend to home on a different scale in order to de-center the state in this analysis, and to recognise that Singapore was made to be small, when, in fact, it contains within it a world-in-a-home.

CONCLUSION: RE-SCALING SINGAPORE

While writing this thesis, reading the news from home often left me confused, restless and frustrated. It was hard to imagine the relevance of my research in the context of increasingly repressive legislation, growing socioeconomic disparities, and continued attacks on LGBTQ rights and advocacy organisations. Most recently, during a Parliament session on April 2, a bill for the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation was tabled after a few years of discussion among ministers about the necessity of legislation against "fake news" – a term borrowed from Donald Trump speaking about US news media. The mobilisation of this term reminds me of Yurchek's discussion[21] of "authoritative discourse" where the state – or individuals with the mandate of the state – are produced as the sole arbiters of truth (2006, 36). If anything represented in news media or on social media has the potential to be false except for state-sanctioned content, can we critique and question hegemonic narratives?

In this context, why does it matter to continue to ask questions about home and scale? I would argue that the discourse of home is used to naturalise authoritarianism, and the mechanism of scale-making is used to narrow the spaces available for the negotiation of ideologies, values, and ways of being and living. The artists, writers and theatremakers I met were engaged in a reclamation of the metaphor of home, turning to the un-home as a space of possibility. This plurality of representations is a way of holding multiple truths, and of contesting the discursive power of state narratives. We do not have to succumb to the state's use of cultural production for its own purposes; we might create new kinds of value through art.

I opened my thesis with questions about the values that are articulated and contested in artistic production, and how these productions reproduce certain forms of value. Scale-making,

[21] Yurchek explains that Stalin is made to be the sole arbiter of truth because his prestige enables him to stand outside of authoritative discourse, and therefore to produce it.

as I explore in my second chapter, is a strategy of governance and regulation. Singapore is produced as small, and this smallness is both its strength and weakness: smallness is both the source of exception and the limiting factor that influence its governance. Through scale-making, value is attributed to certain ideologies and practices, as in the examples of comparative mechanisms of "stayers" and "quitters," and "freedom to" and "freedom from." These comparative mechanisms have moral and political implications that uphold certain regimes of value, as I elaborate in the third chapter. This chapter follows the second, which asks how Singapore became small, to ponder the implications of that smallness with attention to how my interlocutors understand the value of their work in contrast with how they are valued or de-valued by the state. They do not fit in the state's regime of value, and thus experience citizenship and governance in contradictory ways; they are also tasked with creating value coherence across citizenship and artistic production, in order to justify the value of their own work to the state.

In the last chapter, I discuss the ways in which our imaginaries of "home" and "world" are shaped by scale. For the Singapore state, home and nation are scaled together in order to retain the commitment of its citizens. The National Day reception at the Singapore Consulate shows this project of scaling the nation-as-home. The Singapore Literature Festival also relies on metaphors of home to perform the un-home through a sense of artistic cosmopolitanism. In a third space, however, in the homes and private spaces where my interviews took place, the home-in-the-world was enacted on a different scale. In this third space, neither Singapore nor New York City were cast as "home" or "world," but New York City was one place (of many) where a re-imagining of nation-as-home was possible.

To conclude this thesis, I would like to address my most important learning points from this research, as well as possibilities for future studies of nations and diaspora.

First, scales are not spontaneous or essential characteristics; we cannot take them for granted. Scale-making has been a project to further the aims of the state, used to naturalise the boundaries of what is good or acceptable citizenship, but these scales are open to subversion and challenge through re-scaling. To re-scale might mean more exploration, in art and in research, of the relationship between public and private space in diaspora. It might mean a greater attention to Southeast Asia, as a region that has been minimised and marginalised in academia. It should involve work that de-centers the state as the site where meaning and value originate.

Second, comparative categories – such as stayers, quitters, global, local – are means of governance; individuals everywhere move between them, but also reproduce them. I followed the footsteps of many others to study in the US believing that it would be a space of greater freedom to explore what interested me. While that belief was not wrong, it does not mean that a similar space does not or cannot exist in Singapore. This imaginary of Singapore as repressive and conservative in contrast with the liberal US is inaccurate, and profits (once again) the state and capital by upholding existing power structures. It is also the effect of a colonial legacy that sees the "East" as backwards and peripheral to the center of the "West." This rhetoric is used to discipline us – for example, public protests are a thing of the "West," and have no place in an "Eastern" society. We can do better by understanding the discursive power of these comparisons and working against them.

Third, in order to not reproduce the ideologies of the state in artistic production, it is necessary to continue to question what kind of art is being made, where, and why. Artists, as creators of value coherence, have the capacity to communicate across different regimes of value through representation. Earlier, I quote Geraldine, a visual artist who tells me that she does not want to see New York City as the only node of legitimacy in the art world. I also quote Mimi on how she understands her responsibility to her audience, as a director and playwright.

While this thesis does not discuss activist art, I hope that it might generate further reflection on ethics, responsibility, and power in artistic production, especially in relation to diasporic movement. *Crazy Rich Asians* should not be the epitome of representation, for example, and it reproduces orientalist stereotypes without addressing the conditions of labour and poverty that made such wealth possible. Given that such representations have increasing discursive power outside of Asia, we should continue to discuss how the rise of one narrative might suppress or silence another.

There are also questions in my research that I was not able to address which merit deeper investigation. Given that the development of arts institutions and policy in Singapore was (and remains) racialised, and based on the language of the medium, one important question is how the artistic production is governed, policed, and facilitated along lines of racial and religious difference. Further research might look at how the arts have been ideologically positioned in Singapore – as something for well-educated, upper-class audiences, or as something frivolous and impenetrable, or as something dangerous and threatening to the state's legitimacy – much of which was spoken about during interviews as part of Singapore's political culture, or a culture of censorship. In her thesis, Ashlynna argued that culture is an area of governance because of how individuals internalise certain beliefs, ideologies, and practices. There is a culture of rule-following, of fear, disempowerment, and distrust that results in what Jee pointed out as "politics for the politicians," where only appointed individuals can engage in political discourse and activism. This thesis does not have the capacity or the historical grounding to explain the development and perpetuation of this political culture, but I hope it might address artistic production and diasporic movement as attempts to speak back to and against this culture.

I would like to conclude with a brief look at a play by Kuo Pao Kun, a Singaporean playwright who is widely recognised as the pioneer of local theatre. Kuo was also a director

and activist who founded arts centres, conducted workshops, and mentored younger artists. His activity in Singapore's Chinese theatre scene through the 1960s led to his arrest in 1976 during a purge of communist influences. He spent four years and seven months in detention and had his citizenship revoked. Today, Kuo is celebrated and his works continue to be re-staged and studied in Singapore schools.

After his release from prison in 1980, Kuo wrote his first play in English in 1985 titled *The Coffin Is Too Big For The Hole*, which I quote below:

> Can you imagine that the coffin of your grandfather cannot get into the hole specially dug for him on the day of his funeral? […] It must have been the funniest thing that ever happened in the entire funeral history of mankind. You invested so much time and money and energy and emotions in a grand funeral that two hundred people had come to see and what happens? The coffin won't get into the grave because the hole was too small – or the coffin was too big. Anyway, they didn't fit. They didn't fit! So we stood there. We looked at the coffin. We looked at the hole. We looked at each other. All the crying suddenly stopped.

Written as a monologue, the play revolves around a man who arrives at his grandfather's burial site only to find that the coffin will not fit in the grave because it is not a "standard size." He enters into a tussle with government bureaucrats. The absurdity of mismatched scales – either the hole was too small or the coffin was too big – engages a more sombre, painful theme of individual desires and aspirations rubbing up against the unsympathetic, repressive state, with no way of finding coherence between them. "They didn't fit!" the man exclaims. There is no way around this mismatch of sizes, and of values; the play concludes with the bureaucrats agreeing to make an exception for this man and his grandfather, just the once.

I wish I had given more time in this thesis to the anger, resentment, and pain of my interlocutors, and to others who have been hurt through the un-homing, like the frustrated grandson, like Natalie Hennedige's Medea. My research is limited by place and time. However, I want to end on the note of collective recognition: that we should bear witness to this absurdity together, just as the funeral-goers laugh, and then start to cry, and then stop crying and look at

one another. The play has been staged many times, in Singapore and elsewhere, because of its universal themes of conflict between the individual and the state, and between individual desire and common good. In reading this play, the problem of scale at the center of this thesis opens up to new questions: how might scale-making be a collective project? How can shared scales and shared spaces be created? I also end with Kuo's work as a nod to generations of citizens, activists, and artists who continue to do the work of creating value coherence across different regimes, a project that brings national and non-national communities together to engage in political discourse about our values and how we can imagine ourselves otherwise on new scales.

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