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Grounded high-flyers
How academically elite students are en-territorialised in Singapore

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Grounded high-flyers: How academically elite students are *en*-territorialised in Singapore

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Centre for Language, Discourse and Communication

King's College London

2018

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This journey really began when I was a teacher in secondary school, interacting with and befriending students of various backgrounds. The evolution of my thoughts and writing, however, would not have been possible without the guidance provided by my own teachers. My sincere thanks to Anne Pakir and, in particular, Christopher Stroud, who pointed me toward KCL. I have also had the privilege of Meg Maguire's kindness and encouragement while at King's. And of course, my PhD supervisors, Ben Rampton and Roxy Harris, who have overseen the progress of this thesis, and my growth as a scholar, since I did my MA with them in 2010. I will always count on Ben and Roxy as my mentors.

Naturally, this thesis is for my long-suffering wife, Jane, who agreed to life with a penniless student.

To God be the glory.

High-Flyer: An Epitaph

I must see you in whitewash, in the
Strict, stiff context of a pleated shirt
Garnished in your Oxford blacks, enrobed,
Swallowed up, sprawling out

Like Chatterton (with less than depth
Or fervour). If they hushed you up
You were quiet also, the surface
Of a figure in a frieze, anonymous. What

Do you represent, that I may look at you
And figure out meanings from your gesture
Or do we already know, have painted your
Fresco in our minds, share your theme:

Our mutual mural sordidness, called Silence –
You are of our flock, Promethean
Who stole fire in scorched hands
For warmth, and scant light, fleeing

Blind beyond redemption. What have you
Seen of better ages? Only the fleeting final
Glimpse, like Breughel's Icarus; of being
Clipped out of air, submerged;
                Of Consequences –
        It is time for us
        To be ashamed
                Of Excellence.

1993, UK

On the death of Lei Don, by suicide, in Magdalen College
Oxford.

- Alvin Pang (1997)

Abstract

This thesis presents a response to prominent theorisations of cosmopolitan elite migrants. These individuals are often characterised as engaging in frictionless transnational moves, having weak links to local spaces, and largely motivated by economic logic (Appadurai 1996, Castells 1996, Robbins 1998, Bauman 2000, Cheah 2001). There is also a lack of empirical data when it comes to describing the mobilities and cultural practices of cosmopolitan elites in migration studies (Skey 2013) elite schooling, and language and education. In order to interrogate such theorisations, the thesis undertakes a qualitative study of a group of academically elite students in Singapore who often aspired to and engaged in transnational migration. It seeks to explore the links that localised contexts might have to these individuals' trajectories and practices (Yeoh and Huang 2011, Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013). Informants all graduated from a particular top-ranked secondary school in Singapore, and include both immigrants and locals born and raised in the country. The study relies primarily on life history interviews and focus group discussions with 30 such individuals. It examines how informants discursively positioned themselves in relation to, and made sense of: (i) aspirations and educational trajectories linked to their secondary school environment; (ii) undergraduate state scholarships targeting citizens; and (iii) the notion of race in their accounts of self-differentiation. Findings in (iii) then lead to the consideration of the role that a localised register, Singlish, might play in disaffiliation and tension amongst academically elite students in Singapore. Through such investigations, it will be argued that notions of frictionless and deterritorialised movement are inadequate to capture the nuanced differences amongst informants. Moreover, the data actually provides empirical evidence of their *en*-territorialisation in local spaces. That is, their educational aspirations and trajectories, attitudes toward scholarships, accounts of self-differentiation, and valuation of Singlish are embedded in and conditioned by local social, cultural and political spaces. These findings present implications for understandings of cosmopolitan cultural practices, the state's recruitment of talented immigrants, and narratives regarding elite immigrants circulating amongst the Singaporean public and in other national contexts globally.

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Chapter One: Encounters with academically elite students in Singapore

1.1 Introduction

Ming was 15 when she arrived in Singapore. It all seemed an exciting proposition from the beginning. Singapore was itself renowned for its education system; she would have the chance of learning English in an environment where English was an official language, and to do all of that in one of the best schools in the nation. In comparison, competition for places in top high schools and universities was much higher in China, and English language teaching was probably not as developed. The best thing was, it was all to be paid for by the Singapore government. School fees, plane tickets and lodging. There was no bond she had to fulfill after her studies, and she would be free of any obligation to the Singapore state. Surely it was an opportunity not to be missed? All she and her parents had to do was sign the papers.

Except that Ming and her family were not going to stop at Singapore. If she could graduate with top honours from one of the best secondary schools in the tiny nation-state, then her future was truly set to be limitless. She could dream of Oxford and Cambridge, or Harvard and Stanford, and after that, who is to say where she would end up? Hedge fund manager at Morgan Stanley, London, perhaps? Or Chief Scientist in an American research lab? Ming had not really decided if Economics or Biology was her thing. She could always return to China or Singapore for work to be nearer her family. In any case, this dream of hers was not a mere castle in the air, without precedent. Already, many of her seniors in middle school had gone to Singapore, and from there, reached the heady heights of the Ivy Leagues in the US. It was a well-worn path to success.

Whilst in the secondary school in Singapore, Ming met other academically brilliant students like herself, including Singaporean peers, who shared similar aspirations of attending the top universities in the West. Singaporeans, such as Adam and Gabriel, have always longed to attain prestigious undergraduate scholarships sponsored by the Singapore government. These scholarships would enable them to fund their studies in the world's best universities in the US and UK, while also guaranteeing them a career in Singapore's civil service. These ambitions for and trajectories of international mobility

are thus ubiquitous amongst Ming and her friends in the secondary school, regardless of their country of origin.

By 18, Ming was fluent in English and Mandarin. Seven years later, and Ming is indeed in New York as a financial analyst, armed with a postgraduate degree in Economics and Finance from one of the world's best business schools. She now has the world as her oyster.

Where will she eventually settle though? Her passport is the only indicator that she remains a citizen of the People's Republic of China. Beyond that, stereotypes of ethnicity or nationality appear fuzzy. Few developed nations in the world would reject her application for a work visa and immigration. At 25, she has spent large chunks of her life in three different countries (not counting the year of internship with banks in London and Hong Kong), all culturally dissimilar. China was simply her first point of embarkation. She speaks English with a slight Singaporean lilt, and certainly counts the language as integral to how she expresses herself. She still craves *Laksa* and *Charsiew* noodles[1], and might trawl whole cities for the best food joint in town. She also likes the more liberal way of life in the US. She has not regarded China as her home for a long while.

Ming's story is true, and she is a real person that I came to know whilst a teacher in Singapore. As mentioned, Ming is not alone and there are others like her, such as Adam and Gabriel. Pertinently, people like Ming have been envisaged by the literature in particular ways that seem at odds with my own encounters with such individuals.

1.2 A topical relevance to studying people like Ming

There is a case to be made that the high-flying migratory moves and practices of people like Ming have often been misconstrued in reductionist ways. This occurs in governments' broad characterisations of such individuals through their immigration and economic policies – as labour 'designed' to serve the needs of the nation's economy (Simmons 1999). It also exists in the form of stereotypes in the public imagination – as 'scroungers' who do not have an attachment to local spaces (Chong 2014).

[1] *Laksa* is a Peranakan (Straits-Chinese) curry with noodles only found in Singapore and Malaysia, while *Charsiew* is a typical Cantonese dish of sweetened barbecued pork.

At the level of the nation state, academically elite students like Ming have been contextualised as individuals caught in a global war for talent (Ng 2013). Singapore's own need for talented immigrants have been widely described (Yeoh 2007, Yeoh and Yap 2008), and the government has shaped its education policies in such a way as to attract students from the East and Southeast Asian region (Koh 2010, Gopinathan and Lee 2011). Immigrants are selected based on their (potential) ability to fulfill the nation's economic needs, as well as to fit into existing official racial categories. Singapore is certainly not alone in establishing criteria for potential immigrants or a proactive outlook to selecting future citizens. Bauder (2008) notes congruent strategies in Canada where the Canadian State consciously discriminates between immigration candidates with the explicit aim of stimulating economic growth. The UK's points-based system for immigration is clearly another example of favouring skilled migrants and students deemed to be more capable. The selective and exclusive nature of such discriminatory immigration policies have led some scholars to label these migrants as 'designer immigrants' from the perspective of the state (Simmons 1999, De Costa 2010). In the view of national governments, academically elite students like Ming are therefore forms of 'flexible labour' (Fairclough 2000:148), and mere digits in the state's pursuit of economic growth.

Amidst these statist efforts at attracting talented individuals across national borders, there has also been recent political pushback against immigration. Shashi Tharoor (2017), a former United Nations Undersecretary General, describes this as "a backlash against cultural globalisation – encompassing cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, and secularism – driven by those who seek the comforts of traditional ethnic, religious, or national identity." Thus, Western European states such as the UK are caught in a bind over how best to integrate immigrants of certain ethnicities and religious affiliations deemed to be more foreign (Cameron 2011). More recently, we have witnessed an upsurge in racist and xenophobic rhetoric commensurate with Trump's election in the US, Brexit in the UK, and electoral swings toward far-right nationalist parties such as Alternative für Deutschland in Germany's federal elections. In Singapore, similar anti-immigrant sentiment includes the stereotypical view of talented immigrants as 'scroungers' with no ties to the local, merely using the nation and its resources to further their own selfish ambitions (Chong 2014). Resentment toward the Singapore state's immigration policies contributed to the ruling party's historically lowest

percentage of votes in the 2011 General Election[2]. As a deliberate measure by the Singapore government to placate public discontent, the inflow of migrants has been significantly reduced since then.

This context of a global war for talent (Ng 2013) in an age of rising anti-immigrant sentiment thus suggests a topical relevance to studying academically elite students like Ming who engage in intense transnational mobility. As a matter of public interest, there is a need to examine state conceptualisations of such talented immigrants and better inform commonly held stereotypes about them. Admittedly, my interactions and experiences with academically elite students in Singapore make me sensitive to their situation and portrayals in the public sphere. My impressions of them do not exactly chime with the view that they are mere 'designer immigrants' who fill an economic gap in the national workforce, nor are they 'scroungers' who have no tie to local spaces. These are actual persons who have their own aspirations and desires in life, who develop idiosyncracies in their daily habits and attitudes. An overarching aim of this study is therefore to uncover a more nuanced, rather than reductionist consideration of their transnational movement and cultural practices. Doing so will, hopefully, lead to a more comprehensive and sympathetic view of these individuals by the state and the public. For these reasons, I suggest a case study of people like Ming in Singapore as an imperative.

My short description of Ming's story characterises a group of talented individuals peculiar to the Singaporean context, where the city-state has been described as an "emerging immigrant gateway city" (Price and Benton-Short 2008:10) and "transnational turnstile" for migrants (Yeoh and Yap 2008:200). It is to Singapore next, that I turn.

1.3 People like Ming in Singapore

Singapore is one of a handful of sovereign city-states in existence. Situated at the southern tip of the Malay peninsula, its prime geographical location has long been recognised in the shipping lanes between Europe and East Asia. This was the primary reason the island was acquired by the British East India Company as a trading post in

[2] The ruling People's Action Party still garnered 60% of the electorate's votes, a landslide victory by most international standards.

1819. It remained a British colony until its independence as part of Malaysia in 1963, before attaining full independence in 1965. The nation covers a mere 700 square kilometers, but has developed as one of the world's busiest ports and leading financial centres. According to the World Bank's 2012 figures (World Bank website), Singapore's Gross National Income per capita ranks third in the world (behind only Norway and Luxembourg). At the same time, income inequality is one of the highest amongst developed nations[3]. Politically, Singapore adopts a Westminster system of parliamentary democracy, though the People's Action Party is by far the most dominant political party and has won every election since 1959. Demographically, it has 5 million inhabitants, of which 2.9 million are born in the country (Singapore Department of Statistics 2010a:39). It is ethnically and linguistically diverse, with the official recognition of three 'races' (Chinese, Malay and Indian) and four languages (English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil).

In Singapore, immigration policies are intertwined with state initiatives to counter flagging birth rates in the nation. One of these policies involves offering scholarships to secondary school students from neighboring countries (eg China and Vietnam) who are excellent in Math and Science. This is done in the hope that they will augment the local workforce and some might eventually settle in Singapore.

Ming was recruited on such a scholarship, and she actually shares common educational trajectories with some other immigrants and locals in Singapore. These are individuals who are amongst the best performing students academically in their countries of origin and in Singapore. I label them 'academically elite students', not necessarily in terms of how they identify themselves, nor as a monolithic group with homogeneous practices[4]. I use the term fundamentally as a descriptive label for their factual scholastic achievements. Throughout their lives, these academically elite students have attended and sought to attend the top-ranked schools in their respective localities, and then the top-ranked schools in the world. Their countries of birth are primarily in East Asia, including China, Vietnam and Singapore. All of them are academically brilliant students who have been through selective education systems that emphasised individual performativity, with high stakes examinations at various institutional stages. All have

[3] Singapore's Gini coefficient in 2012 was 0.459 after transfers and taxes (Singapore Department of Statistics 2012:2).
[4] As I reiterate throughout the thesis, I do not assume homogeneity amongst this grouping. In fact, an investigation of their attitudes and practices through the data shows up nuanced differences, even when there are broad commonalities.

been highly successful in such a system. There were key points in their life stages when transnational mobility was an option due to their academic attainments, and many among them pursued this option. Singapore is a hub, from and through which their scholastic trajectories were launched.

I taught and interacted with some academically elite students whilst a teacher for four years in a top-ranked secondary school in Singapore. My MA dissertation (Lu 2016) examined how identities and aspirations held by five immigrant students, challenge the essentialist assumptions of the highly influential Linguistic Human Rights[5] paradigm (Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas 1995, Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). The study found that these five students often aimed to be peripatetic, migrating through multiple territories with no end destination of residence in sight. Questionnaire data revealed how concepts of cultural and national identity held relatively little significance for some of them. Having interacted with many such individuals, my impression is that their considerations for socioeconomic betterment and aspirations of intense transnational mobility may also be similar for many other academically elite students. That is, I realise that there are many other people like Ming, including Singaporeans. At the same time, I am aware that my small questionnaire sample size of five informants cannot be claimed as a definitive representation of all such immigrants nor academically elite students in Singapore.

Based on my prior MA findings (Lu 2016) and knowledge of academically elite students, there is thus an intriguing intellectual puzzle. How does my understanding of these individuals fit current characterisations of migrants and migration by other scholars? How does the existing academic literature account for their cultural identities and sociolinguistic practices? Indeed, does my understanding even fit these individuals, or is there more to be uncovered?

On a superficial level, my experience as a teacher and MA researcher suggest that many academically elite students in Singapore possibly share two traits:

[5] Proponents of Linguistic Human Rights advocate that minority languages and their speakers within a locality should be accorded the same levels of institutional recognition as majority languages and their speakers (May 2001:8), though framing this as a universal right has often led to accusations of essentialism (Wee 2010).

(i) In terms of their migration patterns, they often aspire and have the ability to be peripatetic in their destinations.

(ii) They may often be willing to adapt by picking up new cultural and linguistic practices in their host nation.

It is on this basis that I proceed to research a group of individuals in Singapore like Ming that I call academically elite students.

1.4 The outline of this thesis

Chapter Two deals with my theoretical conceptualisation, as I attempt to match academically elite students in Singapore with available typologies and characterisations of similarly top-performing students in the literature. This is done through the fields of: (i) migration studies, (ii) elite schooling, and (iii) language and education.

I begin by trying to fit my apprehension of academically elite students' migratory routes, and linguistic and cultural practices within a range of established migrant typologies in migration studies. I will argue that the model of 'cosmopolitan mobile elite' is potentially closest to my understanding of them. I go on to review the literature regarding cosmopolitan elites, and demonstrate that there seems to be a lack in empirical description of the lives of people like Ming, so that there is insufficient understanding of their migratory lifestyles, language use and cultural behaviour. Consequently, there is a cumulative tendency to describe elite mobile individuals like Ming as making "frictionless" moves (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013:186), and leading deterritorialised lives. There is little empirical description of how the migratory decisions, and linguistic and cultural practices of such people are necessarily rooted in "local social-cultural-political matrices" (Yeoh and Huang 2011:684) and connected to wider "regimes of mobility" (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013).

These characterisations of easy mobility also extend to the field of elite schooling. Kenway and Koh (2013) describe students from an elite secondary school in Singapore as "nobility without a state", by virtue of their academic credentials that allow them entrance into educational institutions worldwide. Moreover, studies that have addressed the links between local institutional contexts and the aspirations and trajectories of top-performing students in Singapore (eg Yang 2016a) have tended to focus only on their

immigrant status, without examining in detail how such identities might emerge from contact with local students or how differentiations might occur amongst those who are academically elite.

I then speculated that the field of language and education might offer some insight into this empirical gap. However, the lack of research on the 'cosmopolitan mobile elite' extends to the field in two areas. For one, the focal research subject in language and education has mostly been the disadvantaged immigrant student who has been excluded from mainstream pedagogy and practices (eg Gibson and Ogbu 1991, Heller 2006, Talmy 2008), not academically elite migrants who appear to thrive and succeed at school. Second, the typology of migrant students in sociolinguistics appears to be of a conventional form well established in current migration studies. That is, the individuals' migratory patterns are assumed to be fixed (eg Reyes and Lo 2009). Less studied are migrants with more flexible or even indeterminate migratory destinations. I propose that the field of language and education needs to broaden its analytic gaze to include ostensibly top-performing individuals like academically elite students.

Roughly guided by the framework of "regimes of mobility" (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013) and the need to situate transnational movement in "local social-cultural-political matrices" (Yeoh and Huang 2011:684), I am led to develop two broad research questions:

1. How are the cultural identities and sociolinguistic practices of academically elite students linked to their aspirations, trajectories, and wider circulating discourses in the local context of Singapore?
2. In what ways does an investigation of these links complicate and contribute to theorisations of cosmopolitan elite migrants by academics and conceptualisations of such people by governments?

In Chapter Three, I argue that these research questions can be answered through a qualitative approach, informed by my own experiences as a former teacher and student of the same top-ranked secondary school in Singapore attended by my informants, as well as my participation in a peer group of academically elite students. I discuss why I adopted the specific methods of life history interviews and focus group discussions, as well as how I went about collecting and analysing data. My approach is informed by an

axiom in sociolinguistics where "the contexts for communication should be investigated rather than assumed" (Blommaert and Rampton 2011:10) so as not to reify my informants' practices and identities, as well as Burawoy's (1998) extended case method where there is a constant dialogue with theory. The crucial point of analysis involves examining how informants discursively positioned themselves to and made sense of wider structures and circulating discourses in their lives. Finally, I conclude by addressing reflexivity and in particular, how my own position has influenced the process of data collection and interpretation.

Chapter Four contextualises the transnational mobility of academically elite students in Singapore. My informants, as students, enter a particular sociocultural space, where the top-ranked secondary school they attended (that I call St Thomas' School) is positioned at the top of a stratified education landscape. Their transnational movement into and out of this space is mediated (and often enabled) by an elaborate scheme of scholarships that are tied to the state's immigration policies and agenda of talent management. I thus describe three contextual aspects that I suggest are crucial to understanding my informants' trajectories and lives in Singapore: (a) racial politics and the racial criterion of immigration in Singapore; these are commensurate with, (b) a scheme of scholarships offered by the state; and informants have to navigate these scholarships when entering and leaving, and (c) St Thomas' School in an elitist education system. I suggest that the broader research questions proposed at the end of Chapter Two be applied to each of these specific contextual aspects in turn. Specifically, it means that I investigate how informants discursively positioned themselves to and/or made sense of these structures (points a, b and c) in talk, so as to interrogate notions of frictionless and deterritorialised moves purportedly undertaken by cosmopolitan elites.

In this vein, Chapter Five is focused on the environment that is St Thomas' School. I outline how the school's ethos regarding academic ability and the globalist outlook in its curricula might be linked to the conventionalisation of particular aspirations and trajectories amongst its students. In light of these structures in St Thomas', I proceed to examine the narratives produced by my informants regarding their aspirations and trajectories. I explore the specificities and commonalities of these narratives, and make empirical observations that do not really fit articulations of easy mobility and deterritorialisation prevalent in the literature on cosmopolitan elites.

Chapter Six addresses one strategy in which the Singapore state tries to retain academically elite students in its local talent pool – the policy of prestigious undergraduate scholarships. This is a scholarship that only citizens are eligible for, and that therefore imposes a differentiation amongst academically elite students based on their migrant status. I first address how the state's elaborate scheme of government scholarships offered to citizens has a moralistic dimension of service to the nation. Academic ability is thus imbued with a sense of *noblesse oblige*. This moralistic dimension is coupled with real economic capital, as individuals who attain government scholarships are rewarded with life-long careers in the civil service. I examine data from life history interviews and focus group discussions when informants spoke about these scholarships in their aspirations and trajectories. This is in order to investigate whether and how the state's discourse and differentiation of academic elites regarding the scholarships is reflected in my informants' talk. Such findings will in turn provide evidence in understanding whether and how 'frictionless' and 'deterritorialised' are accurate characterisations of my informants' mobility.

Chapter Seven pertains to the notion of race and its centrality in the state's recruitment of talented students from abroad. I argue that the racial criterion of recruitment is assumed by the state, but remains largely unexamined by both government and academia. I then proceed to elaborate on the public perception of immigrants in Singapore, presenting implications for how my informants might experience life in interaction with their local peers. Having sketched the context, I focus on data that demonstrates how my informants talk about self-differentiation in relation to their peers, looking at whether and how race or other classifications are invoked. These accounts can point to impedance or friction in the transmigration process of recruited immigrant students, even if they might be assumed by the state to be racially and culturally similar to the existing polity.

As part of my findings in Chapter Seven, Singlish was uncovered as one key cultural resource that informants used in their accounts of self-differentiation. This leads me to consider whether and how Singlish might be a source of differentiation and tension amongst academically elite students. I examine interview data when informants expressed ideologies pertaining to Singlish and Standard English. Invoking Bourdieu's (1991) theory on language and social fields, I discuss how differences in access to and valuation of Singlish, especially between immigrants and localised individuals, can

contribute to tension amongst academically elite students in Singapore. This is even as recruited immigrant students are often well-adapted to succeed and attain high status in educational institutions.

All of these findings in Chapters Five through Eight contain instances of nuanced variations in attitudes and practices amongst academically elite students in Singapore. Instead of being utterly deterritorialised in regularly engaging in transnational mobility, there is manifest evidence of my informants also undergoing processes of *en*-territorialisation. That is, my informants: (i) are socialised into local ways of thinking and behaving, taking up localised discourses; or (ii) developed connections to local spaces and peer groups. These findings pose implications for our understanding of cosmopolitan cultural practices, the state's recruitment of talented immigrants, and narratives regarding elite immigrants circulating amongst the Singaporean public and in other national contexts globally.

1.5 The aims of this thesis

Before the reader engages in this thesis any further, there is a need to underline its aims and what it does not seek to do.

First, this thesis does not aim to conduct an evaluation of existing immigration policy nor of the institutional programmes in schools. While I do describe some of these policies and curricula in detail, the basis of such description is to facilitate the understanding of my informants' lives and how they might position themselves in relation to these structures in their talk. The focus is therefore on my informants' accounts and discursive positionings, rather than an objective judgment of the structures they refer to in interviews.

Second, this then means that the thesis does not purport to provide a manifesto for change. It does not offer recommendations for what the state and schools ought to be doing differently for top-performing students. There are certain points when the findings might suggest some theoretical and practical implications, but these are largely in relation to our anticipation of elite migrants, rather than insights on how best to tweak public policy.

Third, the thesis does not claim to be a platform to rehabilitate the public image of elite migrants. What it tries to do is to make a contribution to existing narratives that shape our understanding of these individuals.

Accordingly, this thesis seeks to contribute to the empirical gap regarding cosmopolitan elites by looking at a case study of academically elite students in Singapore who engage in intense transnational mobility. It focuses on the experiences of these individuals within the Singapore context (rather than when they have left the Singaporean space), drawing relations between local structures to ostensibly transnational lives. This is not to suggest that theorisations on cosmopolitans regarding their deterritorialisation and frictionless movement (eg Appadurai 1990, Castells 1996, Kenway and Koh 2013) are entirely misguided, but that the empirical evidence points to a more nuanced picture involving interwoven processes of *both* deterritorialisation and enterritorialisation. The thesis is also a response to the current sociopolitical climate where states compete for talented migrants whilst managing anti-immigrant sentiment amongst their citizenry. In Singapore, and to my immigrant informants, my study can translate into a calibrated portrayal of their lives, serving to enrich and refine dominant narratives and theories.

Chapter Two: Cosmopolitan mobile elites as a puzzle and challenge for research

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter One, I suggested an imperative to study academically elite students like Ming in Singapore. To better understand existing theoretical conceptualisations and empirical descriptions of such individuals, this chapter therefore reviews literature that focuses on migrants who are top-performing students. In particular, I look at the fields of: (i) migration studies, (ii) elite schooling, and (iii) language and education where such student types are likely to have been studied. This chapter aims to demonstrate that there seems to be a lack in empirical description of the lives of people like Ming across all three fields, so that there is insufficient understanding of their migratory lifestyles and cultural behaviour.

I begin by situating my apprehension of my students' migratory routes, and linguistic and cultural practices within a range of established migrant typologies. I argue that the model of 'cosmopolitan mobile elite' is potentially closest to my limited understanding of people like Ming. I continue to review literature in migration studies to uncover how the model for cosmopolitan elites is circumscribed by its theoretical idealisation and lack of empirical grounding. Consequently, there is a cumulative tendency to describe elite mobile individuals like Ming as: (i) making "frictionless"[1] moves (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013:186); (ii) leading deterritorialised lives; (iii) with their migration motivated by economic logic. There is little empirical description of how the migratory decisions, and linguistic and cultural practices of cosmopolitan mobile elites are necessarily rooted in local social-cultural-political matrices (Yeoh and Huang 2011:684) and connected to wider "regimes of mobility" (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013).

Such characterisations of easy mobility also appear to extend to the field of elite schooling in Singapore. Kenway and Koh (2013) describe students from an elite secondary school in Singapore as "nobility without a state", by virtue of their academic credentials and accumulated resources that allow them entrance into educational institutions worldwide. Moreover, studies that have addressed the links between local institutional contexts and the aspirations and trajectories of top-performing students in

[1] I note later (pp 32 this chapter) that the literature tends to denote 'friction' in mobility as impedance when moving between point A and B, or resistance in the process of adapting to new host societies (cf Yeoh and Huang 2011:683).

Singapore (eg Yang 2016a) have tended to focus only on their immigrant status, without examining in detail how such identities might emerge from contact with local students or how other differentiations might occur amongst those who are academically elite. This is important as Ong (1999) reminds us of how such differentiations might lead to tension between groups, and hence friction in migrants' transition to new host societies.

Having had a sustained interest in the school as a fieldsite and in immigrant students' cultural and linguistic practices, the field of language and education might offer some insight into the empirical gaps outlined above. However, the lack of research on the 'cosmopolitan mobile elite' extends to the field of applied and sociolinguistics in two areas. For one, the focal research subject in language and education (eg Gibson and Ogbu 1991, Heller 2006, Talmy 2008) has mostly been the disadvantaged immigrant student who has been excluded from mainstream pedagogy and practices, not academically elite immigrants who appear to thrive and succeed at school. Second, the typology of immigrant students in sociolinguistics appears to be of a conventional form well established in current migration studies – the immigrants' migratory patterns are assumed to be fixed and involving permanent settlement (eg Reyes and Lo 2009). Less studied are immigrants with multiple or even indeterminate migratory destinations.

I propose that language and education needs to broaden its analytic gaze to include ostensibly top-performing individuals like academically elite students. Their achievements in educational domains belie the possibility of difficulties and impedance when engaging in transnational movement into local spaces. Investigating such individuals – through a sociolinguistic axiom of examining (not assuming) categorisations such as race and nationality (Blommaert and Rampton 2011) – will potentially contribute to current theorisations regarding cosmopolitan behaviour and elite migrants in migration studies and elite schooling, especially with regard to emphasis on their supposed frictionless trajectories and deterritorialised nature.

2.2 Migrant typologies in Migration Studies

In attempting to understand academically elite students, it is useful to first situate them amongst various typologies of migrants that have been developed from broader migration theories. A discussion of some typologies and theorisations was helpful in clarifying my thinking on characteristics portrayed by students like Ming, and generated

possible lines of inquiry in actual research (Layder 1998 and Ringer 1997 in Engbersen et al 2013:962). The development of migrant typologies is itself dependent on the theorist's analytical position. Some typologies were established through an "etic" perspective in terms of spatial and temporal scales, pathway sequences, age and gender (eg rural-urban migrants, seasonal migrants, adolescent migrants etc) (King 2012b:136-138). Other scholars have developed typologies based on ethnographic investigation of intentions and goals of migrants (Engbersen et al 2013, Duvell and Vogel 2006, Eade et al 2006, Grabowska-Lusinska and Oko lski 2009, Trevena 2013), that King (2012b:138) calls an "emic" approach. There are also alternative heuristic strategies in developing typologies. For instance, Cohen (1996:xi-xiv) and King (2002:90-91) used binary distinctions to iterate migration forms like internal vs international, temporary vs permanent etc. The scope of this thesis limits our review to typologies and theorisations that could describe and explain the migratory routes undertaken by academically elite students, as well as some aspect of their cultural practices.

Given the diverse forms of migration and conceptualisations applied to each[2], there is naturally insufficient space to deal with all of them. I will hence only focus on four distinct models that have been acknowledged to be highly influential within the canon of migration literature, (Block 2007:31-33, King 2012a:11-25, Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013:185-187).

2.2.1 The old characterisation of migration – 'push-pull' and 'structural centre-periphery' models

One of the earliest and most influential works regarding migration theory, is Ravenstein's (1885, 1889) 'laws of migration' based on observations made from British and other censuses (King 2012a:12). It laid out empirical generalisations that sought to explain why and how migrants move. For example, Ravenstein noted how movement was usually from rural to urban settings; how females tended to be more migratory over shorter distances, while males were the majority in international migration; and how major causes of migration were economic (King 2012a:12). Such early models combined individual-rational choice theories with larger structures of rural-urban and developmental inequalities between regions. Scholars such as Everett Lee (1966) took

[2] King (2012a:7-25, 2012b:136-147) offers a more comprehensive overview of migrant types and theorisations that are beyond the purview of this thesis.

up and developed it in greater detail, suggesting how individuals were 'pushed' by factors like landlessness and unemployment, and 'pulled' toward localities where economic opportunities were more abundant.

In King's (2012a:13) estimation, these 'push-pull' and 'neoclassical' models dominated migration theorisation till the 1960s. The framework was underpinned by a neoclassical economics paradigm that focused on rational choice, maximisation of resources and labour mobility (King 2012a:13). It provided a useful analysis of both macro economic processes (eg in terms of how migration is effected by an uneven distribution of labour over geographical space), and micro individual decisions as people weigh the consequences of staying and moving (Massey et al 1998:18-21 in King 2012a:13-14). However, a general critique (King 2012a:14, Arrango 2004:19-20) was that the model failed to pay attention to global macro-level structures such as political barriers and gateways to international migration. Nor did it account for historical processes like colonialism that led to these flows of people. Consequently, it was unable to explain why nations with similar economic conditions experience different emigration outcomes. At the micro-level, it neglected personal and socio-cultural factors, and thus did not explain why some people do not migrate despite ripe reasons for doing so.

It was in this backdrop of critique that scholars began to look toward other ways of conceptualising migration, by accounting for historical processes and overarching economic structures. This was done through the lens of a Marxist political economy and systems theory in the 1970s and 80s (King 2012a:14). An eminent example of a historical-structural model would be Wallerstein's (1974) World Systems Theory that classified nations according to their levels of development in the global market economy. Poorer countries in the 'periphery' were dependent upon economic networks dominated by capitalist nations in the 'core', so that labour migration and flows of capital mirrored this asymmetric relationship (King 2012a:18).

While powerful in addressing major migration trends in the modern world, in Arrango's (2004:27) words, World Systems Theory tends to regard migrants as "little more than passive pawns in the play of great powers and world processes presided over by the logic of capital accumulation". King (2012a:19) echoes this view by contending that the model is inclined toward a form of historical determinism. It neglects agency on the part

of migrants, and disregards the fact that migratory flows can develop spontaneously as pockets of perceived opportunity appear in various parts of the world.

Both the 'voluntarist push-pull model' and 'structural centre-periphery model' were the main competing theories of migration for many years (Papastergiadis 2000 in Block 2007:31). Embedded in this old account of migration were migrant typologies that reflected both of the paradigms' deterministic stances (Block 2007:31-32). Block (2007:32) suggests that migrants were often typecast as 'classical migrants' who move to adopted homelands and stay there permanently, or 'expatriates' who choose to live abroad for extended periods with expectations of returning to their country of origin. 'Classical migrants' are generally thought to undergo a period of assimilation as they come to terms with new customs and ways of life, so that they are caught in a dilemma between cultural maintenance and integration.

Separately, King (2012a:9) writes of three core groups that have dominated migration studies in the past and still do to some extent today – 'Temporary labour migrants', 'settler-migrants' and "refugees". When tied to the 'push-pull' model, these 'old' typologies of migrants tend to signal a general bifurcation between two territorialities. Migrants are noted to be travelling in a "linear", "unidirectional fashion" (often of no return), with a fixed route of migration from point A to B (King 2012a:7, 20, 25)[3].

The life stories of academically elite students, however, appear more complex than these 'old' typologies, as their migratory goals could be rather open-ended and involve more than two nodes of (dis)embarkation. For example, Ming already counts Singapore, Hong Kong, London and New York among the locations where she has sojourned, without necessarily planning to settle permanently in any of these places. Ying, an informant from my MA study (Lu 2016) who also participated in this current PhD research, went on to pursue part of her degree in Germany, and is now working for an engineering firm in Singapore. This is even though her stated plan during my MA data

[3] A reading of Petersen's (1958) *A General Typology of Migration* certainly does appear to attest that both Block (2007:31) and King (2012:a:9) are accurate in their representations of 'old' migrant typologies. Petersen (1958:259-266) built on the 'push-pull' model and offered five classes of migration ('primitive', 'forced', 'impelled', 'free' and 'mass' migration) with the delineation of migrant pathways as always linear and between two localities. All five categories presupposed eventual settlement, with no indication that there may be some individuals who do not desire permanence in a given place. Lee's (1969) *A Theory of Migration* also presented migration as linear moves from point A to B, explicitly stating that " every act of migration involves an origin, a destination, and an intervening set of obstacles" Lee (1969:49).

collection was to work in the UK before returning to China. Gabriel, a Singaporean, pursued a MA in New York on a scholarship awarded by the Singapore state. This is after three years' of undergraduate study in London. Their linguistic and cultural practices are hence less straightforward than a matter of cultural integration versus maintenance at a permanent location. They are definitely neither 'classical migrants' nor 'expatriates'. While their migration patterns do reflect pathways from countries in the periphery to those in the core, Arrango (2004:27) reminds us that such movement is not initiated without agency and choice. Academically elite students' migratory aspirations and routes are not unidirectional but potentially circular, with multiple destinations. The old characterisation of migration does not seem sufficient to capture such life stories.

2.2.2 The characterisation of transnationals

More recently, the framework of *transnationalism* and *transnational social spaces* has come to dominate the field of migration studies (King 2012a:24-25). First posited by Glick Schiller et al (1992) and Basch et al (1994), *transnationalism* is generally agreed to involve migrant activities,

> "that take place on a recurrent basis across national borders and that require a regular and significant commitment of time by participants. Such activities may be conducted by relatively powerful actors, such as representatives of national governments and multinational corporations, or may be initiated by more modest individuals, such as immigrants and their home country kin and relations. These activities are not limited to economic enterprises, but include political, cultural and religious initiatives as well."
>
> (Portes 1999:464)

Transnational social spaces[4] are thus sites where individuals have settled in a host country and are seen to have "retained and developed their cultural and economic links with their homelands, including (in some cases) their political loyalties and commitments" (Jordan and Duvell 2003:76).

[4] Faist (2010:1672) suggests that 'transnational communities' is sometimes used interchangeably with 'diaspora(s)'. Portes et al (1999) also equates both terms in cases where political loyalties and commitments to the home nation are apparent.

Studies on transnationals tend to focus on ties that bind them to their countries of origin, with a substantial body of work that describes how transnationals are no longer ''either-or'' but ''in between'' the homeland and the host land (Lin et al 2010:205). Research is often focused on the ways they mediate their home country and current locality (eg Lin et al 2010), or intent on describing the transnational social spaces created by particular groups, such as Taiwanese immigrant entrepreneurs in Canada (Wong 2004) or comparison across groups such as Punjabis, Kannadigas and Indo-Fijians in Australia (Voigt-Graf 2004).

Through such investigations, transnational migration patterns have been recognised as multiple, at times circular journeys that take into account the social networks of participants (Yeoh and Yap 2008:178). To King (2012a:25) such acknowledgement is useful in challenging the "linear", no-return 'push-pull' model of migratory movement. By allowing insight into meso-level human relationships and ties that intercede between micro-level rational choice and macro-level economic structures[5], the transnational framework also fills a theoretical gap between the old 'push-pull' and 'structural centre-periphery' models (Block 2007:31-33, King 2012a:25).

Despite its prevalence in current migration studies, it is important to note, as Portes (2003:876) does, that transnationalism is a description only applicable to a minority of migrants. Block (2007:32-33) concurs that it is a typology that adds to and is distinct from the characterisation of 'classical migrants' and 'expatriates' (still available options to migrants today), rather than a category that subsumes all others.

Could transnationalism be an account that accurately describes academically elite students like Ming? The migratory trajectories of academically elite students are certainly similar to transnationals in being multiple and potentially circular. However, they do not quite fit the transnational model either, as academically elite students might not necessarily portray 'deep rootedness' to any specific locality. Individuals such as Ming may not actively seek to maintain their original linguistic and cultural practices. A host country might only be "host" for the temporal now, not the future. A home country might not be associated with strong feelings of belonging either, or one could end up with multiple "home" countries by virtue of having had extended sojourns in each. This

[5] This multi-level migration systems theory was first proposed as a significant theoretical perspective by Faist (2000), and Castles and Miller (2003).

is in contrast to transnationals who devote "regular and significant commitment of time" (Portes 1999:464) to maintain social and political ties between home and host nations, or Basch et al's (1994:7) definition where a "multiplicity of involvements" is sustained by "transmigrants . . . in both home and host societies".

In reviewing more prominent typologies (including transnationals) that have been developed to map out diversity in migration patterns today, Engbersen et al (2013) conclude that:

> "On the one hand, classic patterns of seasonal and settlement migration are discernible. On the other, new fragmented patterns of transnational and 'footloose' migration seem to be emerging. These latter patterns relate to migrants who are rooted in the home country as well as in the destination country, and to migrants who act fairly independently because they are less bounded by family obligations or other commitments in either country. Young and highly skilled migrants with a migratory habitus of 'intentional unpredictability' seem to be over-represented within these migration patterns."
>
> Engbersen et al (2013:964)

Engbersen et al (2013) thus draw a clear distinction between transnationals who are "rooted" in the home and destination country, compared to migrants who act fairly independently amongst either home or host nations[6]. It is migrants with a "habitus of intentional unpredictability" that command our attention. Variously labeled "career seekers" (Trevena 2013), "searchers" (Eade et al 2006) or "global nomads" (Duvell and Vogel 2006), all three studies in Engbersen et al's (2013) review concur that these are often highly-educated individuals who are young, have few family obligations and are willing to be indefinitely mobile in search of economic opportunities. This general profile, as well as migratory objectives and pathways, do seem in common with those portrayed by academically elite students in Singapore. In terms of linguistic and cultural practices, it is also important to note that narratives of mobile elite and deterritorialised (ie having weak links to a specific locality) individuals have often been associated with

[6] Duvell and Vogel (2006 in Engbersen et al 2013:962), in particular, make this same distinction between "transnational migrants" who straddle home and host nations and "global nomads" who live and work in various countries and have a cosmopolitan outlook.

a ‘cosmopolitan’ orientation (Hannerz 1990:240-243, Vertovec 2009:5). It is this model of ‘cosmopolitanism’ and mobile elites that I will next address.

2.2.3 Cosmopolitans and mobile elites

As Vertovec and Cohen (2002) surmise, scholars across the social sciences and humanities have been captivated by the concept of cosmopolitanism, variously viewing or invoking it as:

1. a socio-cultural condition
2. a kind of philosophy or world view
3. a political project toward building transnational institutions
4. a political project for recognising multiple identities
5. an attitudinal or dispositional orientation
6. a mode of practice or competence

(Vertovec and Cohen 2002:8-14)

Without delving into the historical associations and connotations of the term ‘cosmopolitan’[7], iterations on what constitute cosmopolitanism in an individual generally converge on the notion that it is an orientation of openness to foreign others and cultures (points 1, 2, 5 and 6 in Vertovec and Cohen 2002; Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013:186-187). Conceptualised as a subjective disposition that influences one’s cultural practices and identities, Beck (2004) outlines a cosmopolitan “experiential space or horizon” as one that

> “denotes the internalised otherness of others, the co-presence or coexistence of rival lifestyles ... the ability to see oneself from the viewpoint of those who are culturally other—as well as to practise this within one’s own experiential space through the imaginative crossing of boundaries.”
>
> (Beck 2004:153)

[7] Vertovec (2009:5) gives a brief overview. In the 19th century, the label was pejorative and given to those (especially Jews) perceived to be territorially rootless and multilingual, whose national loyalties were doubted. By the 1950s, the term had evolved to be associated with sophistication and elite wealthy travelers who could afford multicultural/national connections.

For scholars like Beck (2002:30) and Vertovec (2009:8-9), cosmopolitanism exists as a set of attitudes, practices and competencies that can be taken up and enacted by migrants in everyday life. Cosmopolitanism is thus a stance invariably linked to mobility, and that can be attributed to individuals regardless of their social class and positioning (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013:186).

Academically elite students in Singapore do seem to possess cosmopolitan competencies to some extent, evidenced through their willingness to move abroad and adapt to 'foreign' cultural practices. Given that these academically elite students are high-achieving and highly educated, it is reasonable to focus on theorisations that have drawn the link between mobile elites and cosmopolitanism.

The relation between an elite class[8], high mobility and cosmopolitanism was proposed by Hannerz (1990) in his discussion that sought to distinguish the cultural demeanours of cosmopolitans from those who are mere tourists, exiles and expatriates. Not unlike Beck (2002, 2004) and Vertovec's (2009) later explications, Hannerz (1990) denotes cosmopolitanism as

> "an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other. It is an intellectual and aesthetic stance toward divergent cultural experiences… cosmopolitanism can be a matter of competence… a personal ability to make one's way into other cultures… a built-up skill in manoeuvring more or less expertly with a particular system of meanings and meaningful forms."
>
> (Hannerz 1990:239)

To Hannerz (1990:246), cosmopolitans were also often persons with "credentials" and "decontextualised cultural capital". More recently, corresponding descriptions of the professional, managerial and entrepreneurial elite have tended to portray them as "rootless merchant sojourners" (P. Cheah 2001:135) and "cosmopolitans" who are "basically indifferent to where they lived", or "cosmopolites" who are "habitants of a vast universe"(Robbins 1998:3). In outlining cultural behaviour in a post-modern world of increasing migration, Bauman (2011), too, speaks of high-achieving individuals who

[8] Yeoh and Lai (2008:236) use the term 'talent' and 'talent migration' to denote the same group of high-achieving, highly mobile persons who are scarce and greatly valued in the global labour market.

"do not harbour a desire for guarantees of communal security, and considering the price of any long-term obligations, do not have much enthusiasm for them either" (Bauman 2011:82). This is in contrast to groups "who are neither wealthy nor capable", who seek shelter and protection from the instabilities of globalisation, in the solidity of life-long memberships (Bauman 2011:82). These depictions of elite persons who are highly "capable", with weak ties to territories, and who have a cosmopolitan attitude toward communal practices and identities, might appear most congruent (compared to other typologies in my discussion) with the life stories of academically elite students that I have encountered. Even so, the theorisation and sociological understanding of cosmopolitan mobile elites are not without weaknesses.

2.3 Weaknesses in the theorisations of 'cosmopolitan mobile elites'

First, there is a tendency to describe the mobility of elite migrants as 'frictionless' moves (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013:186). To Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013:186), narratives of 'flows' of people, capital and ideas postulated by the likes of Appadurai (1996), Castells (1996) and Bauman (2000, 2002, 2007) appear to take for granted the easy mobility of individuals. Specifically, Appadurai (1990:301-303) addresses "deterritorialisation"[9] as a global force where people, cultures and capital develop weak relationships to specific localities while becoming independent of national boundaries. Such an iteration of mobility, "generally evokes a positive valence, denoting: (1) the ability to move; (2) the ease or freedom of movement; and (3) the tendency to change easily or quickly." (Salazar 2010:54). Yeoh and Huang (2011:682) agree that these narratives emphasise "the hyper-mobility of these elite transnational subjects – forever-on-the-move, forever-in- transit, forever unmoored, forever part of the 'space of flows'", leading to the depiction of talent migrants "as mobile individual careerists responding purely to corporate logic and circulating in an intensely fluid world of intra- and inter-firm transfers and career mobility." For example, take Bauman's (2011: 34–35) depiction of the third wave of modern migration, where pathways of migration are no longer determined by a rush to colonise or conquer new lands. Migrants of today are "steered instead by the logic of the global redistribution of living resources and the

[9] Giddens (1991) describes similar processes in globalisation through the notion of "disembedding", where the term "refers to the way in which contemporary social practices can no longer be primarily defined by their grounding, or embeddedness, in the local context of a restricted place and time" (Stones 2012:449).

chances of survival peculiar to the current stadium of globalisation" (Bauman, 2011: 35).

Moreover, the narrative of frictionless mobility is coupled with the portrayal of mobile elites as necessarily rootless and with weak cultural affiliations (as in the depictions of P. Cheah 2001 and Robbins 1998). To Yeoh and Huang (2011:682), mobile elites are often rendered "astronauts" or "frequent flyers, who are insufficiently 'grounded' to be involved in the localised politics of place-making in the co-presence of others." This is problematic as economic and rational choice is seemingly de-linked from sociocultural spheres of the individual. It assumes the pre-eminence of economics in the migrants' list of priorities, as if all other factors such as social networks have no part to play (Yeoh and Huang 2011:688).

This overall sociological picture obfuscates the reality that elite migrants do engage in sociocultural processes of identity-making and developing a sense of belonging while in specific localities, even if they might appear to be deterritorialised over a longer time frame. As Yeoh and Huang (2011) explain,

> "…while economic relations and rationalities are fundamental to the phenomenon of talent migration, they are folded into broader culturing processes at work. More specifically, we collectively argue that the migratory moves of the talented and skilled have to be understood within a broader cultural politics – **both in terms of a politics of moving (and belonging) and a politics of place**… Transnational migratory moves are hence negotiated moves, as mobile sensibilities are shaped not just in response to corporate logic or economic rationalities alone but also in the context of social-cultural-political considerations operative at family-community-country scales."
>
> (Yeoh and Huang 2011:683, emphasis my own)

Seen in these ways, 'mobility' implies not just the movement between two points, but also the process of transitioning and adaptation from one point to another (cf "a politics of moving and belonging"). Accordingly, 'frictionless mobility', in suggesting that such moves are smoothly continuous, understates the process of transition and adaptation, and the influence of prevailing local sensibilities when moving from point A to B. In

this thesis, when I refer to 'friction' in mobility, I use the term in both senses: (i) to denote slowing movement down, meeting impedance while moving to or at the point of new host societies, or (ii) where transition and adaptation to a new host society are not seamless.

As an example of how migratory moves are embedded in local sociocultural contexts and not always 'frictionless' and 'deterritorialised', Tseng (2011) examines skilled Taiwanese migrants in Shanghai. She uncovers that economic factors may be trumped by lifestyle preferences and life-stage processes like marriage and having children, in terms of influencing migratory decisions. Tseng (2011) contends that the link drawn between skilled migrants and 'a global identity' and mobility is a myth, and that,

> "with the exception of those at the top rank, most skilled migrants cannot afford to be rootless, for a number of valid economic and social/cultural reasons. Skilled migrants are not as hypermobile as imagined. They value the cultural attractions and lifestyles associated with particular destinations, and are inclined to put down roots once they have settled in a new place they call home. "
>
> (Tseng 2011:766).

Consequently, however much we might be tempted to see Ming's story of migration as easily achieved without social cost, and motivated by an astute eye for economic success, there must be more complex mechanisms at play at each stage of further migration and/or settlement. Cosmopolitan elite students must navigate, and make strategic choices in their current countries of residence – the kind and quality of linguistic practices they acquire or reject; the tensions between integration, citizenship and transnationalism. Their transnational movement has to be understood as rooted and constrained within a wider cultural politics, in terms of both migration and belonging to a particular place, for "inasmuch as 'moving' is negotiated within multiple life domains, decisions to 'stay' after the move and the contemplation of different kinds of 'belonging' are equally embedded in social-cultural-political matrices" (Yeoh and Huang 2011:684). Perforce, it is worth seriously examining in this thesis Tseng's (2011) idea that "Contrary to the portrait of the skilled migrant as someone who does not need to be attached to a particular place… migrants' sense of economic and cultural connection with the city along the migration journey is central to their migration and

settlement decisions and outcomes." (Tseng 2011:781-782).

A second weakness of current theorisations regarding cosmopolitan mobile elites, is the critique that ideals of cosmopolitanism do not sufficiently engage with human behaviour as an empirical condition (Ho 2011:731). Explanations of how individuals develop cosmopolitan orientations (Kennedy 2004, Conradson and Latham 2007, Nava 2007), tend to perceive them as "a project of self-fashioning", "wherein individuals deliberately cultivate a global sensibility by embracing cultural diversity in their friendship and professional networks, developing tastes for foreign music and food, and participating in lifestyle choices (e.g. environmentalism and organic diets) characteristic of a cosmopolitan society" (Ho 2011:730). Cosmopolitanism is hence often described as "an imaginary celebration of difference" (Ho 2011:731), and (like the critique of 'frictionless' mobility) seldom defined in terms of how it is necessarily rooted in and intertwined with localised territory, culture and ideologies (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013:186-187).

Skey (2013) similarly argues for the need to supplement our understanding of cosmopolitanism with how people are variably engaged in and committed to such a practice. He posits that,

> "…the analytical dimensions of the concept [of cosmopolitanism] remain much too broad, premised on the idea of 'openness' and a willingness to engage with 'others'. Such broad-based definitions do not adequately address the potential for different levels of openness, the extent and significance of these engagements or who is being defined as the 'other'. As a result, there is a real need to take into account the findings of recent empirical research, which has begun to explore the ways in which such encounters are marked by access to different economic, cultural and political resources and, hence, relations of power."
>
> (Skey 2013:249)

To illustrate this gap between idealised notions of cosmopolitanism and how these orientations are played out in actual contexts, Ho (2011) investigates the experiences of highly skilled Singaporean transmigrants in London and the ways they enact cosmopolitan identities and cultural practices. She describes her informants as

individuals who are deliberately acquiring cultural capital in the form of foreign cultures, so as to become more marketable in their internationally mobile work lives (Ho 2011:733). To scholars like Conradson and Latham (2007: 249 in Ho 2011:733), Ho's informants could be perceived as engaging in a process of self-fashioning to become part of an "emergent cosmopolitan society." However, Ho (2011) discovers that,

> "The cosmopolitan capital demonstrated by the Singaporean transmigrants in this study is often premised upon essentialising racial/ cultural/civilisational constructs framed around the superiority (or inferiority) of some cultures over others [ie white British is more valuable than British South Indian practices]. They may be asserting their difference and negotiating it in a productive and affirmative way for themselves but what about for the 'Other'? These framings of cultural hegemony are antithetical to the ethos of a cosmopolitan project in which difference should be received with mutual acceptance and respect for one another's differences."
>
> (Ho 2011:743)

In other words, while mobile elites may superficially appear open to and welcoming of cultural difference, they are not free from discourses and ideologies that value some cultural practices over others, and may be active participants in reproducing these hierarchical constructs. Engaging with cultural difference in such a discriminatory fashion, appears to fly in the face of a cosmopolitan ideal where there is a "penchant for diversity" (Vertovec 2009:6), and where cosmopolitans "are characterised by their recognition of others because of their value and integrity as human beings, quite independently of their national affiliations. They share an open and tolerant world view that is not bound by national categories…" (Mau et al 2008:5).

Despite this apparent contradiction between ideal and reality, Ho's (2006, 2011) findings do corroborate Beck's (2002) initial postulation of cosmopolitanism, as Beck only envisions it as an abstract ideal that is in constant tension with traditional social categories and ideologies like race and nation. This is why he writes of cosmopolitinisation as "a dialectics of conflict: cosmopolitanisation and its enemies" (Beck 2002:29), rather than a condition that exists as human behaviour writ large.

It is hence important to realise that while mobile elites are inclined to develop some cosmopolitan practices, this is not to say that they fulfill all aspects of the cosmopolitan model all the time. Yes, many students like Ming may have hybrid linguistic and cultural practices, and they might explicitly state their weak affiliations to national and cultural identities. This does not preclude the fact that their migration pathways and current cultural practices might be embedded within and a result of local, regional and global hegemonic structures. They choose to learn English in Singapore rather than China, and might have preferences regarding the variety of English they acquire while in Singapore, including how they learn the language.

In order to reconcile the differences between ideal models of migrant cosmopolitanism and dominant ideologies still rooted in modernist notions of ethnicity and nationality (ie "cosmopolitanism and its enemies" Beck 2002:29), Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013) propose a framework of 'regimes of mobility' to move forward from current migration studies. In their words,

> "the term 'regime' calls attention to the role both of individual states and of changing international regulatory and surveillance administrations that affect individual mobility. At the same time, the term reflects a notion of governmentality and hegemony in which there are constant struggles to understand, query, embody, celebrate and transform categories of similarity, difference, belonging and strangeness."
>
> (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013:189)

This will allow theorists to highlight the relationship between being mobile and immobile; to understand how this relationship is shaped by and played out in local social, cultural and political contexts; and how the relationship is in turn linked to wider webs of unequal global relationships of power (cf Wallerstein's World Systems Model). Migration in this sense, is not entirely agentless or agentive, but a duality of both structural constraints and individual action (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013:195-196).

Yeoh and Huang's (2011:688) emphasis on delineating the fluidity and friction of talent migration, then reminds us of the need to avoid artificially segregating the economic and sociopolitical spheres of migrant life. The economic and social must be seen as

interwoven, in order to explain the mobility of the highly skilled. Therefore, it is by situating our investigation of cosmopolitan elite students in a 'regimes' paradigm (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013) contextualised in the "social-cultural-political matrices" (Yeoh and Huang 2011:684) of a particular space, that we may grasp at a more comprehensive understanding of individuals like Ming.

Having tentatively narrowed students like Ming in Singapore to a type of 'cosmopolitan mobile elite', I have concluded that the model suffers from a lack of empirical grounding. There is a lack in empirical description of how macro historical processes and economic structures, as well as more immediate sociocultural and political milieu of the host country, are linked to the migratory aspirations, cultural identities and linguistic practices of these individuals.

At this juncture, it must be noted that I am aware of a large tranche of studies in intercultural communication that have also dealt with cosmopolitanism as a concept. Much of such work seeks not to investigate cosmopolitan behaviours and attitudes, but to examine how cosmopolitan competencies and stances might be attained in intercultural settings such as language classrooms (eg Quist 2013, Sobre-Denton and Bardhan2013). Holliday[10] (2016) thus advocates a "cosmopolitan approach" towards intercultural education. These studies are somewhat less relevant to my interest in examining actual attitudes and practices of individuals, especially those who are top-performing students such as Ming. It is for this reason that I have chosen not to dwell on the field of intercultural communication. Instead, the descriptive gap in local contexts that I have identified earlier might be filled by existing literature on top-performing students with schools in Singapore as a key fieldsite. The next section will therefore address studies regarding the institutional experiences of such students in Singapore.

2.4 Top-performing students in elite schooling in Singapore

A prominent and recent body of work on elite schooling pertains to an investigation of elite secondary schools around the world. Driven by a team of scholars who examine

[10] It must be said, however, that Hollidays' (1999) proposed methodology of understanding "small cultures" (where the practices of any cohesive social grouping is to be distinguished from larger assumed groupings such as ethnicity and nationality) is compatible with the sociolinguistic axiom of investigating the contexts of communication rather than assuming them (Blommaert and Rampton 2011:10). This axiom is instantiated in Bucholtz's (2009) study described later in this chapter, and further explicated as the basis of my research method in Chapter Three.

specific elite schools in localities including Singapore, Barbados, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Hong Kong and Australia, the project has the stated thematic emphasis on critiquing methodological nationalism, interrogating and complicating class theory, as well as highlighting the historical processes of these elite schools in globalising circumstances (McCarthy and Kenway 2014:167).

Within this set of studies, Kenway and Koh (2013), through Bourdieu's lens, attempt to understand graduates from an elite secondary school in Singapore as participants in a transnational social field[11]. They argue that the school and its graduates participate in activities (such as immersion and networking programmes) that enable them to acquire knowledge of foreign cultures, forge connections with other elite secondary schools, and obtain "Ivy League and Oxbridge credentials". These school activities thus enable students to promulgate and attain capitals[12] that can "potentially be invested in *any* nation state and in relation to certain fractions of *any* state nobility" (Kenway and Koh 2013:287, emphasis my own). In order to explicate the transnational mobility of these students, Kenway and Koh (2013) employ Bourdieu's concepts of cultural and symbolic capitals to refer to the educational credentials and knowledge of foreign cultures etc that have international currency acquired by Singapore's academic elites today. Bourdieu's notion of field is used to understand how this "transnational class" (Kenway and Koh 2013:287 citing Sklair 2001) of individuals operate on a global stage, able to move between educational systems in Singapore, the US and UK, and potentially to any nation state.

Notably, Kenway and Koh's (2013) critique of Bourdieu's (1996) *The State Nobility*, includes the view that the work is characterised by 'methodological nationalism', where the unit of sociological analysis is delimited by the borders of the nation-state without the engagement of transnational processes (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). Suggesting that Bourdieu was describing a time when expressions of contemporary

[11] According to Vertovec (2001:24), the 'transnational social field' was introduced and made prominent in migration literature by Nina Glick-Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Blanc-Szanton (1992). They argue for the importance of studying social fields by reformulating the concept of society, casting it as one that is not bounded by the limits of the nation-state (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004:1003). Their framework of 'social field' is explicitly stated to be drawn from Bourdieu's (1991), and the Manchester School of Anthropology (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004:1009).

[12] Separately, Igarashi and Saito (2014) also used a Bourdieusian approach to describe similar educational processes that develop cosmopolitanism as cultural capital amongst elite students, enabling them to interact with peoples of other nationalities, and be open to foreign cultures. They argue that school systems around the world (such as university rankings) increasingly institutionalise cosmopolitanism as a required capital for entry and hence mobility, even as the capital is unequally distributed globally and across social classes.

globalisation were just emerging, Kenway and Koh (2013) argue that Bourdieu,

> "…did not conceive of fields that extend beyond the nation state or capitals with exchange value around the world. He did not see that elite schools could draw their prestige from the global hinterlands of a nation state as well as from the national field of power. He did not conceive of class or class relations that were not contained within a national field of power."
>
> (Kenway and Koh 2013:287)

While Kenway and Koh (2013) situate elite students as operating in a transnational social field rooted in Singapore, their analysis is focused on the school's curricula and physical environment, not on aspects of socialisation experienced from the perspective of students. Moreover, Kenway and Koh's (2013) narrative of the migratory trajectories of these individuals appear largely similar to that propagated by Appadurai (1996) and Castells (1996), where moves are depicted to be 'frictionless'. By conceptualising these elite students as "nobility without a state", there is an emphasis on the accumulation of certain capitals that denote economic value and prestige for the individual, and their supposed seamless adaption to various localities.

Even as the tranche of studies outlined by McCarthy and Kenway (2014) focuses on the nature of elite schools, other scholars have investigated top-performing students in Singapore from the perspectives of the research subjects themselves. De Costa's (2016) work focuses on the experiences of five Asian immigrant students in an elite secondary school in Singapore. All five were recruited on the same state scholarship that Ming (in Chapter One) attained. This scholarship scheme is termed 'SM1' and targets 15 year old students in China. De Costa (2016) labels them 'designer immigrants' by virtue of the exclusive process through which they were selected by the state. His study examined how these students negotiated, resisted and took up language ideologies regarding Standard English over the course of a school year. The study sought to demonstrate links between these circulating ideologies and the students' own positionings as academic high achievers, and how they learnt English.

At higher educational levels, Yang's (2016a) ethnography of 'SM2'[13] students in a Singapore university accounts for how "educational desires and sociocultural identities are ongoing personal projects for international students. It shows how these desires and identities are constantly revised and renegotiated, held onto or abandoned" (Yang 2016a:23). Importantly, he pays attention to circulating ideologies in the local university, for example, when his informants talked about revising their career and educational ambitions in relation to their social networks and wider anti-immigrant sentiment in the school.

In the same context of local universities, Collins et al (2014) portray biographical interviews of immigrant students in the National University of Singapore to show how they translate their imaginations into social practice, so that Singapore is not envisioned as the end destination in their career trajectories. These desires for transnational mobility are argued to be socially generated but also "co-constitutive" with institutional structures when viewed in relation to the state's own strategies and programmes that encourage transnational networks (Collins et al 2014). This is as the state's intention is to govern mobility by attracting foreign talent and shaping Singapore as a knowledge and economic hub in the region.

> "Mobilities can be moulded by states, families, and students, but their effects remain indeterminate, embodied in desires 'to become in circulation' and embedded in geopolitical and geo-economic relations and the strategies that seek to influence them. Student desires and the actions of NUS and the Singapore state are co-constitutive – students strategically mobilise investments and programmes such as the Global Schoolhouse in seeking to materialise their desires while NUS and government actors work to shape those desires. Both fashion emergent and lived globalising and regionalising urban and educational spaces. Student desires are important objects to be governmentalised, while strategy must attend to recalcitrant, shifting, or as yet unformed desires."
>
> Collins et al (2014:673)

[13] The SM2 scheme refers to the Singapore state's scholarship targeted at recruiting 18 year old students from China (see Chapter Four).

All three studies above thus add other dimensions to my understanding of migratory flows by focusing on the individual's negotiation of language ideologies (De Costa 2016), shifting educational desires (Yang 2016a) and the state's attempts at governing mobility (Collins et al 2014) through their experiences in school. The lesson to be drawn is in how the aspirations and resultant trajectories of students can be linked to circulating ideologies within the school, as well as programmes promulgated by the institution.

Yet, these studies also appear to assume the a priori condition of their focal participants as immigrants. None of these studies looked to perspectives from and interactions between *both* locals and immigrants who participate in and share the same institutional spaces as top-performing students. Less is said about how immigrant and local identities might emerge from discursive positionings in talk, or how differentiations and social tensions might occur amongst these academically elite individuals. The issue of differentiations amongst academically elite students is important as it could be related to the supposed frictionless migratory moves that these individuals undertake.

At this point, it is useful to consider Ong's (1999) depiction of 'flexible citizenship' amongst wealthy ethnic Chinese who engage in intense transmigration. In particular, she demonstrates how transnational movement for elite migrants may not always be as straightforward as much of the literature suggests. In Ong's (1999: 88-96) account, these individuals recognise that the initial cultural capitals they hold (eg languages) might be valued differently in their transnational moves to other localities. They respond by being flexible in the accumulation of new capitals valued in these localities, in order to participate in and be members of localised contexts. At the same time, Ong (1999:91), like Kenway and Koh (2013:287), acknowledges that the concept of cultural capital is originally conceived by Bourdieu to address the reproduction of social power in a static economy (ie a well-defined field of power circumscribed by national borders). In the event of transnational movements, the reproduction of social power is never guaranteed. Even if immigrants are flexible in acquiring valued cultural capitals in new localities, these individuals might embody certain irrevocable traits such as skin colour and ethnicity that count as symbolic deficits in the new society. There might be a perceived mismatch between racial identity (eg being seen as Chinese) and the cultural capitals they have acquired (such as fluent Standard English), so that these individuals might still be judged in the new host society to be culturally deficient and low status

(Ong 1999:91). To Ong (1999:92), migration as a transnational process is an especially telling instance of this incompatibility between symbolic capital and its embodiment:

> "Bourdieu's concept of habitus and capital accumulation seems to work seamlessly when applied to French society, which he analysed as a fairly stable social-class system where everyone knows his or her place even if the cultural codes of distinction may shift from time to time. But what happens when strategies of cultural accumulation run up against regimes of racial difference and hierarchy…? The experiences of Hong Kong migrants… help to complicate the picture regarding the effectiveness of accumulation strategies in transnational arenas."
>
> Ong (1999:93)

With Ong's (1999) work as a cautionary example, it is worth examining in this thesis how the mobility of academically elite students due to their educational credentials that have been outlined by Kenway and Koh (2013), might face resistance and hence friction as a result of various social differentiations and tensions between groupings when they enter Singapore's local spaces as immigrants.

2.5 Top-performing students in language and education

The review of literature in migration studies has attempted to show how the model for cosmopolitan elites is let down by a lack of empirical description with certain implications: (i) there is a cumulative tendency[14] to regard cosmopolitan elites as deterritorialised and motivated by economic logic (Yeoh and Huang 2011:682), making "frictionless" moves (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013:186); (ii) there is a corresponding inadequacy when describing how the actual cultural and linguistic dispositions and practices of cosmopolitan elites could be constrained by local hegemonic structures or regimes, and could be different from the cosmopolitan ideal envisioned by Beck (2004). There is hence a need to contextualise their mobilities and behaviours in the "social-cultural-political matrices" (Yeoh and Huang 2011:684) of a particular space. In the field of elite schooling, some studies in Singapore have attempted to draw attention to

[14] This was also observed by Ball and Nikita (2014) in their review of literature on the mobilities of individuals they call the "global middle class". That is, the literature "stresses the loose and transient global networks and local isolation" of these individuals (Ball and Nikita 2014:86).

local contexts of academically elite students in schools. However, the studies do so by assuming the same notions of frictionless and deterritorialised moves (eg Kenway and Koh 2013), or by neglecting the social differentiations and tensions that could occur amongst these top-performing students (eg De Costa 2016).

One other broad academic field that has had a sustained interest in students who are also migrants is in language and education. The field can be productive in illuminating my understanding of people like Ming especially in terms of the use of empirical linguistic data to illustrate wider networks or "regimes" (ie the links between macro sociocultural and political structures, and micro discursive events). The analytical framework of linguistics is important as "examining education through the lens of language, and particularly linguistic difference, allows us to see ways in which social boundaries in local community contexts intersect with institutional categorisation processes and ways in which social structure is articulated with human agency" (Heller and Martin-Jones 2001:5-6). This approach is especially pertinent to uncovering the possible differentiations that might emerge amongst academically elite students in Singapore. It is linguistic data collected through observation and interviews, that will shed light on the individual's linguistic and cultural practices vis a vis other students, the processes and tensions of identity construction and performance, as well as how all these are related to or in tension with wider sociocultural and political contexts.

The following section thus surveys some literature in applied and sociolinguistics that have focused on migrant students. Principally, I will be attentive to the depiction of immigrants and how they match my own provisional outline of students like Ming as 'cosmopolitan mobile elites'. This is done while bearing in mind the ways in which the immigrant students' migratory routes, cultural demeanour and linguistic practices are characterised. Baynham (2013) suggests two interrelated themes that often emerge at the confluence of applied linguistics and migration: (i) regarding immigrant students' access to education (Baynham 2013:422), and (ii) how immigrant students enact their identities (Baynham 2013:418). I divide the literature into these two broad areas and look at each in turn. It will be argued that despite investigating the differentiations that could occur amongst a student body, there is a research gap. Most studies have concentrated on exclusion and disadvantage, not top-performing students. Most migration patterns have been depicted as conventional fixed routes (ie from A to B, possibly back to A), rather than with some degree of unpredictability and multiplicity.

2.5.1 Immigrant students' access to education in language and education research

A major issue in the area of language and education research is the "impact of policy, linguistic barriers to access to curriculum achievement in the dominant language, and also opportunities to maintain and develop bilingual skills" (Baynham 2013:422). Notably, much work on language and education in schools has been devoted to the plight of migrant minorities, with a focus on the ethnicity and social class of students. This includes examining issues faced by immigrant students who possess different linguistic and cultural practices from the majority.

A seminal example of such work in North America is Gibson and Ogbu's (1991) volume showcasing North American case studies of various ethnic communities (some of whom are immigrants) in schools, providing insight on why some students are able to succeed in certain educational settings while others do not. Ogbu (1992) himself makes a finer distinction amongst ethnic minorities in the US, drawing certain co-relations between their specific minority status and educational attainment. In his view, "immigrant or voluntary minorities" are those who have moved voluntarily to the US in search of greater economic prospects and/or political freedom. They "usually experience initial problems in school due to cultural and language differences as well as lack of understanding of how the education system works. But they do not experience lingering, disproportionate school failure" (Ogbu 1992:8). On the other hand, "castelike or involuntary minorities" are those compelled to move to the US for reasons like slavery or colonisation. They are often prevented from actually integrating with the rest of society, so that "it is involuntary minorities that experience greater and more persistent difficulties with school learning" (Ogbu 1992:8). Gibson (1997) and Collier (1995) present similar bodies of work regarding students' immigrant identities that might entail various attitudes, positionings and desires, in relation to the difficulties they might face in language acquisition in schools.

Within studies that encompass ethnographic approaches, the theme of immigrant students being marginalised by institutional practices remains consistent. Amongst the most prominent are Monica Heller's (2006) linguistic anthropological research, Patricia Duff's (2002, 2003) studies pertaining to Language Socialisation, and Talmy's (2008) Critical Ethnography in a Hawaiian school. Based on a French language minority school

in Ontario in the early 1990s, Heller (2006) demonstrates the tensions that exist amongst statist language ideologies and education outcomes, the school's own political agenda as a minority French language school, the identities of immigrant students with their corresponding attitudes to language learning, and the linguistic practices of the dominant student group. The majority of students were bilingual francophones who conformed to the school's vision of English and French as parallel monolingualisms, and whose families' linguistic resources and practices enabled them to do so. This was in contrast to recently arrived immigrant students who were monolingual francophones marginalised by the school's linguistic norms. Also marginalised were students who may have been bilingual but who spoke the French Canadian vernacular that is a stigmatised version of French in the school (even if Canadian French is prevalent in the rest of Canada). Language learning in the school is thus presented as a contestation of language ideologies, cultural identities and social networks.

At a more micro-level of classroom interaction, Duff (2003) sought to examine the language socialisation of Asian immigrant students in a mainstream multilingual, multicultural secondary school in Vancouver. Duff reported that there was a lack of overt participation in classroom discussions by immigrant students, and "there was no 'crossing' ethnolinguistic community boundaries between 1st generation Asian-Canadian and local European-Canadian groups in either of the classes observed, inside class or outside…" (Duff 2003:8). Teachers thought that the reticence of immigrant students were because they were shy, while local students believed that their immigrant counterparts did not possess the language skills nor made the effort to participate (Duff 2003:8). From the immigrants' own position, they were not vocal because they lacked the knowledge of European pop culture or current affairs that the discussions were often about. They also perceived such discussions as a distraction from the actual lesson (Duff 2003:9).

Such disjunctures and resistance to teaching practices were likewise seen in Steven Talmy's (2008) work on immigrant students in Hawaii. Talmy undertakes a Critical Ethnographic (Atkinson et al 2011:93-94) approach in describing the situation that new immigrants (aka "Fresh off the Boats") face in schools in interaction with other immigrants who have been in Hawaii for a longer time, and local students. He describes how all immigrants were classified by the school as 'ESL students' and compelled to undertake an "infantilised" ESL curriculum, regardless of their language proficiencies.

Immigrant students resisted the label of 'ESL student' and pedagogy by disengaging from classroom activities and tasks, so that they continued to achieve poor grades and were stuck in ESL lessons (Talmy 2008:623-639). Talmy proceeds to argue that resistance to "hegemonic socialising forces" while not necessarily transformative, can be socially and culturally reproductive (Talmy 2008:639).

The relationship between access to education and immigrant cultural identity and practices is a major topic outside of North America as well. In Australia, Cruickshank (2006) details the situation of 20 Arabic-speaking families and their children's access to literacy. While the parents are all first generation migrants from the Middle East, the children are mostly Australian-born. His findings suggested similar barriers to achievement compounded by cultural differences between local and immigrant students. Drawing from her own ethnographic study of three Chinese immigrant students in an Australian highschool, Miller (2000:98) argues that the cultural practices of her informants were excluded from institutional norms in the school, leading to their inevitable marginalisation.

Notably, Miller (2000) suggests that her findings are not new, and provides an apt sequitur for studies regarding immigrant students' opportunities in school in much of the Anglo-world:

> "Finding similar cases as those presented here from Australia in the United States, Canada, and Europe would not be difficult, that is, places where linguistic minority students have little opportunity to use the dominant language in interpersonal relations and inadequate use in academic settings for acquisition. The ways in which these students represent themselves and are represented in schools are critically related to the types of social interactions they participate in, to their inclusion or exclusion from mainstream discourses, and to their ongoing language acquisition and integration."
>
> (Miller 2000:98-99)

At this stage, it is crucial to reiterate that students like Ming are academically elite individuals who often perform extremely well in Singapore schools (especially in the Math and Sciences) despite their initial low proficiencies in English. This occurs even

as there is little or no pedagogical differentiation in the teaching of English or any other subject between immigrants and their Singaporean classmates. The situation of students like Ming is hence rather different from the underprivileged migrants in the aforementioned studies.

2.5.2 Enactment of identity and linguistic practices by immigrant students

There is another area of concern in sociolinguistics, not necessarily to do with educational access or the school as a key fieldsite – the enactment of identities by immigrant students (Baynham 2013:418). This set of studies might be useful in showcasing the differentiations and frictions, or common practices that might emerge amongst a mixed group of local and immigrant students sharing the same institutional space.

Rampton's (2005) explication of "crossing", as students engage in multilingual practices and identities supposedly not of their ethnic group (Rampton 2005:14), is a prime example. To Rampton (2005:20), "crossing" constitutes a ritualised activity employed by adolescents to "escape, resist or affirm the ritual orderings that threaten to dominate their everyday experience." He describes how these youths of Caribbean, Anglo, and Indian/Pakistani descent mixed Creole, Punjabi and Asian English in the context of a British secondary school. These practices were seen to contest racial boundaries and assert particular identities. The study also presents a case for how UK TESL practices and educational policies often assume a homogeneous and neatly defined ethnic reality. This is translated into pedagogies that are incompatible with the lived experiences and diverse cultural identities of student populations infused with immigrants[15] (Rampton 2005:308-327).

In a separate anthology of studies, Reyes and Lo (2009) use "Asian Pacific American" as an umbrella term for various groups of Asian immigrants in the US. The studies investigated how different participants orient to racial or ethnic labels and categories (eg being "Korean" or Japanese" or "American-Chinese") in interaction. Within this volume, Bucholtz (2009) looked at how two Laotian American girls negotiated a set of identities in a San Francisco Bay highschool. Both arrived in California in childhood as

[15] To be sure, Rampton's (2005) participants are all British born, though still marked in the community by their minority ethnic status, and as being descended from immigrants (Rampton 2005:34-46)

refugees, and had working class families. Despite similar socioeconomic circumstances with neither being a native speaker of English, "both girls' identities were produced neither in their native language nor in a shared, ethnically distinctive 'Asian American English'." (Bucholtz 2009:39). Both of them actually displayed different stylistic identity practices amongst a set of stereotypical identities and semiotic resources which were available to them. One girl identified more as a "model-minority nerd", while the other positioned herself as a "dangerous gangster", each with its peculiar range of linguistic identity practices. Thus, Bucholtz challenges the "assumption that those who are classified as members of the same group will have a common language and common identity" (Bucholtz 2009:39).

In all of these cases, it would appear that the migratory routes of immigrant students have been characterised as largely the conventional form established in migration studies. Migratory movement is largely assumed to be unidirectional (from A to B; cf King 2012a:7, 20, 25). This is in contrast to the mobilities and destinations of academically elite students in Singapore, which are potentially multiple. The significance of this will be addressed below.

2.5.3 A research gap in language and education

Having surveyed a broad range of literature on immigrant students in language and education, I suggest that the research subject or participant in this work remains narrow with a potential gap to be filled. This occurs on two fronts.

First, studies on immigrant students' educational access in the field of language and education, have mostly been about disadvantage and exclusion. As Baynham (2013:422) observes, linguistic barriers to curriculum achievement has been a major motif when it comes to investigating immigrant students in schools. Miller (2000:98-99) alludes to the sustained and prevailing nature of this theme by stating that it is not difficult to find such case studies in North America, Europe and Australia. Even as scholars like Duff and Talmy (2011:111) acknowledge the "essential unpredictability, contestedness, and fluidity" of language learning for immigrant students, the concern thus far appears to be on individuals excluded from mainstream linguistic and cultural norms and practices in schools, and who are ostensibly disadvantaged in the institution. Some studies recognise that apparent marginalisation need not be at the expense of

academic performance (some of Duff's [2002] reticent immigrant students, for example, actually had better grades overall than vocal local students), but there is certainly much less literature that explicitly and exclusively deals with academically elite students who seemingly thrive in their new school despite linguistic differences.

Second, the characterisations of immigrants in most sociolinguistic research appear to be of the conventional form described previously, where migration is a fixed route with a specific end destination. Such migration patterns may adhere to the "permanent settlement migration paradigm", conceiving of migration as a displacement from the country of origin A and a permanent settlement in destination B (Agunias 2006:44). We recall the research subjects such as those in Ogbu's (1992) early typologies of ethnic minorities in the US, Reyes and Lo's (2009) Asian Pacific Americans and Talmy's (2008) "Fresh off the Boats". Seldom addressed are students whose migratory goals are more indeterminate, and who cross national borders on a regular basis.

While studies such as Rampton (2005) and Bucholtz (2009) have been useful in demonstrating how social differentiations might occur amongst individuals through linguistic resources, their informants' practices are not linked to their potential for transnational movement. There may be a need to make a substantive distinction between individuals who are permanently settled or with fixed migratory destinations, from those with more indefinite trajectories, as this is a factor that could influence their current cultural and linguistic practices. For instance, the migratory pathways of Korean "study abroad" students are presented by Song (2012) as involving return migration. The goal of eventually returning to Korea is associated with the students' desire to maintain their Korean linguistic and cultural practices so as to abide by their Korean ethnic identity (Song 2012). Crucially, academically elite students in Singapore, both locals and immigrants among them, may desire future transmigration and may or may not envisage return migration in the foreseeable future. The aim of leaving Singapore (and not returning) might be linked to their uptake (or rejection) of local ways of behaving and speaking.

Few sociolinguists have focused on deterritorialised subjects that portray "intentional unpredictability" Engbersen et al (2013:964) in their migratory pathways. We have earlier discussed how the typology of cosmopolitan mobile elite students is quite different from transnationals. It is the mobile elite as a frame of analysis that appears to

be under-researched within the field. Significantly, we are reminded by Tseng (2011) that there are limits to how such aspirations of "intentional unpredictability" play out in reality. The mobility of elite global nomads is often constrained by mundane life decisions such as marriage and childbirth. Moreover, processes of identity-making and developing (or not) a sense of belonging to a locality, are intricately tied to local sociocultural and political "matrices" (Yeoh and Huang 2011:684). Nonetheless, the question remains open as to the extent these processes occur for academically elite students in Singapore. That is, whether and how they develop or maintain their frictionless trajectories, deterritorialised attitudes, identities and practices, as well as how these relate to local sociopolitical contexts.

2.6 Responding to the challenge: a qualitative research of academically elite students in Singapore

I began my discussion by posing a puzzle. There are people like Ming whom I encountered in school as a teacher. These are individuals who potentially have flexible migratory trajectories, and who might have a 'cosmopolitan' attitude toward their cultural identities and linguistic practices. What has the literature to say about them? How much do we really understand about life stories like Ming's?

I attempted to answer these questions by first situating my tentative apprehension of such academically elite students within current migrant typologies. It might be that people like Ming are closest to the characterisation of the 'cosmopolitan mobile elite'. Even so, I argued that there is a mismatch between conceptualisations of cosmopolitan nomads, and how they actually navigate choices at each stage of moving/staying. Their physical trajectories may not be really "frictionless" (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013:186) nor rootless. Instead, their identity-making and sense of belonging could be tied into social, cultural, political matrices at each locality (Yeoh and Huang 2011:684). Correspondingly, cultural practices associated with 'cosmopolitanism' must be understood as constrained by real world ideologies.

The lack of contextualised empirical description of elite migrants within migration studies necessitated my survey of literature regarding top-performing students in the field of elite schooling in Singapore. However, studies addressing the nature of the elite school tended to describe students' trajectories in the same terms of deterritorialised and

frictionless migration (eg Kenway and Koh 2013). Other studies based on the perspective of students (eg Yang 2016a) were useful in linking institutional programmes and ideologies to the individuals' transnational aspirations and trajectories, but often focused on and assumed their immigrant identities. Less is said of how such identities might emerge or how other forms of differentiations could occur amongst academically elite individuals.

I then turned to the field of language and education where I speculated that characterisations of top-performing immigrant students might also be found. The empirical gap, however, appeared to extend to this field of study. I argued that most studies are focused on individuals suffering from exclusion and disadvantage, not high-achieving students. While sociolinguists (eg Rampton 2005, Bucholtz 2009) have been mindful of investigating (rather than assuming) the emergence of identities and differentiations, most migration patterns of their research subjects are characterised as conventional fixed routes (ie from A to B) involving permanent settlement, rather than with some degree of unpredictability and multiple points of disembarkation.

In summary of the literature review thus far, generalisations about deterritorialisation and frictionless moves in the literature on global cosmopolitanism (eg Appadurai 1990, Castells 1996) and transnational elite schooling (eg Kenway and Koh 2013) have been useful in highlighting the transnational nature and scale of these individuals' mobility. However, as (Skey 2013) suggests, there is a corresponding need to situate and examine such characterisations in local contexts and through detailed empiricity. Indeed, such empirical evidence pertaining to top-performing students also appear lacking in language and education research. It might be that the migration literature has not been attentive enough to contextual groundings when describing individuals who engage in repeated mobility, whereas the language in education literature (in being focused on local contexts) has overlooked the potentially peripatetic mobility of its research subjects.

Given the empirical gap in migration studies, elite schooling, and language and education, my proposal is to broaden the research gaze of language and education to include academically elite students. The aim of my thesis is to interrogate notions of cosmopolitan elites as engaging in transnational mobility in a manner that is frictionless, deterritorialised and motivated by economic logic. This is done through a

case study of academically elite students in Singapore. At the same time, there is a need to avoid assuming the particular identities that they might inhabit (eg immigrants in Yang 2016a) and be wary of reifying academically elite students as a homogeneous grouping. As shown through much sociolinguistic research (eg Bucholtz 2009), differentiations might exist even amongst immigrants, and these differentiations might be related to issues of social tension and friction in transnational movement (cf Ong 1999). In other words, this thesis adopts a sociolinguistic axiom of investigating (rather than assuming) notions such as race and nationality through the talk of informants (Blommaert and Rampton 2011), so as to contribute to theorisations regarding cosmopolitan elite migrants prominent in migration studies and elite schooling.

With "regimes of mobility" (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013), and Yeoh and Huang's (2011) "social-cultural-political matrices" as rough paradigmatic guides, investigating these individuals who engage in intense mobility involves illustrating the links between macro historical processes, economic structures, the sociocultural and political network of the immediate locality, and their cultural and linguistic practices. Within studies on elite schooling, my arguments for contextualisation are in line with Ball and Nikita's (2014:90) agenda for future research regarding the links between schools and the development of 'cosmopolitanism' in students. The thesis is also broadly germane to Maxwell's (2018) "glonacal" framework for analysis emphasising the need for understanding "how global, national and local policies intersect with local community demographies and histories of education institutions in these spaces, which in turn shape the curricula offerings made and the development of student subjectivities in relation to internationalisation and orientations to mobility" (Maxwell 2018:349). In this bid for contextualisation, my thesis addresses the empirical need to describe the cosmopolitanism of student informants like Ming realistically (Skey 2013:238), and explicates the dynamics of structure and individual agency in aspects of immigrant life (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013:195-196). Because of this focus on the local context, the thesis devotes itself to drawing relations between structures in the Singapore socio-political economy and the experiences of individuals as described by them, with much less emphasis placed on when they leave the Singaporean space.

Taking into account both (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013) and Yeoh and Huang (2011), my research aim of investigating academically elite students in Singapore translates into two preliminary research questions:

1. How are their cultural identities and sociolinguistic practices linked to their aspirations, trajectories, and wider circulating discourses in the local context of Singapore?
2. In what ways does an investigation of these links complicate and contribute to theorisations of cosmopolitan elites by academics and conceptualisations of such people by governments?

How then should I seek to answer these research questions? In Chapter Three, I argue for a qualitative approach, informed by my own position as a provisory insider to my informants' educational environment in Singapore. I go on to outline my research design, how I collected data, and how these were interpreted in analysis. It is also important to note that the review of literature does not end with this chapter. This thesis adopts Burawoy's (1998) approach for a reflexive science in that there is a constant dialogue with theory throughout the research and argumentative process, so as to refine existing theory. Subsequent data chapters will thus begin by dwelling on additional relevant literature in order to shed light on the interpretation of data, as well as how the data responds to available literature. The significance of both Burawoy (1998) and the sociolinguistic axiom outlined by Blommaert and Rampton (2011) to my research design will be further explicated in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a discussion of how I went about studying academically elite students such as my informants in the context of Singapore. I begin by connecting my methodological approach to the broader theoretical frameworks of "regimes of mobility" (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013) and "social-cultural-political matrices" (Yeoh and Huang 2011), suggesting why a qualitative approach is best suited. I then go on to outline my research design. Next, I discuss the specific methods I have used to address my research questions, as well as how I went about collecting and analysing data. Finally, I conclude by addressing reflexivity and in particular, how my own position has influenced the process of data collection and interpretation.

3.2 Why qualitative research?

I have previously argued that theorisations of cosmopolitan mobile elites have often described them as: (i) making "frictionless" moves (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013:186); (ii) leading deterritorialised lives; (iii) with their migration motivated by economic logic. Yet, these theorisations tend to be let down by a lack of empirical data (Skey 2013). There is a therefore a need to situate the transnational movement and practices of cosmopolitan mobile elites in local contexts. I thus proposed two linked research questions in order to investigate people like Ming in the context of Singapore:

1. How are my informants' cultural identities and sociolinguistic practices linked to their aspirations, trajectories, and wider circulating discourses in the local context of Singapore?
2. In what ways does an investigation of these links complicate and contribute to theorisations of cosmopolitan elite migrants by academics and conceptualisations of such people by governments?

How then can I respond to the empirical and methodological challenge of illustrating these cultural identities, linguistic practices, networks and links? In more quantitative approaches, studies have long been responsible for bringing to light broad trends regarding educational attainment and its co-relation to specific factors such as ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Padilla 2004:132). Quantitative methods are also useful in

tracking the overall distribution of factors amongst a given population (Erickson 1986:121). Notwithstanding the value of quantitative pieces of research, Erickson (1986:121) explains that interpretive methods using participant observation as part of fieldwork are best suited to answering the kind of research questions that I wish to ask. I outline these reasons below.

First, the nature of my research interests and questions appeared to match the epistemological framework of a qualitative approach. That is, the aims of my investigation demanded that I used a qualitative interpretive method, as opposed to quantitative and experimental procedures. I was interested in the process of how academically elite immigrant students develop or maintain their aspirations, identities and linguistic practices. For example, embedded in my research questions, I wanted to understand their experience of school life from their own perspectives; what certain school practices meant to them, how they reacted to these practices etc (Chapters Five and Six). I wanted to know what their affiliations are to different groups in their school environment, and the ways in which they actually developed these affiliations (Chapters Seven and Eight). I wanted to uncover the underlying influences on their migratory aspirations, trajectories, and their current identities and practices. These are forms of knowledge that are not easily produced in a solely deductive manner, such as by setting up an experiment with test subjects, or through a survey. The point of my research was not to prove "the existence of particular relationships so much as to describe a system of relationships, to show how things hang together in a web of mutual influence or support or interdependence…" (Diesing 1971 in Becker 1996:56). It would be immensely difficult to develop a questionnaire from the outset that covered every aspect of my informants' lives, in order to uncover the "system of relationships" (Becker 1996:56) that influence their behaviours. I did not know in advance the pertinent questions to ask; there might be features in their lives I never countenanced as being important, and hence leave out of my questioning, but were actually salient to my focus on the development of their aspirations, identities and linguistic practices.

On the other hand, combining interviews and conversations with participant observational fieldwork allowed me to establish a more holistic interpretive account and understanding of phenomena in order to answer my research questions. In contrast to a one-off survey, I was able to continually develop an awareness of new insights and variables that were built into my interviews and conversations with focal participants,

and all these unanticipated data fed into my resulting theorisations or claims (Becker 1996:56-57).

Second, and building on the previous point, if I were to develop a deeper understanding and empirical description of my informants' behaviour as linked to wider cultural processes, this could only be done through an extended period of immersing myself in their world, talking to them about it, and observing their lives. Underlying this is the interactionist view that all human behaviour is "based upon, or infused by, social or cultural meanings: that is, by intentions, motives, beliefs, rules, discourses, and values… people **interpret** stimuli, and these **interpretations**, continually under revision as events unfold, shape their actions." (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:7-8, words in bold my emphasis). In Erickson's (1986) words, "…different humans make sense differently. They impute symbolic meaning to others' actions and take their own actions in accord with the **meaning interpretations** they have made" (Erickson 1986:127, words in bold my emphasis). What this implies is that human behaviour occurs as a dynamic of people constantly (re-)interpreting (in different ways) the situations they are in, rather than being governed by uniform laws and mechanics. Similar environmental input can mean different things to different people, even to the same person at different times or situations (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:8).

Third, on account of the above two arguments, a qualitative approach in my thesis involved the interpretation of data (eg interviews) as forms of discourse that reflected wider social structures. Salazar (2010) himself calls for the use of cultural anthropology as a key to understanding both physical and aspirational human mobilities, as well as migratory phenomena in general. In his words,

> "Cultural anthropology fruitfully contributes to this field of inquiry by ethnographically detailing how mobility is a contested ideological construct involving much more than mere movement but is culturally embedded, manifested in metacultural discourses and imaginaries. It can, for instance, assess how imaginaries and social relations concerning mobility are materialised, enacted and inculcated. Instead of asking what migration does, or how it comes about, or how it is structured, a cultural mobilities approach to migration is concerned with how personal migratory experiences are tied

> into the cultural web of ongoing discourses of belonging, separation and achievement, power, nationalism and transnationalism."
>
> (Salazar 2010:64)

One way in which "imaginaries and social relations... are materialised, enacted and inculcated" is through talk produced by social actors. In a sociolinguistic paradigm articulated by Blommaert and Dong (2010), language is seen to be loaded with social significance that is assessed as a tool by human actors. Language is deployed and used as a resource by humans in social life, so that "there is always… an identifiable set of relations between singular acts of language, and wider patterns of resources and their functions." (Blommaert and Dong 2010:7). The assumption is that discourse itself is a crucial symbolic resource that people deploy in order to project their interests, construct their alliances, and through which they exercise power (Blommaert 1999:7).

Consequently, language has to be perceived as an integral part of social structure and relations, and can be studied as such. This means undertaking a methodological approach that accounts for "real historical actors, their interests, their alliances, their practices and where they come from, in relation to the discourse they produce" (Blommaert 1999:7). The ways in which these linguistic symbolic resources were produced, distributed, circulated, and the value attached to these resources were the foci of my attention.

In this vein, I use the term 'discourse' to mean "language in use" (Cameron 2001:13), where language is used to do and mean something, produced and interpreted in a real-world context (rather than the idealised, made-up examples often analysed by syntacticians). Such "language in use" would also be referred to as "discourse (with a little 'd')" by James Gee (2005). Examples of discourse would include the moments of talk produced during interviews with my informants.

There are also instances in this thesis, when I make reference to "circulating discourses". By this, I mean the ideologies, socially and historically significant identities, beliefs, values that people have access to, and which are enacted and propagated as they talk about things using these 'discourses' available to them. In Gee's (2005) terms, this would be expressed as "Discourses (with a big 'd')", a system of language use (linked with behaviour, dress and other practices) that form ways of

talking about social reality. Examples of such discourses can include ways of talking about scholarships and career trajectories, as well as immigrants in Singapore. Thus, Gee (2005: 97) separately discusses the reflexive relationship between language and reality, where "language simultaneously reflects reality and constructs it to be a certain way." It is this reflexive relationship that undergirds how I might draw links between social structures in Singapore and how my informants talked about these structures.

In this thesis, an investigation of my informants' talk (discourse with a little 'd') involved examining how they discursively construct their migratory experiences and position themselves in relation to various structures or wider ideologies, making use of Discourses (with a big 'd'). It was thus through qualitative research as a methodological solution, that I might better perceive and empirically illustrate the "cultural web" (Salazar 2010:64) or "social-cultural-political matrices" (Yeoh and Huang 2011:684) that 'designer immigrant' students find themselves enmeshed in.

In sum, a qualitative approach that included interviews and conversations with informants, informed by participant observation allowed me to develop an interpretive understanding of my informants' lives. This in turn enabled me to draw links between what they said and how they said it in interviews, and wider social structures (ie regimes of mobility) that are within the broader remit of my thesis. Using a more quantitative approach (eg standardised survey) in isolation would have been less suitable for my purposes. Though this is not to say that I discounted the use of any quantification at all. Indeed, quantification of certain empirical observations in the data was helpful in demonstrating patterns of distribution and generalisability within the corpus (Erickson 1985:108). The methodology I have adopted was thus primarily qualitative but also aided by quantification at certain points of my analysis and argumentation. The next section outlines how I designed aspects of my qualitative research and notes some anticipated problems.

3.3 Research design

As a piece of qualitative research, this thesis does not aim to generalise in a quantitative fashion, but rather to interpret and contextualise the experiences described by my informants (Creswell and Miller 2000). For this reason, the research design was based on the goal of surfacing the complexity and nuances of the phenomena under study, and

contextualising them in order to increase the possibility for explanation. This is in accordance with what Mason (2006) notes as the primary basis of qualitative research, that is, "situated and contextual understandings are at the centre of qualitative explanation and argument" (Mason 2006:17).

One way of understanding the context of my informants was to collect data in a particular setting that they share. Given my focus on migratory pathways of top-performing students, particular attention must be drawn to their experiences of school, and the academic programmes and state policies that may be linked to these trajectories. Singapore was thus chosen as a fieldsite as I was familiar with the environment; it was where I encountered these top-performing students who engaged in intense transmigration and became puzzled by theorisations about them. I wanted to study individuals who shared the same institutional and educational settings. Given my position as a former student and teacher of St Thomas' School, a top-ranked secondary school in Singapore where academically high-achieving students could be found, I, as a matter of course, sought access to conduct research there. However, the school stated that researching immigrants was too sensitive a topic in light of prevailing public sentiment in Singapore. They therefore rejected my application for access. My rejection by St Thomas' School then necessitated a rethink of my assumptions about conducting research in institutional settings. If institutions such as St Thomas' School were resistant to admitting researchers, how else can I collect data from top-performing students regarding their experiences of school and how they negotiated key institutional junctures? Moreover, if the issue of immigration is really so sensitive, how would I get people to even talk about their migratory experiences into and out of Singapore?

The solution I developed enabled me to overcome both problems of institutional access and the sensitive nature of immigration as a topic. I would seek out former students of mine who have all attended and graduated from St Thomas' School as focal participants in my research. Following my stint as a teacher in St Thomas', I had maintained extensive contacts with students who have become my friends even when they and I left the school. The level of trust I have with them better allowed me to broach potentially sensitive topics like immigration, and I could also elicit their views and accounts of their lives in St Thomas' through interviews.

The adoption of an alternative plan is not to suggest that it is an inferior, second-best research design compared to the original idea of research in the context of the school. Rather, it points to a change in the direction of research (motivated by aforementioned constraints in the fieldsite)[1]. These individuals were residing in Singapore, as well as in the US and UK. They had experienced life in St Thomas' and had moved on to later life stages in universities and workplaces. An investigation of their accounts would enable me to draw potential relations between their accounts and their resultant trajectories. I could examine their accounts of life experiences after graduating from St Thomas'. Instead of an ethnographic study focused on the secondary school, I could now look at their trajectories and institutional structures both before and after their time in St Thomas'.

Crucially, the focus on students from St Thomas' does not mean that I am treating these informants as a homogenous grouping from the outset. A long history of sociolinguistic research has generated certain premises for methodology. One important axiom holds that "the contexts for communication should be investigated rather than assumed" (Blommaert and Rampton 2011:10). Instead of an analytic lens based on the assumption that there are delimitable speech communities or native speakers of a language, sociolinguistics now resists these idealisations through "the notion of linguistic repertoire" and by accounting for the "individuals' very variable (and often rather fragmentary) grasp of a plurality of differentially shared styles, registers and genres" (Blommaert and Rampton 2011:4). We saw this in Chapter Two through Bucholtz's (2009) study of Laotian girls, where the idea of homogeneity within a supposed ethnic group became untenable in the face of sociolinguistic data. The Laotian girls portrayed a range of identities and linguistic practices, none of which is emblematic of their ethnicity. In this view, overarching categorisations like 'race' or 'nationality' become objects of analysis in themselves, while I address the ways in which informants use various linguistic forms to signal their (dis)association with different categorisations at different times (Blommaert and Rampton 2011:5).

Coterminous with my aim to study the migratory movement and cultural demeanour of academically elite students, I therefore have an issue with my investigation of these

[1] Hunter (1995) has long noted the propensity of elite institutions and individuals to resist the enquiries of academic researchers, especially those with an ethnographic and qualitative edge: 'Elites are… relatively unstudied, not because they are not part of existing social problems but precisely because they are powerful and can more readily resist the intrusive inquisition of social research" (Hunter 1995:167).

individuals – how do I research a group of students, without reifying their practices and group identity? What if they do not identify themselves as a group? There might very well be great variation in their practices and "meaning interpretations" (Erickson 1986:127) of school life. This means that my investigation should not presume, nor take as a starting position, that academically elite students have distinctive aspirations, cultural identities and linguistic practices. My data collection ought not to be centred only on immigrant students recruited by the state. It must include other immigrants and Singaporean students as interlocutors and co-participants with whom, or in relation to which, various identities are consolidated, contested or ignored in discourse. Their aspirations, identities and practices (and possible nuanced variations of all these) are to be examined rather than assumed.

Second, another key procedure in my research involves the extensive survey and use of existing literature over the course of data collection, analysis and writing up. This is in line with Burawoy's (1998:28) advocacy for reflexive science that, "rely on embedded objectivity, dwelling in theory". There is a constant dialogue with theory throughout the research process, and ultimately involves "reconstruction of theory", where "the analyst works with a prior body of theory that is continually evolving through attention to concrete cases" (Burawoy 1998:27). My study of academically elite students in Singapore is thus similar to Burawoy's extended case method of Zambian miners, in that,

> "The goal of research is not directed at establishing a definitive 'truth' about an external world but at the continual improvement of existing theory. Theory and research are inextricable… whether reconstruction pushes theory forward or merely makes it more complex, whether reconstruction leads to more parsimonious theories with greater empirical content, whether reconstruction leads to the discovery of new and surprising facts".
>
> Burawoy (1998:28)

Finally, in seeking to answer my preliminary research questions, it may also be fruitful to adopt an overarching theoretical framework to guide my investigations and explanations of observed phenomena. Given Bourdieu's influence on Glick-Schiller and Salazar's (2013) own theoretical formulation of 'regimes of mobility' and transnational social fields, this thesis also adopts Bourdieu's theorisations on social fields and capitals

as a useful broad heuristic frame. The potential utility of Bourdieu's theory has already been demonstrated through the work of scholars examining transnational migration (eg Ong 1999) and elite schooling (eg Kenway and Koh 2013), previously discussed in Chapter Two[2]. In his introductory notes as editor to Bourdieu's (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power*, John Thompson (1991:14) expresses the view that Bourdieu actually uses different terms to refer to social contexts or fields of individual action: "…'field' *(champ)* is his preferred technical term, but the terms 'market' and 'game' are also commonly used, in ways that are at least partly metaphorical."[3] Thompson also sets out what he believes to be how Bourdieu defines a 'field' and 'capital':

> "A field or market may be seen as a structured space of positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources or 'capital'… A field is always the site of struggles in which individuals seek to maintain or alter the distribution of the forms of capital specific to it."
>
> (Thompson 1991:14)

Moreover, Bourdieu's theorisations on social fields and capitals extends to the area of language in two ways pertinent to this thesis: (a) Language as a resource or capital; (b) language as a practice constrained by the social field. Language itself can be perceived as a resource or commodity, where certain language varieties, accents and so on are accorded particular values contingent on the laws of price formation in the linguistic market. Particular linguistic forms (such as Standard English) come to represent certain traits of being well-educated, intelligent and polite. That is, linguistic practices are linguistic capitals in themselves, convertible to and symbolic of the prestige or authority that a standard English speaker might be perceived to possess. These different resources in the market, such as language, may be exchanged for other resources, so that one type of capital may be converted into another type of capital (Bourdieu 1986:252). Competition for and accumulation of these resources will then lead to various social positions in the specific social field.

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[2] Recall from Chapter Two how Ong (1999), and Kenway and Koh (2013) critiqued Bourdieu's original conception of field, capital and habitus as not incorporating transnational activities and processes. Nonetheless, both sets of work continue to use 'field' and 'capitals' as productive notions to help sensitise us to and describe relations and flows of power in transnational contexts. Studies like Ong's (1999) and Kenway and Koh's (2013) serve to update (rather than upend) Bourdieu's ideas; applying Bourdieu's notions in new transnational situations; building on, complicating and adjusting them.

[3] The interchangeability of these metaphors, used by Bourdieu as explicatory concepts, is corroborated by Warde (2004:15).

Bourdieu's theory of field also offers a way of drawing links between my informants' talk in interviews to the social structures that might constrain such linguistic production. The logic of how an individual acts in a field may be characterised as existing within a set of "strategic possibilities" (Bourdieu 1993:314). These possibilities of individual action are influenced by "objective power relations imposed on all who enter this field, relations which are not reducible to the intentions of individual agents or even to direct *interactions* between agents" (Bourdieu 1991:230). As Hanks (2005:69) explains, the individual is socially embedded in the field that conditions relatively stable and regular perceptions, dispositions and actions. These inclinations and actions (such as evaluating certain linguistic codes and language use) that are habitually reproduced is what Bourdieu calls habitus.

As Chapter Four will go on to argue, this thesis attends to various contextual aspects as crucial to understanding my informants' trajectories into and out of Singapore (ie St Thomas' School, state scholarships and racial politics). These contextual aspects might also be seen as pertaining to the social field of education (folded into the local political economy), and (as will be better defined in Chapter Eight) a field of informal socialisation in Singapore. The resources or capitals evaluated and accrued by my informants, how they positioned themselves in these fields, their regular perceptions and dispositions toward certain social structures (such as moving abroad and Standard English) are important ways that illuminate the processes of deterritorialisation and/or enterritorialisation that they undergo.

Since contextualisation is such a key aim of this study, I have found it useful to draw on multiple methods of data collection. In particular, I rely on life history interviews and focus group discussions. These are informed by my participant observation in a peer group and my own experiences as a former student and teacher in St Thomas'. In what follows, I outline why I used these forms of data collection, and how they connect to the aims of my research.

3.3.1 Participant observation

I have established why I wanted to study high-achieving students from St Thomas' School. Additionally, I adopted a research stance not to assume that the identities and practices of these individuals are homogenous or necessarily distinctive from others.

Participant observation thus provided a window through which I could deepen my understanding of how individuals in a peer group of graduates from St Thomas' relate to one another. It was also an opportunity to develop greater rapport and trust with individuals that facilitated the interviews and focus group discussions that I was conducting.

Crucially, the peer group I was embedded in consisted of individuals who had just entered university or were about to be matriculated in the period of data collection. Some were remaining in Singapore, while others were to make transnational moves to universities in the US and UK. It was thus a unique time period in which to observe how these individuals maintained their relations within the peer group as these life events unfolded.

It is also important to note that I do not utilise these observations of interaction (captured in fieldnotes and audio-recordings) in the concrete interpretation of interview data, nor do interactional data in the peer group form the basis of my arguments in this thesis. Nevertheless, my experiences with the peer group helped me to better understand the individual participants' life experiences and to situate them in transnational contexts spanning Singapore, the US and the UK.

3.3.2 Life history interviews and focus group discussions

Even though, as a former teacher and student in St Thomas', I was already familiar with the reasons these students often choose to study in top-ranked universities in the US and UK, it was necessary to interview these highly mobile individuals to understand the more complex motivations underlying their moves, the meanings they attach to their actions, and any nuanced variations in their accounts. If I view migration as an individual undertaking embedded in "social-political-cultural" matrices (Yeoh and Huang 2011; cf Findlay and Li 1999), I must study my informants' accounts as intertwined with the local contexts they are situated in.

In the case of this thesis, life history interviews were therefore a good method to address these objectives. Life history interviews (McAdams 2008), through which informants produce narrative accounts of life events, enable researchers to elicit subjective thought processes of interviewees. When telling their life stories, interviewees often rationalise their behavior, thereby revealing much about their values, their preferences, and their way of seeing the world. Ochs and Capps (2002), for instance, denote such preferences

and values as a *moral stance*, the "disposition towards what is good or valuable and how one ought to live in the world" (Ochs and Capps 2002: 45). Importantly, underlying the biographical approach of life history interviews is a belief that people live "storied lives" and that by telling stories, people attempt to make sense of themselves (Marshall and Rossman 1999). Moreover, many scholars have already proposed life history interview approaches as a particularly good way to capture subjective accounts, and to bridge these subjectivities with broader structural processes (Halfacree and Boyle 1993, Laoire 2000, Lawson 2000), a core aim of this thesis.

Separate from the life history interviews with individuals, the focus group discussions I conducted then allowed me to compare individual accounts garnered through life history interviews, with accounts that the individuals produced in a group setting. It was a way of facilitating triangulation (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:183-185) in testing the validity of my own observations or interviews with informants, as well as surfacing any discrepancies or complexities in accounts. As already noted in Becker (1996:56-57) in the previous section, these various forms of data can be complementary. Data gained from earlier interviews were transcribed, annotated in fieldnotes, analysed and then followed up in subsequent interviews and focus group discussions with the peer group. For example, this approach allowed me to focus on themes that emerged through individual interviews and discuss it with the peer group. Such recurrent themes included Singaporean informants' inclination to apply for state scholarships (Chapter Six), and the negative stereotypes regarding immigrants that informants regularly produced (Chapter Seven).

Because of the reflexivity of language (which I have addressed earlier), the research interview can often be a site of analysis within sociolinguistic frameworks (Baynham 2013: 76). This draws on broad philosophical principles of social and discursive constructionism, where: (i) meanings in talk are contingent, emergent and co-constructed, and (ii) talk is richly contextualised, indexing forms of cultural resources available to the speaker (Baynham 2011:75-77). My informants' accounts in interviews were therefore a "topic" for analysis, where speakers select from a variety of resources and repertoires, and co-constructs ongoing talk with the interviewer (Seale 1998:215). Also because of this, I am mindful that the interview is not an unproblematic neutral point from which data is elicited. That is, I should not mistake what is said in interviews as an objective representation of the social world. Notwithstanding this, life history interviews can still be a "resource" in revealing particular uncontroversial facts (Seale

1998:215), such as whether my informants headed overseas after graduating from St Thomas'. In these ways, I used life history interviews and focus group discussions as both topic and resource.

I will address how I analysed these accounts in interviews later. I first discuss how I actually conducted my fieldwork.

3.4 Conducting fieldwork

I initiated contact with my former students in early May 2014. This was conducted through the social media platform of Facebook, where I could reach out to as many of them as possible. I started by contacting a small circle of individuals whom I thought I was closest to, then cast the net wider. By the end of May, I had received responses from more than 20 ex-students who were sympathetic to my research agenda and agreeable to being participants. These included a mix of Singaporeans and immigrant students primarily from Vietnam and China[4]. They had all graduated from St Thomas' School between 2007 and 2012 (the period when I was a teacher there), and were between the ages of 20 to 25. Given the time constraints of the research process, I decided that interviewing 20 individuals would be adequate for my purposes, and I stopped searching for additional potential participants.

I thus began setting up a timetable for conducting life history interviews with 20 individuals, though this proved to be slightly problematic as seven of them were residing in the US and UK in different time zones, all of whom had different schedules in school and at their workplaces. I planned for at least two sessions with each interviewee; each session was focused on a different life stage of the individual. I did not set an explicit time limit for each interview session, and left it to my participants' own discretion and how willing they were to talk. As the data collection process unfolded, the progress for each individual's interview sessions were uneven. This actually allowed me time to reflect on earlier interview sessions and apply the insights gathered to later interviews with the same individual or others. Interviews with participants residing outside Singapore were conducted via Skype, whilst those in

[4] A detailed table summarising my informants' key biographical data and trajectories can be found in Appendix A.

Singapore were conducted at venues participants were comfortable in, including cafes and public areas on university campuses. All sessions were audio-recorded with contemporaneous accounts written in fieldnotes. Collection of interview data occurred between late May 2014 to early November 2014.

Each life history interview was conducted in a conversational manner, broadly following what Wengraf (2001) promotes as the Biographical Narrative Method (BNIM). The BNIM approach tries to encourage story telling with limited interviewer intervention. I asked the interviewee a starting question, and he/she is not interrupted until he or she finishes relaying an initial narration (Wengraf 2001:113). With my research focus on my informants' educational trajectories and experience of school and state policies, interviewees were asked to talk about their life in each school they attended, how they navigated the institutional stages, culminating in their current life stage. For example, when starting on the life stage of attending secondary school, I would ask "So tell me about how life was like when you started school in St Thomas' " Each interview session was thus thematically semi-structured, and I would at times pick up on what was said in order to pursue a line of inquiry. Each session usually lasted between one to three hours, and I conducted between two to four interview sessions with each individual.

The typical questions/topics discussed with each individual included:

- Life histories – when and where they were born; a little of their family backgrounds, their parents; life as they experienced it in chronological order, divided into certain life stages and key institutions (ie Primary school, secondary school, high school, university, work place); the process of moving across national borders at each stage (eg applying to overseas universities; sitting for selection tests to get to Singapore); core social groups and networks at each stage of life (ie who they usually hang out with in school).

- Language use in particular social domains (eg what language did they use with whom?)

- Positioning vis a vis other groups and circulating stereotypes.

- Future plans and aspirations

While interview sessions began in late May 2014, I found out through Phey in the first session with him that he was still meeting up regularly with former teammates of St Thomas' football team to play recreational football. Coincidentally, a number of individuals in this peer group had also separately agreed to participate in life history interviews. I thus decided to seek permission from the peer group (via Phey) to join them as a participant-observer. This led to them inviting me in June 2014 to their groupchat on Whatsapp, an instant messaging application for smartphones popular in Singapore. I also began playing football with the group whenever they arranged to do so about once every fortnight. They allowed me to collect interactional data on Whatsapp as well as audio-recording their face-to-face gatherings. The peer group consisted of 11 core individuals previously from St Thomas' football team, as well as others who graduated from the same year in St Thomas'. They were either in the first year of university or about to be matriculated in the academic year of 2014/15. While interactional data were not to become a core part of the thesis, it helped me form a deeper understanding of their concerns about life choices and how they related to one another as peers at this point in time. Importantly, focus group discussions were conducted with the peer group in connection to themes that were uncovered in earlier interviews with individuals. These discussions were also audio-recorded with my reflections of the events taking the form of fieldnotes.

All in all, I collected about 62.5 hours of interview data with 20 individuals, and 2.5 hours of focus group discussions with the peer group. I was embedded in the peer group from June 2014 to January 2015, collecting more than 11000 sent messages on Whatsapp and recording 4.5 hours of face-to-face interaction. My fieldnotes number more than 100 pages in word document format. The next section will describe how I analysed the interview and focus group discussion data that were to form the basis of my thesis. The type and amount of data I have collected are summarised in the tables below.

Table 3.1: Summary of life history interview data

Informant	Number of interview sessions	Number of hours	Fieldnotes (pages)	Interview venue	Country of residence
Andy	2	2.5	3	via Skype	UK
Bay	2	2	3	University campus	Singapore
Cassandra	2	2.5	2	via Skype	US
Chang	4	5.5	10	Local cafes, university campus	Singapore
Dong	3	3.5	3	Local cafes	Singapore
Fang	2	2	3	via Skype	US
Felicia	2	2	3	Local cafes	Singapore
Gabriel	2	2	3	Local cafes	Singapore
Gin	3	4	6	University campus	Singapore
Hans	3	3	3	via Skype	US
Henry	3	3	4	Local cafes	Singapore
Ling	3	4.5	8	University campus	Singapore
Ming	3	3.5	7	via Skype	US
Phey	3	3.5	5	Local cafes, university campus	Singapore
Quentin	3	2.5	3	University campus	Singapore
Seng	2	3	3	Local cafes	Singapore
Vas	2	2.5	2	via Skype	US
Xavier	4	4	8	via Skype	US
Yang	3	4	6	University campus	Singapore
Ying	2	3	2	Local cafes	Singapore
Total	**53**	**62.5**	**87**		

Table 3.2: Summary of peer group data

Focus group discussions				**Interactional data**		
Number of sessions	**Number of hours**	**Venue**	**Fieldnotes (pages)**	**Audio-recordings of face-to-face meetings**	**Whatsapp**	**Fieldnotes (pages)**
2	2.5	Interviewer's home	5	4.5 hrs	11, 000 sent messages	20

3.5 Analysis of data

My research is aimed at generating an empirical description of the links between my informants' cultural practices, with wider social, cultural and political networks (Yeoh and Huang 2011:684). The data I have collected were primarily subjected to forms of thematic and content analysis that enabled me to do this (ie interview as "resource" Seale 1998:215). As aforementioned, the approaches as I used them were guided by the axiom of investigating the contexts of communication rather than assuming them (Blommaert and Rampton 2011:10).

According to Daly et al (1997), thematic analysis is a search for themes that emerge as

being important to the description of a phenomenon. It is a form of recognising patterns within the data, where these emergent themes become categories for analysis (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006:82). The process I adopted is broadly similar to the six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006):

Step 1:
I familiarised myself with the data by transcribing verbatim all verbal utterances. This first level of transcription[5] consisted of basic content, and did not include other linguistic and paralinguistic features such as pauses, interruptions, tone and body position.

Step 2:
Initial codes were generated in a mix of deductive and inductive ways that reflected both my research questions, and allowed themes to emerge from the data (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006:83). Deductively, my research questions allowed me to develop a priori codes. For instance, my interest in my informants' educational aspirations and trajectories led to codes such as "description of application to US/UK universities". Inductively, the process involved me recognising interesting or important moments and encoding it as a "basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" (Boyatzis 1998:63). An example of this is in my recognition of informants describing state scholarships in particular ways of "stability" and "comfort" (see Chapter Six).

Steps 3-5:
The different codes were then collated into broader potential themes. In Boyatzis' sense (1998), themes are "a pattern in the information that at minimum describes and organises the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon" (Boyatzis 1998:161). These themes were reviewed by going back to the data and considering if collated extracts indeed formed a coherent pattern for each theme, or if they might be incompatible. As part of this review, portions of the data that deserved greater scrutiny were transcribed again, this time at a more microlevel (ie including more specific linguistic features such as pauses, interruptions and turn-taking). In looking for patterns, I also used quantification tables reporting raw

[5] See Appendix C, where I provide an example of an interview excerpt that has undergone two levels of transcription, and the corresponding notes and codes that I have generated.

frequencies and patterns of distribution across the data set (cf Erickson 1985:108-109) in order to look for disconfirming evidence as well as demonstrate general patterns. For example, in Chapter Five, extracts that coded for "discursive shifts of justification" were tabulated against my informants' trajectories after leaving St Thomas'. This was done in order to prove my observation and claim that informants who remained in Singapore tended to construct their accounts in typical ways. The comprehensive process of coding and identification of themes was keyed into and conducted through NVivo data management software.

Step 6:
Having confirmed the patterns in the identified themes, I then used these themes in my formulation of arguments in order to respond to the research questions.

Despite the linear presentation of these phases of analysis, I must emphasise that my own research process was actually recursive and characterised by a constant back and forth between steps. This is as I regularly revisited theory, and sought to draw connections or complications between my data and what other scholars have written and studied about similar phenomena [cf Burawoy's (1998) extended case method].

It was thus in these ways, outlined above, that I examined how informants discursively constructed and positioned themselves (in interviews and focus group discussions) to discursive figures including their aspirations and trajectories, state policies, and other individuals or groupings. I acknowledged the variation in accounts and was careful to let any differences amongst my informants emerge from the data, rather than impose them from the outset. I looked out for themes that surfaced, especially in terms of the key institutional structures that influenced their trajectories. For example, whether and how informants talked about undergraduate scholarships offered by the state when discussing their aspirations (See Chapter Six). I tried to look for patterns behind these regularities that might suggest co-construction with interlocutors (ie I as the interviewer or with their peers in a focus group discussion). I thought about how these regularities in accounts could co-relate with relevant biographical information, such as their migrant status, nationality and trajectories upon leaving St Thomas'. I considered how the accounts could also reflect circulating discourses, such as the use of labels for certain groupings. I then postulated arguments that linked wider social structures to the talk that my informants produced.

Importantly, in the analytic process described above, I did not do any formal Interaction (Cameron 2001:106-122) or Discourse Analysis (Cameron 2001:47-52), though I did consider my informant's propositional claims in the micro-discourse context of an unfolding conversation. This was not treating the interview as a topic in the way that Conversation Analysis and Discourse Analysis do (Wooffitt 2010:71-72), investigating the structural organisation of interviews as events, though I showed sensitivity to the unfolding of talk. I did not present informant claims extracted from the talk in which they were generated, though I brought my sense of how these claims fit into the conversation in my interpretation of what they meant. I did not do interaction analysis per se, but my interpretations of what informants said and claimed was sensitive to the interactional context in which their claims emerged. My focus on what informants said was therefore informed by sensitivity to interaction rather than formal analysis of interaction.

3.6 Reflexivity and representation

In this section, I write about my reflections as a researcher and representations of my informants in this thesis. I consider my position as an insider in the fieldsite and discuss both positive and negative implications, as well as how I tried to overcome some of these drawbacks.

First of all, I must acknowledge my position as an insider in the fieldsite. I have lived in Singapore all my life, and spent 10 years as a student and teacher in St Thomas' School. I was a student there from 1994 to 1999, and a teacher between 2007 and 2012, teaching Years 5-6 (17 to 18 year olds). I was a General Paper and Civics tutor (ie form teacher), concurrent with my position as the school football team's coach and teacher-in-charge. I remain friends with many current school leaders and teachers, many of whom also taught me when I was a student. I was also a recipient of the state's undergraduate scholarship to study locally, and was contractually bonded to the civil service (hence my stint as a teacher for four years).

Such an "insider moving outwards" perspective (ie "trying to get analytic distance on what is close at hand") is to be juxtaposed with an "outside inwards" viewpoint (ie "trying to get familiar with the strange") (Rampton 2007:590-591). While Rampton (2007) specifically writes of ethnography, the consequences for the insider also apply to

qualitative research in general. I reproduce them in the context of my own research here:

1. *The from-inside-outwards point of research prioritises the need to achieve greater analytic distance from its object of study.* This was an issue I grappled with from the outset, as I was forced to constantly consider my positioning and familiarity with my informants' accounts. Such familiarity made me blind to certain processes and structures that I had taken for granted all my life. Difficulty in achieving analytic distance was alleviated by my commitment to describing basic contextual information, while questioning why my informants said certain things the way they did. For instance, I encountered some difficulty in achieving analytic distance regarding the ethos of ability in St Thomas', and was hard pressed to explain it to my supervisors during our supervisory meetings. This led me to write about my own experiences as a student in St Thomas', while reading about the experiences of individuals who had attended similar schools[6]. This process of reflection took the initial form of fieldnotes with reference to existing literature, which were then re-written more selectively in the data chapters. The close examination of transcripts, including a more detailed transcription of specific extracts was also helpful in my defamiliarisation with the data (Tavory and Timmermans 2014:123). The exercise forced me to confront the interviews in novel and strange ways, so that I no longer made sense of them automatically.

2. *The position of an insider allows one to be attuned to the complexities of social experience, so that any representation of the phenomenon is less inclined to be reductionist and over-simplistic.* An outsider's view of an event, might preclude him/her from the knowledge of cultural presuppositions and intimations that only a long-time member of the community would possess. This applied to my observation of affiliations amongst my informants, for example, where I already had intimate knowledge of anti-immigrant sentiment amongst the population and sought to explore its influence in my informants' talk (See Chapter Seven).

[6] Fraser's (2008) biographical account of his time in Eton was exceedingly helpful in this regard.

3. *Consequently, a marked familiarity with the social subjects and conditions in which their practices are reproduced, allows one to be sensitive to risks of stereotyping and ascribing essentialist constructions of group identity.* Specifically, in this thesis, I was already aware of differentiations amongst the Chinese as an ethnic group in Singapore. These differences often occurred along the lines of nationality, so that Chinese individuals born in Singapore would tend to position themselves as different to those from China. This familiarity was achieved without the need for extended periods of immersion and observation because of my insider position as a Singaporean and ethnic Chinese. And it is also such cultural familiarity that led me to consider the role of race and nationality in my informants' accounts of self-differentiation in Chapter Seven.

4. *The researcher's position as an insider might ameliorate any apprehension regarding political intervention that an outsider might feel.* In my case, I felt better placed as a Singapore citizen and my informants' former teacher to be able to comment on issues of xenophobic discourse encountered by my immigrant informants. Or, at the very least, my research and any subsequent publications will less likely be construed as one of foreign intervention.

(adapted from Rampton 2007:591-592)

Moreover, the dichotomy of insider/outsider can be situational so that one may be an insider at one point but an outsider in another context in the same fieldsite (Kusow 2003:592-593). On the one hand, my close relations with former students allowed me to gain their consent to participate in my research fairly easily, and be fairly confident when broaching certain conversational topics in interviews such as stereotypes of immigrants. It was also perhaps a degree of mutual trust we shared that allowed informants to produce xenophobic comments rather freely and extensively in their accounts. Indeed, certain segments of the interview could not have occurred without my informants being familiar with me as an individual and being aware that I was similar to them in my educational attainments and trajectories. For example, conversations in interviews often developed in the vein of my informants asking me about my own life choices (eg how to apply for post-graduate studies, why I wanted to leave the civil service etc), as they saw my pathway as one that they themselves might embark on in

the future. On the other hand, my close relations with those I had coached in the school football team did not make me immediately cognizant of the inner workings of their peer group. I had to learn about the rules of engagement and interaction when I was first invited to join the group's football meet-ups.

In this regard, Merton (1972) argues that the central question about the researcher's social position in the fieldsite should not be whether one has privileged access to social reality, and is thus better placed to re-present it. Instead, it is about a consideration of "their distinctive and interactive roles in the process of truth seeking" (Merton 1972:36). Similarly, Todorov's (1988:4) view is that analytic proximity and distance for the researcher is not an either/or relationship contingent upon the inside-outside position of the researcher. Rather, it is about being able to constantly shift between gaining familiarity and achieving analytic distance.

To Heath and Street (2008:64-65), Todorov's (1988) position connotes that,

> "Fieldworkers distance themselves from their home culture as they come into proximity with an unfamiliar social group. They then become more immersed before distancing themselves from their fieldsite as they return home, drawing near again to their home culture. Many return to their fieldsite, thus repeating the cycle of proximity and distance that becomes a reflex for all such engagement with difference and similarity. The ethnographic imagination is founded on this cycle and can be applied in microsituations of engagement and comparison, as well as larger ones, including those where researchers enter and leave sites of learning over a period of time."
>
> (Heath and Street 2008:64-65)

In the course of my own research, regardless of whether I am an insider in the wider school environment or an outsider trying to gain access to a peer group, there was a constant shift between sociocultural familiarity and analytic distance. This shift was not only about switching between frames of mind, but, as I have mentioned, was practically facilitated through explicit effort. It was achieved through a "constant comparative" as I continually reflected on my data and my knowledge of theories and concepts in existing literature (Heath and Street 2008:32-38). For instance, Bourdieu's (1996) description of

processes in elite French schools, as well as Fraser's (2008) biographical account of life in Eton were all helpful in prompting me to think about similar structures in St Thomas' School. It was also achieved by dwelling on the transcription process in a contrived manner, forcing myself to transcribe particular extracts in greater detail so as to be defamiliarised with actual data (Tavory and Timmermans 2014:123).

The point to note is that I see my position as an insider of Singapore (with the proviso that I could also be an outsider in particular contexts), not necessarily as a handicap in terms of a lack of objectivity, nor was it entirely advantageous. It is, however, a valuable addendum and caveat, a *principal vantage point* in the reflexive process of empirical description, data analysis and interpretation.

3.7 Moving Forward

I have outlined some of the challenges associated with researching academically elite students in Singapore. These included the difficulty in gaining access to institutional settings as well as the potentially sensitive topic of immigration. I have tried to adopt an approach that aims to overcome these challenges, whilst still fulfilling my research agenda of connecting the local context to my informants' talk about how they experienced transnational mobility. My methodological approach is highly influenced by sociolinguistics where "the contexts for communication should be investigated rather than assumed" (Blommaert and Rampton 2011:10) so as not to reify my informants' practices and identities, as well as Burawoy's (1998) extended case method where there is a constant dialogue with theory. I emphasised the importance of my own unique positioning as a researcher and circumstances when designing the research and selecting specific methods. I believe this has helped me to address a number of my theoretical interests, in particular how the production of discourse in research interviews can be linked to wider social structures.

Now that I have established both the theoretical and methodological background of the project, I will begin the next section of the dissertation: the contextualisation of my informants and findings. The chapter that follows provides an overview of Singapore's demography, and how my informants' educational trajectories are intertwined with: (i) immigration policies; (ii) scholarships offered by the state; (iii) St Thomas' position in an elitist school system.

Chapter Four: Contextualising the trajectories of my informants

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a brief account of the social, cultural and political context of Singapore, as well as certain state policies that are key to my informants' transnational movement in and out of the country. As explained previously, this is in line with the thesis' focus on my informants' experiences in Singapore, rather than when they have left the Singaporean space. Such an endeavour is also contiguous with the need to illustrate the "cultural web" (Salazar 2010:64) or "social-cultural-political matrices" (Yeoh and Huang 2011:684) that my informants' transnational mobilities are embedded in. My informants, as students, enter a particular sociocultural space in Singapore, where St Thomas' School is positioned at the top of a stratified education landscape. Their transnational movement into and out of this space is mediated (and often enabled) by an elaborate scheme of scholarships that are tied to the state's immigration policies and agenda of talent management. I highlight three contextual aspects that are crucial to understanding their trajectories and lives in Singapore: (a) racial politics and the racial criterion of immigration in Singapore, (b) a scheme of scholarships offered by the state; and it is via such scholarships that informants are admitted into or leave, (c) St Thomas' School in an elitist education system.

This chapter thus begins by providing a broad overview of my informants' trajectories, where St Thomas' School in Singapore might be seen as a hub through which they pass. I then describe the general demographics of Singapore, the historical basis of its racial politics, and how both low birth rates and 'race' are tied to its immigration policies. One of these immigration policies involves identifying and recruiting top-performing students from neighbouring countries at age 15. This was a path that most of my immigrant informants undertook. I describe this process of recruitment and situate it within the state's larger scheme of scholarships and talent management in Singapore. It is through processes of international recruitment (for immigrants) and academic selection (for locals) that culminated in my informants being admitted to St Thomas' School. I therefore vary the analytic lens to describe Singapore's education landscape and St Thomas' position within it. The chapter ends by suggesting that the preliminary research questions raised at the end of Chapter Two can be applied to each of these three contextual aspects (a, b and c noted above) in turn.

4.2 My informants' backgrounds and trajectories[1]

Before I proceed to address the context of Singapore, there is a need to provide some background to my informants and their trajectories. This panoramic perspective is based on life history interviews with 20 informants conducted independently. As detailed in the previous methodology chapter, this thesis primarily relies on two datasets. The first dataset consists of life history interviews that I conducted with 20 individuals. This was focused on uncovering the educational pathways they undertook, as well as how they experienced life in each school they attended. The second dataset comprising focus group discussions was collected while I was a participant-observer for six months in a particular peer group of 11 core members, of whom three were involved in the life history interviews. This peer group is made up of individuals who had graduated from St Thomas' in 2011.

Informants in life history interviews comprise two individuals born in Singapore, six born in Vietnam (all six recruited by the state at age 15), one born in Saipan[2], one born in Taiwan, one born in India, and nine born in China (eight were recruited by the state at age 15). Informants in the peer group consisted of eight individuals born in Singapore, one born in China, and two born in Vietnam.

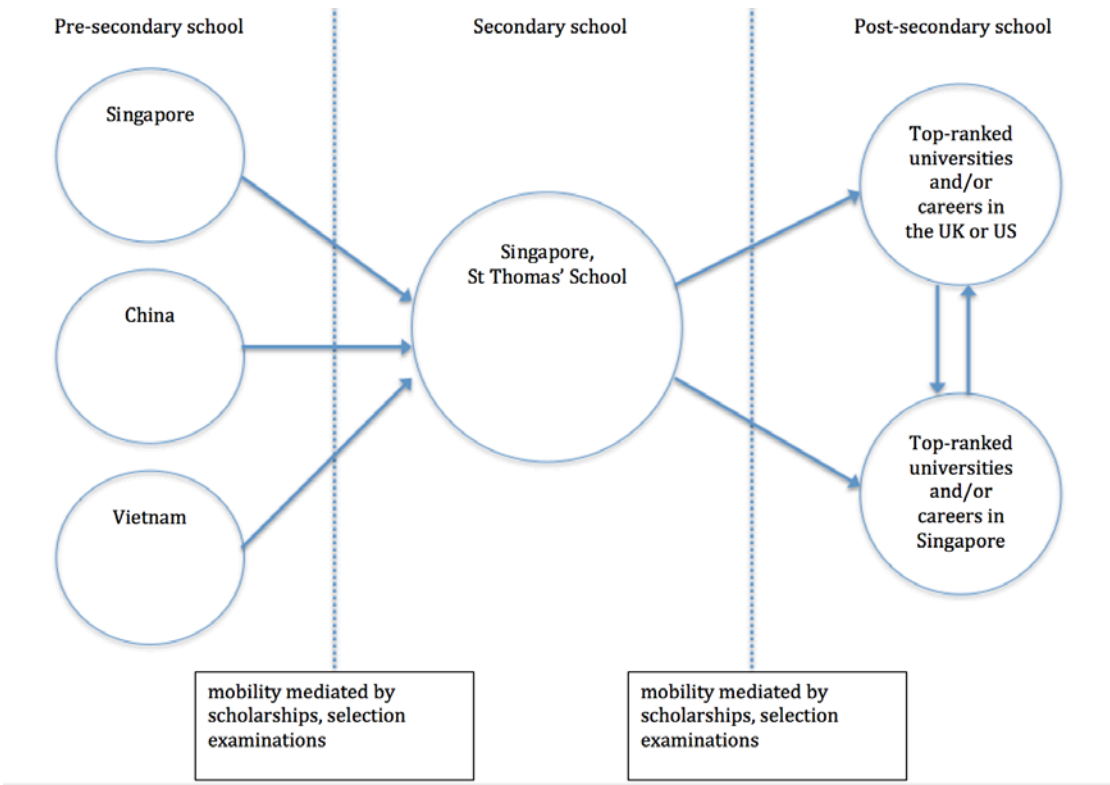
While there may be an obvious gap in economic development between Singapore and developing nations like China and Vietnam, this is not to say that my informants born in developing countries lived in relative material deprivation and poverty. Those born outside Singapore were all raised in prosperous urban centres (with the exception of Hans born in Saipan). Informants from Vietnam were from Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi and Hue. All informants from China were from provincial capitals or cities such as Shenzhen, Zhengzhou and Chongqing. 18 out of 20 life history interviewees have parents who work as secondary school teachers, university lecturers, or administrators in the civil service. All 20 have at least one parent who graduated from university. Like Singapore, the secondary school landscapes in China and Vietnam are highly stratified[3], with an academically selective system for enrolment into top-ranked middle

[1] A tabulated summary of my informants' trajectories and biographical information can be found in Appendix A.
[2] Saipan is the largest of the Northern Mariana Islands in the western Pacific, and a US commonwealth.
[3] This characterisation is based on my informants' representation of their life histories before they arrived in Singapore. The depiction of stratified middle schools in China is corroborated by Pérez-Milans' (2013) ethnography of three such schools in Zhejiang, as well as Yang's (2016a, 2016b) study of Singapore's scholarship recruitment process in Nanchang.

schools in each major city. Consequently, all my informants raised in Singapore, China and Vietnam, have been socialised into similar selective education systems that emphasised individual performativity, with high stakes examinations at various institutional stages. They have been highly successful in such a system, being funneled into/through the top-ranked schools in their respective localities, before attending a top-ranked secondary school in Singapore that is St Thomas' School. All 20 informants in life history interviews scored at least three As in their A Levels. By virtue of my informants' academic attainments and educational trajectory, it would be reasonable to consider them academic elites in the context of Singapore, though this is with the caveat that I am not treating them as a homogenous grouping with uniform practices and attitudes.

Upon leaving St Thomas', 10 informants headed to top-ranked universities in the US and UK, while the other 10 remained in Singapore to study in local universities. 15 out of 20 of them won undergraduate scholarships sponsored by the Singapore state. A simplified graphical representation of my informants' trajectories is provided below:

Figure 4.1: Graphical representation of informants' trajectories



It may therefore be apt to consider St Thomas' School in Singapore as a hub through which my informants enter and leave, whilst navigating the prospect of transnational mobility. Immigration policy, state scholarships and national examinations are key institutional structures that feature prominently in how my informants negotiated these moves. The next section will discuss Singapore's context as a cultural space in which all my informants were/are situated. In particular, I attend to: (a) its racial politics and demography that I argue are related to the immigration policies of foreign student recruitment. The recruitment of academically elite foreign students is in turn part of a larger strategy of attracting and retaining talent in Singapore. I thus describe: (b) the elaborate scheme of scholarships in Singapore. It is through these scholarships that my informants engage with the possibility of transnational trajectories, and enter and leave St Thomas' School. This brings me to: (c) the position of St Thomas' School in an elitist education system

4.3 Race and language policies in Singapore

Singapore is ethnically and linguistically diverse, with the state's recognition of three 'races' (Chinese, Malay and Indian) and four official languages (English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil). As of 2010, the resident population comprised 74% Chinese, 13% Malays and 9% Indians (Saw 2013:5). Indeed, race has often been seen as a key feature of Singapore's politics. The state has been described as a stable ethnocracy where bureaucratic decisions and policies are formulated according to its various 'races' (Pieterse 1996:36). Racial and ethnic identity in Singapore are often characterised to be manufactured (Pieterse 1996), closely managed (Chua 1998, 2005) and actively enforced (Purushotam 1998a, 1998b) by the state. Understanding Singapore's sociocultural milieu must encompass an understanding of the historical basis for its racial and language policies.

Singapore's independence in 1965 was a result of forced circumstance, as the state was abruptly expelled from the Federation of Malaysia. Historical accounts generally agree that a key determiner for geopolitical separation was a disagreement between the Singapore and Malaysian federal government on the guarantee of affirmative action and special rights for Malays in Malaysia (B. K. Cheah 2002:98-102). Demographically, Singapore's majority Chinese population also challenged the predominance of Malays as the "indigenous" race in the rest of the federal states (B. K. Cheah 2002:94). Singapore's separation from Malaysia was thus a culmination of rising Malay-Chinese

tensions, which manifested as a series of racial riots in 1964. Before then, Singapore as a sovereign nation was not an idea nor identity actively pursued by the population (Chua 1998:29). Further, its residents were largely made up of the descendants of immigrants or were immigrants themselves, so that there were no "myths of shared traditions" that bound the peoples (Chua 1998:30, 2005:3).

At independence in 1965, the racial composition of Singapore was about "78% 'Chinese', 15% 'Malays' and 7% South Asians" (Chua 2005:4). The Chinese were the most numerous and organised via various clan and business associations that they established themselves. However, the presence of Singapore as a Chinese state would not be politically acceptable in a Southeast Asian region dominated by Malay-speaking peoples in Malaysia and Indonesia (Chua 2005:4). The Malays were indigenous to the locality, but were a numerical minority unable to dominate local politics. The Indians were fewer in number than the Malays, and were also mostly immigrants like the Chinese (Chua 2005:4). Thus denied of a common history and identity to justify Singapore's *raison d'etre*, the ruling People's Action Party turned to economic "capitalist development" to fill the ideological vacuum and unite its citizens (Chua 1998:31). Chua (1998) describes this as such:

> "Political separation [from Malaysia], which led to the apparent collapse of the anticipated larger Malaysian market for Singapore's fledgling industrialisation, might be said to have placed the economic viability of the island nation in serious jeopardy. The PAP government astutely seized upon this apprehensiveness, turning it into an ideological means with which to highlight the problem of guaranteeing the 'survival' of the new nation and how this could only be achieved through economic development."
>
> Chua (1998:31)

The notion of multiracialism and equality amongst all races was then developed out of a perceived necessity to enable all to have a sense of citizenship and belonging to the newly-formed nation, as well as a prerequisite to maintaining harmony between racial groups and national stability (Chua 2005:18). As Chua (1998) surmises,

> "By promoting 'group rights' in a cultural sphere which is restrictively circumscribed by racial boundaries, the state is able to claim for itself a

> 'neutral' stance towards all racial groups, without prejudice or preference… it erases the grounds upon which a racial group may make claims on behalf of its own interests without ostensibly violating the idea of group equality that is the foundation of multiracialism itself."
>
> (Chua 1998:36)

The concept of 'race' and multiracialism was hence used to legitimate and rationalise strategies of administration, where "race is essentialised as an unchanging feature of the population so as to ground various specific ways of disciplining the social body" (Chua 1998:34). Without belabouring the origins of racial definitions and their use for administrative expediency, suffice it to say that the newly independent Singapore government inherited from their former British colonial masters, a convenient brand of social classification which was "orientalist" and colonialist in approach (Purushotam 1998a:57-64)[4]. A predication of Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others, a residual category for Eurasians and everyone else, allowed the state to easily reduce what was a complex multilingual and multiethnic community into four manageable social groups, thus allowing formulation of national policies to be based upon these simplified collective differences (Chua 2005:6). 'Race' was strictly defined by patriarchal descent[5], and one's 'race' would determine one's culture as well as the languages one will be expected to acquire in the state education system (ie a Chinese will have to learn Mandarin, a Malay the Malay language, and an Indian, Tamil).

The demands of nation building – a lingua franca for inter-racial communication; the need to foster cohesion amongst various linguistic and ethnic groups, whilst ensuring equality for all the official races; economic development by plugging into the global economy – culminated in the bilingual policy at the outset of Singapore's independence. Students (from Primary One) have to acquire English and the language denoted by their race (ie official mother tongues) to gain bilingual proficiency through the state schooling system. Such a phenomenon of language planning and policy has been termed "pragmatic multilingualism" (Kuo and Jernudd 1994:32), while 'Bilingualism' itself in Singapore "has come to be uniquely defined as 'proficiency in English and one other official language'" (Pakir 1997:58).

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[4] For a deeper analysis of the origins of racial ideology in Singapore, please refer to Purushotam's (1998b) work on the same subject.

[5] From 2010, one's race can now be a choice between that of either parent, or a double-barrelled incorporation of both (Hoh 2010).

The state's enthusiastic promotion of English has culminated in massive language shift amongst the population (Li et al 1997:386). Stroud and Wee (2010:186) describe the rise of English as being most prevalent in Chinese and Indian homes. Chinese homes which declared English as the principal home language rose from 10.2% in 1980 to 23.9% in 2000. For Indian homes, it was 24.3% in 1980 and 35.6% by 2000. Malay homes also showed notable increases, albeit at a less pronounced rate, from 2.3% in 1980 to 7.9% in 2000. This shift to using English as predominant language at home is most starkly seen in younger families with young children, where a mere 12% of Primary One students reported not using English at home (Ministry of Education 2007:4). The most recent population census of 2010 also noted that among Singapore residents aged 5-14 years, English was the home language for 52% of the Chinese and 50% of the Indians (an increase from 35.8% and 43.6% respectively since 2000). English was the home language for 26% of Malays aged 5-14 years, up from 9.4% in 2000 (Singapore Department of Statistics 2010a:10).

4.3.1 The policy of recruiting top-performing foreign students

Against this backdrop of state-managed racial and language policies, Singapore also stands out as having one of the lowest birthrates in the world. The Total Fertility Rate was 1.20 in 2011, and figures for each race were 1.08 (Chinese), 1.06 (Indians) and 1.64 (Malays) in 2012 (National Population and Talent Division 2012a:4). As a strategy to prevent economic stagnation, this phenomenon is counteracted with an immigration policy that seeks to boost workforce numbers at all skill levels (Yeoh and Huang 2012, Saw 2013:1, National Population and Talent Division 2012b:17). My immigrant informants, therefore, must be perceived as part of a wave of general migration into Singapore from the 1990s to 2000s, that saw the non-resident population (ie non-citizens) increase more than four fold from 1990 to 2010. Immigrants who were non-citizens (1.3 million) comprised 25% of Singapore's total population in 2010 (5.1 million), compared to 10% in 1990 (Singapore Department of Statistics 2010b:v).

Within the same economic and population strategy, the government has since the 1990s began actively initiating policies to shape Singapore's infrastructure as a regional education hub for foreign students, in the hope that some of them may be retained in the workforce to contribute to the local economy (Yeoh 2007). More recently, the policy

took a proactive turn[6], and currently involves offering scholarships to secondary school students from neighboring countries (eg China and Vietnam) who are excellent in math and science. Top ranked secondary schools from Singapore routinely visit prominent schools in China[7] and Vietnam in order to headhunt pupils from these localities and attract them with scholarships to study in Singapore. These 'feeder' schools have been designated and allocated by the home nation, so that Singapore is only allowed to recruit students from these same schools every year. Each top-ranked secondary school from Singapore is matched with top-performing schools in a given city where the recruitment process occurs. From the Singapore government's perspective, it is hoped that 'catching' these students at a young age will increase the probability of them being assimilated and deciding to adopt citizenship. Such a policy would not only augment a population with one of the lowest birthrates in the world, but also establish stronger political ties with geopolitical neighbours.

One of the other main criteria in recruiting students is that they must fit existing ethnic categories officially recognised within Singapore[8]. In order not to upset the racial balance and the state's brand of multiracialism in Singapore (Tan, E. 2003:773, Yeoh and Lin 2013:35), individuals who are ethnically Chinese form the vast majority of immigrants in general and recruited students in particular. Potential candidates of age 15, with already excellent academic attainments, are interviewed for scholastic aptitude and sit through a series of assessments testing proficiency in basic English and other subjects. Individuals who accept the scholarship, arrive in Singapore at age 16 with free education till their A-levels at 19. There is the possibility of further sponsorship should they do well enough to land a place in any local university. They are generally one year

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[6] As mentioned at the outset (Chapter One), it is Simmons (1999) who first drew our attention to the emergence of certain immigrants who were subjected to discriminatory processes in the context of a global war for talent and economic demands on a nation. He described how immigrants to Canada underwent rigorous selection procedures to fill perceived gaps in the Canadian workforce, and termed them 'designer immigrants'.

[7] The recruitment process in China is not permitted in 'first tier' economic zones such as Beijing and Shanghai, but takes place in 'second tier' cities such as Chongqing and Chengdu. I would presume it is for reasons linked to restrictions on internal migration within China ie the '户口 *HuKou'* system where families are registered as households and tied to a particular municipality. This may widen the opportunities for individuals who desire top quality education, but who may be prevented by the *HuKou* system from migrating to Beijing and Shanghai where the best institutions are. It would also prevent a brain drain of top talent already residing in and enjoying opportunities in 'first tier' cities.

[8] As I will further explain in Chapter Seven, the rationale for such an apparent racial criterion is presumably to prevent immigration from upsetting the existing racial balance and status quo, which could incur negative reactions from the polity (Tan, E. 2003:773). Neither the recent population census nor the Ministry of Education provides statistics on the exact numbers and racial composition of foreign students attracted thus far. It must, however, be stated that the observable ratio of Chinese to non-Chinese student immigrants in St Thomas' School is easily 5:1.

older than their Singaporean counterparts in the same cohort, due in part to their lower proficiencies in English. Their academic performance in Singaporean schools is constantly monitored, with those unable to maintain a minimal grade point average having their scholarships revoked and facing possible repatriation.

Yet, these scholarships offered to foreign students at age 15 are but one facet of the state's overall strategy of attracting and retaining talented individuals in Singapore. As mentioned when describing my informants' (both immigrant and Singaporeans') trajectories, scholarships offered by the state are a prominent institutional structure mediating their entering and leaving St Thomas'.

4.4 Scholarships in Singapore

Scholarships offered by the Singapore government may be categorised into two main schemes that cater to two different groups of students. One scheme comprises undergraduate scholarships targeted at and for which only Singapore citizens are eligible, while the other is for international students at various educational levels. Both sets of scholarships that are for undergraduate study have conditions labelled "bonds". These are legally-binding contractual agreements that tie the scholarship-holder to Singapore for a fixed number of years, depending on the value of the scholarship.

4.4.1 Scholarships for citizens

Undergraduate scholarships that only citizens are eligible for[9] are a matter of intense competition and prestige, with links to attaining the highest echelons of bureaucratic and political power in Singapore. The stated aim of such scholarships are "attracting and developing talent for the Singapore Civil Service", and "to safeguard the principles of integrity, impartiality and meritocracy in the Singapore Public Service" (Public Service Commission website). The intention of the state is therefore to ensure that leaders within the government are selected purely on merit rather than through nepotism or corrupt means. Scholarship-holders are legally "bonded" to serve in specific bureaucratic organs upon completion of their undergraduate degrees. Scholarships to study locally have a 4-year bond, while overseas scholarships have a 6-year bond.

[9] I focus on these scholarships targeting citizens in Chapter Six.

The level of prestige of each scholarship is attributable to its monetary value and kind of career path it generates. That is, a measurement of whether a scholarship is more prestigious than another can usually be assessed in such a manner: (i) whether it allows one to study abroad or locally, as overseas scholarships obviously cost more with a longer bond to serve; (ii) whether it allows one to serve in the highest echelons of the civil service. It is also usually the case that overseas scholarships are the ones linked to fast-tracked career paths in the highest levels of government service. For example, scholarships awarded by the Public Service Commission (PSC, an arm of the government that oversees the operations of the entire civil service), tend to be seen as more prestigious than scholarships awarded by individual ministries and government bodies. The two most prestigious awards, the President's Scholarship and the Singapore Armed Forces Overseas Scholarship (SAFOS), are both administered by the PSC. Scholars returning from overseas universities are rewarded with higher pay (even if they were in the same job as non-scholars) and often fast-tracked into key civil service positions compared to their contemporaries on local scholarships or non-scholars. Those in key civil service positions are, in turn, often co-opted into the ruling People's Action Party as members and future MPs. Of the 18 MPs in Singapore's cabinet in 2014, nine of them were awarded government scholarships, of whom eight were President's or SAFOS scholars or both. It is also important to realise that many Singaporeans apply for scholarships, not because they cannot afford to study in local or overseas institutions, but simply because of the prestige and career prospects that come with these awards. A table summarising some of these scholarships and their relative levels of prestige is shown below:

Table 4.1: Summary of state-sponsored undergraduate scholarships for citizens

State-sponsored undergraduate scholarships for Singapore Citizens			
Relative prestige level[10]	**Scholarship type**	**Organisation**	**Remarks**
1	President's Scholarship	Public Service Commission	Awarded on top of another public sector scholarship. Usually linked with a career in the elite Administrative Service (highest level of the civil service), and political office. Only 2 to 3 awarded per year.
2	Singapore Armed Forces Overseas Scholarship	Public Service Commission	Linked with a career in the highest ranks of the Singapore military. Scholars are also rotated amongst the elite Administrative Service (highest level of the civil service) and leading to political office.
3	'Open' scholarships in public administration	Public Service Commission	Usually linked with a career in the elite Administrative Service (highest level of the civil service). Scholars are rotated amongst ministries or parts of the civil service. Possibility of political office.
4	'Tied' scholarships	Public Service Commission	Scholars are tied to a particular ministry and linked to attaining the highest offices in that ministry.
5	Scholarships offered by individual ministries or government agencies	Individual ministries or government agencies	Scholars are tied to a particular ministry and linked to attaining the highest offices in that organisation.
5	Scholarships offered by government-linked corporations	Government-linked corporations (eg Singapore Press Holdings which publishes *The Straits Times* and owns almost all print news outlets in Singapore)	Scholars are tied to a particular government-linked corporation and linked to attaining the highest offices in that orgnisation.

[10] The level of prestige associated with each stereotype is informed by my own experiences interacting with my informants and the peer group, as well as my knowledge of the system as a former teacher, student and actual recipient of a PSC scholarship to study locally.

4.4.2 Scholarships for international students

Government-sponsored undergraduate scholarships for international students, however, are only tied to universities in Singapore. These scholarships should be perceived as part of an elaborate recruitment system targeting academically elite students overseas at various educational levels. These undergraduate scholarships are thus in the same vein as the scheme that recruited many of my informants when they were age 15. Official figures state that the government spends $36 million SGD[11] a year to give 2000 undergraduate scholarships to foreign students each year (Shanmugam 2015). In a government-produced television programme, Singapore Foreign Minister K. Shanmugam explains the rationale for scholarships targeting foreigners:

> "You want to have an integrated ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), Singapore wants to be the New York of ASEAN, and we have to do our part. Our people are going to get tremendous opportunities as ASEAN gets integrated. But as part of that, we also have to allow some ASEAN students to come here. They become our brand ambassadors as well, don't forget there is a lot of soft power. I give you one example. A Vietnamese student who studied here is in Silicon Valley. When our companies want to go over there, he offers tremendous help. And the returns our companies get, far outweigh anything we spend."
>
> (Shanmugam 2015)

It is also instructive to note that the state's recruitment of students from China dwarf other available schemes targeting other nationalities in terms of sheer number and systematicity. The programme that targets 15 year olds is called "SM1", the one that targets 17 year olds "SM2", and the third that targets those in the first year of university "SM3". There is no other scholarship scheme that attracts one particular nationality on such a scale through direct recruitment in the country, and which necessitates official labels for each age group. The government does not publish official figures[12], but Yang's (2014) ethnographic study of the SM2 recruitment process estimates that the

[11] Singapore Dollars. 1 SGD is approximately 0.5 British pounds.
[12] The state has been rather reluctant to publish hard figures of immigrant students on scholarships, even when asked direct questions in parliament (Hansard 2012:776). This may be due to the rise in anti-immigration sentiment amongst members of the public, and the state's fear of antagonising these groups.

yearly intake of SM1 students is 200; SM2 is 200-400; SM3 is 200-400 (Yang 2014:360)[13].

Unlike the scholarships that target individuals in secondary schools (that have no bond), undergraduate scholarships come with a bond that lasts three to six years. Upon completion of their undergraduate studies, scholarship-holders must seek employment in Singapore and remain here for the period stipulated by one's bond. A table summarising all scholarships available to immigrant students, sorted by nationality and age group is shown below.

[13] My own view is that these figures are fairly conservative. St Thomas' School alone recruits at least 60 individuals (total of boys and girls) from China each year under the SM1 scheme, prior to 2011. Around 30 secondary schools in Singapore participate in this policy (Yang 2014:360), though few others recruit as many students as St Thomas'.

Table 4.2: Summary of state-sponsored scholarships for international students

Scholarships for international students					
Scholarship Type	**Eligible nations**	**Application/recruitment procedure**	**Phase at which students are recruited**	**Scholarship duration**	**Bond**
ASEAN Scholarship	Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei	Application open to public	Different phases for different nations, usually to enter Singapore schools at Sec One, Sec Three or Pre-U One level.	2 to 6 years depending on which level they entered the Singapore education system, culminating in the A Levels.	NA
	Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Philippines, Laos, Myanmar (Burma)	Nomination by school in home nation; selection tests and interview by recruiting Singapore school			NA
SIA Scholarship	India	Nomination by school in home nation; selection tests and interview by recruiting Singapore school	Usually recruited to enter Singapore schools at Sec Three or Pre-U One level.	4 to 6 years depending on which level they entered the Singapore education system, culminating in the A Levels.	NA
SM1	China	Nomination by school in home nation; selection tests and interview by recruiting Singapore school	Recruited at the end of junior middle school to enter Sec Three in Singapore	4 years till the A levels	NA
SM2	China	Nomination by school in home nation; selection tests and interview by recruiting Singapore school	Recruited in the 2nd year of senior middle school to enter one of Singapore's local universities	18 month "bridging course" and undergraduate studies	6 years
SM3	China	Nomination by school in home nation; selection tests and interview by recruiting Singapore school	Recruited in the 1st year of university to enter one of Singapore's local universities	6 month "bridging course" and undergraduate studies	6 years
ASEAN Undergraduate Scholarship	All ASEAN nations	Application open to public	To enter one of Singapore's local universities	Full length of undergraduate studies	3 years
Other Govt scholarships	Non-Asean nations (mostly targeting Asian nations)	Application open to public	To enter one of Singapore's local universities	Full length of undergraduate studies	6 years

Taking Singapore's system of scholarships as a whole, it may be apt to characterise the picture in terms of Koh's (2010) 'tactical globalisation'. The term itself is "theoretical shorthand for foregrounding the agentive role of the state (at least in Singapore's case) to intervene and reinvent new moves to make globalisation more amenable to local conditions" (Koh 2010:22). This is demonstrated in the state's strategy of identifying a small group of citizens as elite talent and sending them to study in the world's top-ranked universities, whilst legally compelling them to return to contribute as civil servants. It is also seen in the state's systematic recruitment of academically elite students from overseas (at various age groups), in order to augment the local talent pool and extend Singapore's soft power. All these statist strategies of attracting and retaining talent must be made sense of in the context of Singapore's need to augment the local workforce, as well as its racial politics.

4.5 Secondary education in Singapore

Having sketched the larger backdrop of Singapore society and state policies that feature prominently in my informants' trajectories, I now turn my attention to the local education landscape. Recall that it is through scholarships that immigrant students are recruited from abroad to join top-ranked secondary schools like St Thomas' in Singapore. State scholarships are also an important structure that academically elite students navigate when graduating from St Thomas' School. This is a site where secondary schools are stratified in terms of resources and the academic selection of students. The depiction in this section is important in demonstrating how St Thomas' School sits atop an elitist education regime, and my informants' position in such a system.

4.5.1 Stratification of secondary schools in Singapore

Singapore's education system has generally been described by local scholars (C. Tan 2008, Lim 2012) as having contradicting strands of egalitarianism and elitism. On one hand, the state proclaims meritocracy as a key principle of governance (K.P. Tan 2008:7), where any individual may be promoted and rewarded through hard work and performance in school or at the work place. On the other hand, the state has established an education system "that sorts individuals for positions of leadership in order to maximise the average level of well-being in a society" (Lim 2012: 3).

The elitist strand arguably became more pronounced from the 1990s[14] when secondary schools with a history of excellent academic achievement were granted greater financial and curricular autonomy (J. Tan 1998: 51). These are known as independent schools in Singapore. The secondary school landscape thus became progressively stratified in two ways: (i) in terms of the academic quality of students they admit; (ii) in terms of the financial and material support enjoyed by the school.

In the first instance, enrolment in all secondary schools in Singapore is largely based on academic merit[15]. Established since 1960, the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) is a nation-wide assessment that all primary school students must undertake at age 12. Every student competes to enter secondary schools of his/her choice, based on his/her PSLE score. The minimum entry score of each school, also known as the 'cut-off point', is determined by the PSLE score of the student who fills up the last place in the school (Ministry of Education 2015). All secondary schools in Singapore are therefore differentiated via descending PSLE cut-off points that correspond to the academic quality of students they admit. Schools with the highest cut-off points in the nation are always independent schools.

Besides the academic quality of their students, independent schools are different from mainstream schools in various material aspects. They charge private fees for students in addition to receiving state funding, while other schools only charge nominal tuition fees[16]. They are also largely autonomous of state control in their curriculum design and hiring of staff. School facilities, the quality of teachers, rigour in academic learning and breadth of extra-curricular activities are usually recognised by the public as being of a higher standard than in mainstream schools. The introduction of the Integrated Programme (IP) in independent schools in 2002, further marked them as elite

[14] It is important to note, as J. Tan (1998) does, that the process of stratification of schools in Singapore may be situated historically as part of a wider global development from the mid-1980s. Neoliberal principles of performativity, competition and autonomisation were introduced into schools in what has been characterised as the marketisation of education (J. Tan 1998: 49-50). This phenomenon is also described in British schools by Bowe and Ball (1992).

[15] A small proportion of students are admitted into secondary schools under the Direct School Admission programme, where they are selected based on non-academic performance such as in certain sports or the arts. On average, around 2800 students per year out of a national cohort of about 30000, are admitted into secondary schools under this scheme (Ministry of Education 2013).

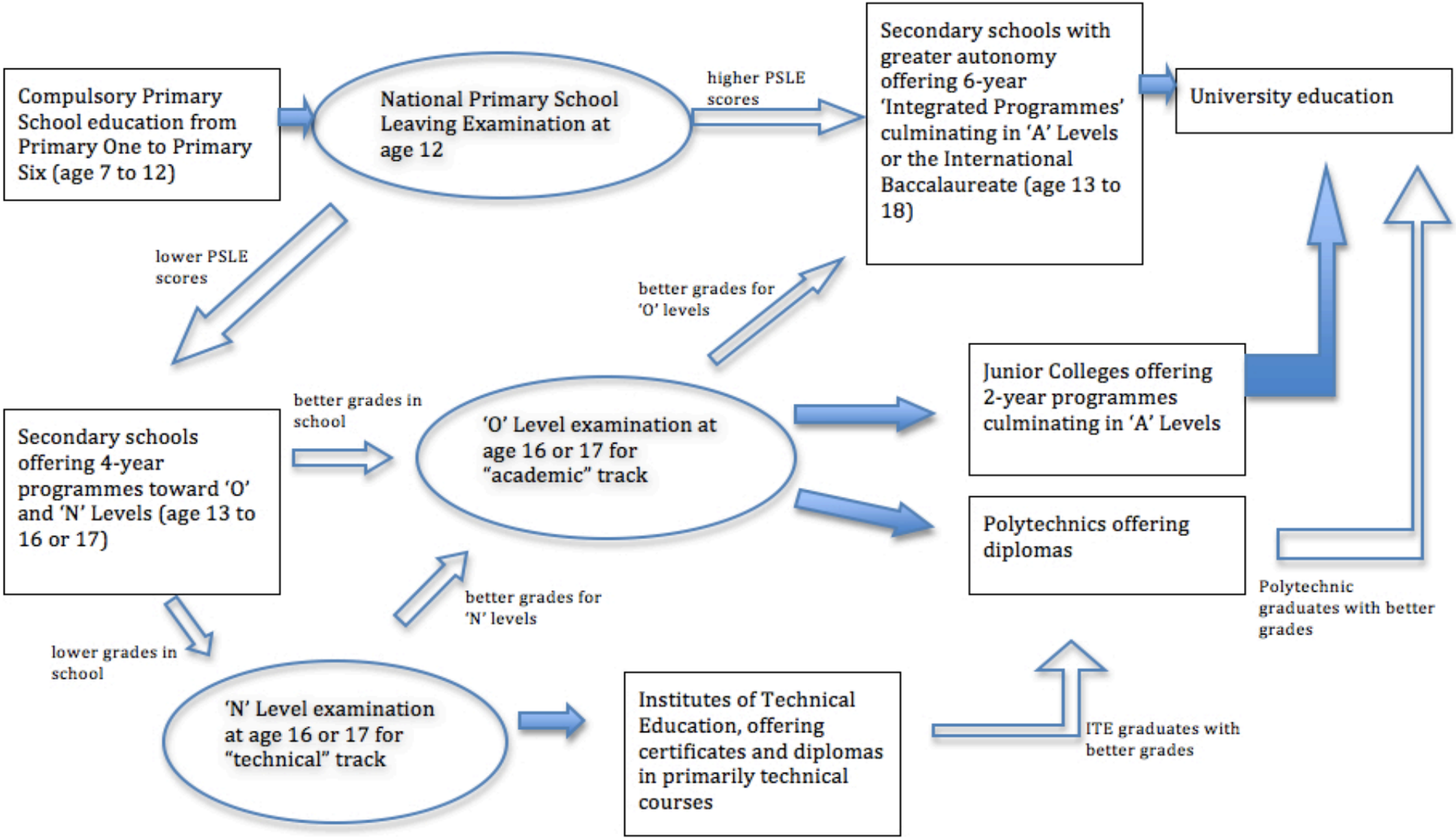
[16] As at 2010, independent schools charge a fee between $200 – 300 SGD per month for local students, while all other schools have a fee of $10 – 30 SGD per month. Fees for international students in independent schools range between $1200-1500 SGD per month. For citizens, the top 1/3 of each PSLE cohort is awarded a scholarship that pays for all tuition fees in independent schools. All students who are citizens and admitted to St Thomas' on academic merit would qualify for this and do not pay any fees (Ministry of Education website a).

institutions within the secondary school system (Lim 2012:3). The programme allows top-performing students already enrolled in independent schools to skip the O Levels[17], and instead undergo a six-year curriculum that prepares them for either the A Levels or the International Baccalaureate. It is designed to be more holistic, with greater scope for independent learning and engagement in community projects. In 2004, the IP was introduced in a few other top-performing schools that are not of independent status. To date, out of more than 150 secondary schools in Singapore, 18 offer the IP and 12 of these are independent schools (Ministry of Education website b).

The following flowchart contextualises the position of independent and top-performing schools, in relation to other mainstream schools. It also provides an overview of the educational pathways available to students in Singapore today.

[17] The General Certificate of Education (GCE) O Levels are examinations typically taken after four years of secondary education in Singapore. The GCE A Levels are taken after six years.

Figure 4.2: Educational pathways in Singapore



4.5.2 St Thomas' School[18] at the top of the pyramid

How then is St Thomas' School positioned in this education landscape typified by stratification and injected with immigrant students? Even amongst independent schools, St Thomas' is regarded as one of the best in its academic performance and most prestigious by Singaporeans. It was one of the first schools allowed by the Ministry of Education to become independent in 1990. Students in Years One to Four (age 13 to 16) are segregated by gender in two campuses, while those in Years Five and Six (aged 17 and 18) are merged on a single campus. The school prescribes an Integrated Programme of six years that culminates in the GCE A Levels[19]. The total student population in Years One to Four is about 3500, while Years Five and Six is around 2500. Academic staff number about 600. The school models itself partially after a British public boarding school, with boarding complexes where all immigrant students and a small number of Singaporean students are accommodated. Facilities on one campus (shared by the boys in Years One to Four and the co-ed Years Five to Six) include two football stadia with 8-lane running track, Olympic-sized swimming pool, indoor gymnasium, three indoor multi-purpose halls, and numerous auditoriums and lecture theatres.

Recall that only top-performing secondary schools in Singapore participate in the proactive recruitment of students from neighbouring countries. In St Thomas', immigrant students on scholarships make up around 10% of the student population in Years Five and Six. Most of them have been recruited directly by St Thomas' at age 15, with a smaller number having been recruited by other top-performing secondary schools, before gaining entry to St Thomas' via the O Levels.

The academic performance of students is exemplary by national standards. For example, in 2011, 49.8% of the 2010 cohort attained at least 4 As in content subjects, while 68.3% attained at least 3As in content subjects[20]. 19% of the cohort had perfect scores for all their subjects. For the most common subjects that Singaporeans read, 50.8% of the cohort scored A for General Paper (a compulsory subject akin to combining General

[18] I was a student in St Thomas' from 1993 to 1999, and also taught in the school from 2007 to 2012. The information on the school provided is partially based on my experience whilst a teacher there.
[19] The General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) Level examination is a national university entrance examination undertaken by 18 year olds in Singapore. The Singapore state also administers the GCE Ordinary (O) Level nationally for 16 year olds. Both examinations are jointly conducted by the Singapore government and the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate.
[20] A typical student in St Thomas' School will read five to six subjects for the A Levels. Some have special dispensation to read up to nine subjects.

Studies in the UK with elements of English Language) and 74.2% scored A for Math. This is compared to the national average of 20.5% and 50.7% respectively (St Thomas' Annual School Report 2011:10-13).

Also pertinent is the trajectory undertaken by large numbers of graduates from St Thomas'. According to the school's brochure,

> "[Graduates of St Thomas' School] account for three out of seven Presidents, two out of three Prime Ministers, four out of 15 [current] cabinet ministers, four out of 11 [current] Ministers of State, and eight out of 22 [current] permanent secretaries in Singapore… Since 1965, we have produced 88 President's Scholars, the highest among all schools in Singapore; on average, about half of the students offered a Public Service Commission scholarship are [graduates of St Thomas']… we send the most number of students to prestigious universities in the UK and US. Every year, approximately 470 [graduates of St Thomas'] are offered a place in top UK and US universities. Other [graduates of St Thomas'] who decide to continue their quest for knowledge in Singapore regularly fill half the number of places in the Medical and Law faculties – the most competitive faculties at the National University of Singapore."
>
> (St Thomas' School brochure 2013:10)

Given the fact that the total number of students in each graduating cohort is around 1250, the figure of "470 are offered a place in top UK and US universities" suggests that almost 40% of students in St Thomas' do so annually[21]. Taken together, St Thomas' facilities, its students' academic performance and trajectory upon graduation all mark the school's position at the pinnacle of Singapore's stratified secondary school landscape.

[21] This figure excludes the total number who gained a place in other overseas universities, or those who applied but did not gain a place.

4.6 Three crucial contextual aspects

This chapter has tried to show how my informants' trajectories in and out of St Thomas' School is connected to Singapore's demography and brand of multiracialism, as well as the state's concomitant rationale for attracting and retaining talent via scholarships. I have also provided a description of the elitist education system and St Thomas's place within it. How then should I proceed in order to illustrate the connections between these institutional structures and my informants' transnational moves and lives in Singapore?

Recall that my research is roughly guided by Glick Schiller and Salazar's (2013), and Yeoh and Huang's (2011) arguments that transnational mobility ought to be understood through localised contexts. This led to two preliminary research questions:

1. How are the cultural identities and sociolinguistic practices of academically elite students linked to their aspirations, trajectories, and wider circulating discourses in the local context of Singapore?

2. In what ways does an investigation of these links complicate and contribute to theorisations of cosmopolitan elite migrants by academics and conceptualisations of such people by governments?

The contextualisation of my informants' trajectories in Singapore has then pointed to three linked aspects that deserve greater scrutiny in this thesis: (a) racial politics in Singapore and the racial criterion of recruiting academically elite immigrant students; (b) scholarships offered by the state; (c) the environment of St Thomas' School. The broad preliminary research questions may be applied to each aspect in turn. Drawing from the previous methodology chapter (Chapter Three), this means that I investigate how informants discursively positioned themselves to and/or made sense of these structures (points a, b and c above) in talk, so as to interrogate notions of frictionless and deterritorialised moves supposedly undertaken by cosmopolitan elites.

Consequently, in the following data chapters, I attend to St Thomas' School as a key site of socialisation in Chapter Five (point c), examining how it might be linked to my informants' talk about their aspirations and trajectories. Chapter Six examines how informants positioned themselves vis a vis prestigious state scholarships targeting

citizens (point b). Chapter Seven looks at the state's racial criterion of recruiting immigrant students (point a), and how race might or might not feature in my informants' accounts of self-differentiation. The findings in Chapter Seven then lead me to consider the role that a localised register, Singlish, might play in differentiations and tensions amongst academically elite students in Singapore.

Chapter Five: Aspirations and trajectories that suggest en-territorialisation

5.1 Introduction

Following Glick Schiller and Salazar's (2013), and Yeoh and Huang's (2011) arguments that transnational mobility ought to be understood as related to localised contexts, the previous chapter identified three key aspects of my informants' trajectories that warrant investigation: (i) the environment of St Thomas' School; (ii) state scholarships; (iii) the racial criterion of recruiting immigrants. This chapter thus focuses on St Thomas' and my informants' accounts of their aspirations and trajectories as they graduated from the school.

The chapter is divided into three main sections. First, I provide an overview of the St Thomas' school environment. I outline how the school's ethos regarding academic ability and its globalist outlook might be linked to the conventionalisation of particular aspirations and trajectories amongst its students. In light of these structures in St Thomas', the second section examines the narratives produced by my informants regarding their aspirations and trajectories. I argue that my informants' narratives and resultant trajectories do broadly reflect the dominant discourses in St Thomas' and iterations of 'frictionless' moves. Yet, their accounts also reveal struggles with academic performance, local friendship ties and personal interests beyond academic pursuits. These nuanced variations in my informants' accounts suggest that their trajectories are (i) not always easy and frictionless as some might face difficulties in gaining mobility, (ii) not entirely motivated by economic logic as they show glimpses of personal interests and the valuation of social relationships; (iii) not absolutely deterritorialised as there are signs of their socialisation into local ways of thinking and acting. I argue that 'friction' might be inadequate as a lens through which to understand my informants' engagement with mobility in St Thomas', and note how the process might be better seen as *en*-territorialisation.

5.2 The ethos of academic ability and normalisation of transnational trajectories in St Thomas'

In seeking to understand the migratory flows undertaken by people such as my informants, it is important to examine the role of institutions through which they have

been socialised. St Thomas' School is a key locus where all my informants spent two to six years of their secondary education in Singapore. I therefore provide a description of some of the discourses and structures within the school that might be related to my informants' aspirations and trajectories as they graduated from St Thomas'. In particular, I focus on two features: (i) the ethos regarding academic ability; (ii) the normalisation of transnational trajectories through school programmes.

5.2.1 Ethos regarding academic ability

We already know (from Chapter Four) how St Thomas' is positioned at the pinnacle of a stratified and elitist education landscape in Singapore. This entails that the school admits the top 3-5% of students of each year's PSLE cohort (Koh 2014:205). I argue here that academic ability is often assumed by the school to be an existing trait in its students. Further, academic achievements are widely celebrated while failure or mediocrity is seldom discussed. The school thus presents a typical student from St Thomas' as one who is an academic high-achiever.

To begin with, academic ability is often emphasised by the school to its own students as a distinct trait that they possess. In my experience as a former student and teacher, this occurs as students are constantly reminded by staff that they represent the best scholars in the country, with high expectations of their academic potential and ethical conduct. These practices are exemplified by the school's admission criteria on its website, with a headline prominently stating that "Admission to St Thomas' is based on merit, regardless of race, creed, social or financial background" (St Thomas' School website).

In some way, this also explains the emphasis the school places on Character and Leadership Education (CLE). If the academic brilliance of students is a given, then it is expected that they ought to be mentally and ethically prepared for social positions that such academic abilities might lead them to. CLE is an integral part of St Thomas' six-year curriculum to cultivate the skills and ethics becoming of a leader[1]. For example, all students in Years Two and Three attend compulsory outdoor experiential camps in Malaysia and the Outward Bound School. Opportunities are provided for students to embark on Community Involvement Projects in Singapore and overseas, where they act as volunteers to build infrastructure and contribute to developing rural areas. Students

[1] These programmes are also described in detail by (Koh and Kenway 2012).

are also expected to be involved in various leadership roles in avenues that include Class Executive Committees, Co-Curricular Activity Leaders and the Students' Council.

The role of leadership is itself framed by the school as a position of service. It is exemplified by the school's stated mission of "Nurturing thinkers, leaders and pioneers of character who serve by leading and lead in serving" (St Thomas' School website). This ethos of *noblesse oblige* – portrayed by Khan (2011) as "the belief ... that with their advantaged position comes a responsibility or obligation to do some good for the less fortunate" (Khan 2011:33) – underscores the school's assumption of its students' existing academic ability, so that students are being groomed for a future role as a leader in any field.

These assumptions of student ability are also produced by many of the students themselves. Koh (2014) reports on how staff and students he interviewed in St Thomas' all displayed deep-seated beliefs that students have earned their place in the school through their own academic merit, rather than advantages accrued through race or socioeconomic status. He argues that such discourses act as a "smokescreen" that legitimises and aligns with the dominant state narrative of meritocracy as a fair system, whilst omitting any sense of elitism and privilege perpetuated by the school (Koh 2014:205-208). To Koh (2014), these discourses mask the processes through which the school might actually be preserving the status quo rather than acting as a social leveler for students in Singapore. In my view, such "meritocratic talk" amongst staff and students may also be considered evidence of a dominant narrative that the academic ability of students in St Thomas' is taken for granted. The widespread belief that these students are academic high-achievers, and the justification of the place of students in the school, become mutually reinforcing notions (ie one enters St Thomas' via academic merit; students in St Thomas' must be academic high-achievers).

This is not to say that the school does not differentiate students in terms of their relative academic performance. Broadly, the school bands students into classes according to their overall academic results and excellence in specific subjects. Students are primarily sorted by ability at two stages: at point of entry into the school via PSLE[2] results; after Year Four's end-of-year examinations, or the O Levels[3] if one enters the school at Year

[2] The national Primary School Leaving Examination undertaken by all 12 year olds.
[3] The national GCE O Level examinations undertaken by 16 year olds.

Five. At the top end, the school promulgates the St Thomas' Academy catered to Years Five and Six students who are adept in Math, Biology, Chemistry or Physics. Students apply to join the programme and are assigned to classes that teach these specific subjects at more advanced (usually university) levels. At the other end of the academic performance spectrum, students who perform less well (many of whom have entered the school via the Direct School Admission scheme)[4] are banded together in what are colloquially known within the school by both teachers and students as 'DSA' classes. Quantitatively, each cohort has about 50 classes, 10 of which are in the St Thomas' Academy programme, while around five classes are made up of mostly DSA students.

Within such an environment where academic ability is often assumed and where students are also differentiated according to ability, the school's discourses directed at the general public (ie outsiders to the institution) are seen to only celebrate achievements while remaining silent on those who fail to meet expectations. Statistically, it is indeed true that the vast majority of students in St Thomas' attain A Level results that are far above the national average. The school's annual report states that 50% of students in St Thomas' score at least 4As in the A Levels, and 70% score at least 3As. These academic achievements are always published in school brochures and reports distributed to students and parents, and prominently displayed as banners around the campus on the day when A Level results are released. The names of students who win the country's most prestigious scholarships are inscribed on plaques, joining a list of names from previous years that adorn the school's central atrium. Corridors along the school are decorated with the biographies and exploits of past illustrious alumni. As also described by Kenway and Koh (2013:284), one particular walkway "includes photos of cabinet ministers and top civil servants, famous sports and media celebrities, and leading professionals such as academics, and business elites; all alumni, all either high-profile achievers in their fields and members of Singapore's various elites, or politicians and civil servants: members of the state nobility**.** Each photo is accompanied by a text pointing to their outstanding achievements, dedication, selfless generosity and commitment to Singapore." Further, these same alumni are often invited back to the school as guests-of-honour and speakers at various school events and ceremonies, during which students are awarded prizes and their achievements celebrated.

[4] Recall from Chapter Four (pp. 92) that a small number of students may gain admission to St Thomas' via their excellence in non–academic areas such as sports and the performing arts. Not all students enrolled via the DSA route do poorly in internal school exams. In fact, some do extremely well and are banded in high performing classes.

To Bourdieu (1996), such celebratory discourses in schools are,

> "essential moments in the work of expression, systematisation, and universalisation through which a group tends to convert its **ethos** into an **ethic**, transmuting the objectively systematic principles of a shared habitus… into an intentionally coherent system of explicit norms with claims to universality."
>
> Bourdieu (1996:44; words in bold my emphasis)

In other words, the assumption that students in St Thomas' are academic high-achievers destined for future grandiose roles of leadership [Bourdieu's *ethos*], are converted via these celebratory discourses into actual practice [Bourdieu's *ethic*], where students are encouraged to work toward goals of attaining excellent grades and particular career trajectories.

The ubiquity of these celebratory discourses is to be contrasted with the school's projected public image regarding middling students and those who do not make the grade. Even as the majority of students do remarkably well in the A Levels, the truth of the matter is that there is also a relative minority of students who are average by national standards, and a small number who consistently fail internal exams and eventually the A Levels. Such realities are never addressed during school assemblies and statistics are never disseminated to the general school population (in contrast to figures such as the number of students who have won prestigious scholarships). These are certainly never announced to outsiders of the school. Officially, the school does closely monitor the performance of these individuals and provides academic support, including advising them and their parents on alternative educational pathways to other mainstream junior colleges or polytechnics. These processes are, in comparison to the celebratory discourses, rather hushed and only directed at the students in question. For example, in 2013, the school decided to open a class catering to individuals who have been identified as unsuited for the school's Integrated Programme, so that they may prepare and sit for the O Levels. However, these provisions for the O Levels are not described in the school's official website that sets out all facets of the school's curriculum; it was not announced as a press release; it was never communicated to the general student population in St Thomas'. In 2016, a news report revealed that only one out of a total of 10 of these students taking the O Levels in St Thomas' actually passed

(Henson and Ong 2016). This was never disclosed by the school in any of its official statements. A refusal to address the issue when contacted by the national broadsheet *The Straits Times* (Davie 2016), further demonstrates how the school's silence is deliberately manufactured rather than one of unintentional neglect.

Moreover, pressure to do well in school is accepted as something that students in St Thomas' have to manage. In fact, the school recognises the potential psychological strain that students might be subjected to[5]. It is telling that St Thomas' employs a handful of full-time counselors to cater to the emotional and psychological wellbeing of its students. This is while national teen suicide rates in recent years have reached record high levels (Wang 2016). According to the Samaritans of Singapore (Samaritans of Singapore 2016), "For the 10-19 age group, there were 27 suicides in 2015; an average of more than two teenage suicides a month. This was twice the number for this age group from the previous year, and one of the highest figures in recent years. This is despite a shrinking population of those aged 10-19, which has seen a decline of 7.1% since 2012." Crucially, the most common stressors cited by this age group that used SOS' services included mental health issues, academic pressure and relationship problems at home and in school[6].

This section has attempted to show how the ethos of ability in St Thomas' assumes the typical student to be an academic high-achiever who is to be prepared for life as a leader in society. Achievements commensurate with this ethos are widely celebrated by the school, and any practice that deviates from it (ie mediocrity and failure) is never projected as part of the school's image to outsiders. Linked to this ethos are the processes within the school that normalise particular aspirations and educational pathways from St Thomas'. This will be addressed next.

5.2.2 The normalisation of transnational trajectories

I present two characteristics of the schooling experience in St Thomas' that arguably act in tandem to normalise transnational trajectories amongst students. First, the school

[5] St Thomas' is not the only school that offers counseling services to its students. The Ministry of Education deploys counselors to all mainstream secondary schools, though unlike St Thomas', they are only stationed at each school on certain days of the week.

[4] As part of the OECD's study, Singaporean students also reported higher levels of anxiety than the OECD average. "For example, 66 per cent of students across all OECD countries said they were worried about poor grades at school, but among Singapore students, it was 86 per cent. In Singapore, 76 per cent reported feeling very anxious for a test even if they were well prepared, compared with the OECD average of 55 per cent" Davie (2017).

promotes a globalist outlook that is systematically formalised in its curriculum (Koh and Kenway 2012:344-45), so that the students' experience of St Thomas' involves much exposure to transnational networks and practices. Besides the regular recruitment of students from neighbouring countries (outlined in Chapter Two), St Thomas' is part of a global network of elite schools that regularly exchange ideas and expertise amongst its administrative leaders. These consortia include the *G20 Schools*, the *Global Alliance of Leading Edge Schools* and the *Winchester Network*, of which members are all prominent (usually privately-funded) educational institutions such as Marlborough College and Eton College in the UK, Chinese International School in Hong Kong and The King's School in Australia.

St Thomas' globalist outlook is further translated into a set of curricula that students participate in. There are various bi-cultural programmes and area studies that students may sign up for. These focus on countries and regions such as China, India and the Middle East, during which students are taught the geopolitics and culture of particular localities. The programmes include a period of cultural immersion and student exchange with other schools. Each department teaching particular subjects organises overseas fieldtrips and exchange programmes at least once a year. For example, students might attend summer school in various overseas highschools or universities under the auspices of St Thomas' Math or Science departments. Many co-curricular clubs and societies (such as the various sports teams) also organise overseas training camps annually. These are in addition to the opportunities for overseas service learning (Community Involvement Projects), and compulsory leadership camps (Character and Leadership Education) that were outlined previously. International experiences are therefore made to be ubiquitous, and part and parcel of student life in St Thomas'. To Koh and Kenway (2012:345), St Thomas' curriculum exemplifies Rizvi's (2009) notion of 'cosmopolitan learning', where students are encouraged, "to examine the political meaning of intercultural experiences, seeking to locate them within the transnational networks that have become so much part of the contemporary era of globalisation" (Rizvi 2009:265).

Second, St Thomas' provides a battery of informational and structural services that directly prepares its students for pathways to prominent overseas universities. It is the only secondary school in Singapore that hires dedicated staff to provide advice on foreign university applications. At the same time, a group of teachers (usually those who have studied abroad themselves) are assigned as specialists in and advisors for university applications to specific localities. The school organises compulsory talks and

seminars, often during school assemblies, that provide information on scholarships (offered by the Singapore state as well as funding by universities), and university application procedures specifically in the US and UK. There are talks that teach students how to write cover letters and how to apply to universities strategically so as to increase one's chances of being offered a place. Alumni and faculty members from top-ranking universities (including Oxford and Cambridge) are often invited to share their experiences and knowledge of their universities. Again, it must be emphasised that the provision of these services are widely advertised by the school, and a mundane part of student life in St Thomas'. All students, regardless of academic ability in St Thomas', would be exposed to these experiences.

Ye and Nyland's (2014) work regarding Singaporean students who have studied in Oxford and Cambridge universities reveal that most of them were graduates of only two secondary schools in Singapore[7] (one of which is St Thomas'). They argue that these processes of preparation were lacking in other secondary schools, and so offered crucial advantages to students from such schools with more experience and resources at sending applicants to top-ranked overseas universities (Ye and Nyland 2014:19-20). More than giving students an edge at university applications, I suggest that St Thomas' internationalised curriculum and the enforced prevalence of preparing students for universities abroad, both serve to normalise the trajectory of moving overseas for university education. In contrast, other educational pathways to study Engineering or the Arts and Social Sciences locally are never advertised to students. That is, St Thomas' establishes the trajectory of heading overseas as a common, regular, even standard or natural sort of behaviour.

5.2.3 The potential impact on aspirations and actual trajectories

Writing of the congregation of students with "strong social similarities" in elite French academic institutions, Bourdieu (1996) makes the following broad observations:

> "Continuous and prolonged contact with classmates endowed with similar or related dispositions can only reinforce in each student the dispositions and values shared by all, and hence each student's confidence in his own value… In constituting elite students as a *separate group,* and hence, as a

[7] Around 80% of Singaporean students, who were awarded government scholarships to study in Oxbridge, were graduates of either St Thomas' or a second elite secondary school. In 2011, 72 students from St Thomas' earned in place in Oxbridge, making up 1.2% of about 6000 places in both Oxford and Cambridge universities (Ye and Nyland 2014:18).

> socially recognised social elite, publicly instituted distinction predestines them to practices imposed by their sense of difference that tend to reinforce difference."
>
> (Bourdieu 1996:186)

To Bourdieu, a place like St Thomas' is akin to a "social paradise", where individuals with similar family backgrounds and hence similar dispositions "recognise in everyone else a like-minded person" (Bourdieu 1996:186). He uses the term 'consecration' to mean a process where social difference is legitimised or naturalised (Engler 2003:446). In the case of students in St Thomas', the school's ethos of ability might very well expedite the consecration of their exclusive social position as academic elites.

Even if Bourdieu's broad observations might resonate with the situation in St Thomas', does this mean that there are no variations in the students' dispositions and values? Given the ethos of academic ability and naturalisation of particular educational pathways in St Thomas', it is now important to examine how students take up, resist or negotiate these discourses. It is worth considering the extent to which my informants' talk regarding their aspirations are similar and different, and how these variations might shed light on notions of friction, deterritorialisation and dispassionate moves.

Recall my preliminary broad research questions (first formulated in Chapter Two):

1. How are their cultural identities and sociolinguistic practices linked to their aspirations, trajectories, and wider circulating discourses in the local context of Singapore?
2. In what ways does an investigation of these links complicate and contribute to theorisations of cosmopolitan elites by academics and conceptualisations of such people by governments?

In the context of St Thomas' School, RQ1 now translates into:

a) Do my informants share the same dispositions and values with regard to academic ability, and in relation to it, particular educational pathways? Do all informants aspire to and take up the trajectories normalised by the school?
b) How might their talk about aspirations and trajectories be linked to their socialisation into local educational contexts?

RQ2 translates into:

c) How might variations (if any) in their uptake of normalised aspirations and trajectories point to careerist or non-economic considerations?
d) What struggles and barriers to transnational moves – which might be construed as 'frictions' – do they encounter in their educational trajectories?

Questions a - d will be addressed in the following sections.

5.3 The data and my informants

The data to be discussed is based on life history interviews with 20 informants, as well as a focus group discussion with a peer group of 11 individuals. As noted before, my informants in the life history interviews comprise two individuals born in Singapore, six born in Vietnam (all six recruited by the state at age 15), one born in Saipan, one born in Taiwan, one born in India, and nine born in China (eight were recruited by the state at age 15). Informants in the peer group discussion consisted of eight individuals born in Singapore, one born in China, and two born in Vietnam (the two Vietnamese and one Singaporean were also part of the 20 life history interviews). The tables below provide a summary of my informants' profiles (arranged alphabetically) at the time of data collection in 2014.

Table 5.1: Profiles of informants involved in life history interviews

Informant	Place of birth	Trajectory	Post-secondary school status[8]	Government Scholarships[9]	Citizenship	Gender [10]/Age
Andy	Vietnam	Vietnam → Singapore → UK	Reading Engineering in Imperial College	ASEAN Scholarship at age 15	Vietnamese	M/23
Bay	Vietnam	Vietnam → Singapore	Reading Chemical Engineering in NUS	ASEAN Scholarship at age 15; ASEAN Undergraduate Scholarship	Vietnamese	M/22
Cassandra	Taiwan	Taiwan → Singapore → US	Graduated with Business degree from NYU; reading MA in Public Relations in Columbia University	NA	Taiwanese and Australian; acquired Singapore Permanent Residency	F/24
Chang	China	China → Singapore	Read Mathematics in NUS; Reading MA in Chinese Studies in NUS	SM1 Scholarship at age 15; Undergraduate Scholarship offered by Singapore government	PRC[11]; acquired Singapore Permanent Residency	F/25
Dong	China	China → Singapore	Graduated with Business degree from NTU; broker in a ship broking firm in Singapore	SM1 Scholarship at age 15; Undergraduate Scholarship offered by Singapore government	PRC; acquired Singapore Permanent Residency	F/25
Fang	China	China → Singapore → US	Read Business in University of Chicago; reading Law in UCLA	NA	PRC; acquired then gave up Singapore Permanent Residency	M/24
Felicia	China	China → Singapore	Read Business in NUS; working in a multinational bank in Singapore	SM1 Scholarship at age 15; Undergraduate Scholarship offered by Singapore government	PRC; acquired Singapore Permanent Residency	F/25

[8] Some abbreviations:
NUS – National University of Singapore, ranked 22nd in the world and 1st in Asia in the 2014/15 QS rankings (QS website).
SMU – Singapore Management University, established in 2000 and specialises in Business and Management Studies.
NTU – Nanyang Technological University, ranked 39th in the world and 4th in Asia in the 2014/15 QS rankings (QS website).
All three universities are highly regarded in Singapore, with each having its own subject specialisations.
[9] Details on abbreviations and the prestige of scholarships have been explained in Chapter Four.
[10] The majority of my informants are males. This is not by design and is a result of the circumstances of my data collection (See Chapter Three). Phey led me to become a participant-observer of an all-male peer group that played football regularly.
[11] PRC – People's Republic of China

Gabriel	Singapore	Singapore → UK	Reading Economics in UCL	Undergraduate Scholarship offered by government ministry	Singaporean	M/23
Gin	Vietnam	Vietnam → Singapore	Reading Engineering in NUS	ASEAN Scholarship at age 15; ASEAN Undergraduate Scholarship	Vietnamese	M/23
Hans	Saipan	Saipan → Singapore → Cambodia → Singapore → US	Read Finance in NYU; working for a start-up in New York	NA	US; acquired then gave up Singapore Permanent Residency	M/23
Henry	Vietnam	Vietnam → Singapore	Reading Electrical Engineering in NUS	ASEAN Scholarship at age 15; ASEAN Undergraduate Scholarship	Vietnamese	M/23
Ling	China	China → Singapore	Reading Law in NUS	SM1 Scholarship at age 15; Undergraduate Scholarship offered by Singapore government	PRC; acquired Singapore Permanent Residency	F/23
Ming	China	China → Singapore → US	Graduated with Economics degree from Cornell University; Graduated with MA in Finance from MIT; analyst for a multinational bank in Wall Street	SM1 Scholarship at age 15	PRC	F/25
Phey	Vietnam	Vietnam → Singapore	Reading Finance in SMU	ASEAN Scholarship at age 15; ASEAN Undergraduate Scholarship	Vietnamese	M/22
Quentin	Vietnam	Vietnam → Singapore	Reading Building and Estate Management in NUS	ASEAN Scholarship at age 15; ASEAN Undergraduate Scholarship	Vietnamese	M/23
Seng	Singapore	Singapore → UK	Reading Aeronautical Engineering in Imperial College	Undergraduate Scholarship offered by government-linked corporation	Singaporean	M/21
Vas	India	India → Singapore → US	Reading Engineering in Carnegie Mellon	SIA Scholarship at age 15	Indian	M/23
Xavier	China	China → Singapore → US	Read Liberal Arts in Swarthmore College; working for a start-up in Chicago	SM1 Scholarship at age 15	PRC	M/25

Yang	China	China → Singapore	Reading Pharmacy in NUS	SM1 Scholarship at age 15; Undergraduate Scholarship offered by government-linked corporation	PRC; acquired Singapore Permanent Residency, then Singapore Citizenship	F/23
Ying	China	China → Singapore → UK → Singapore	Read Civil Engineering in Imperial College; working in an Engineering firm in Singapore	SM1 Scholarship at age 15	PRC; acquired Singapore Permanent Residency	F/25

Table 5.2: Profile of informants in peer group discussion

Informant [12]	**Place of birth**	**Trajectory**	**Post-secondary school status**	**Government Scholarships**	**Citizenship**	**Gender/ Age**
Bay	Vietnam	Vietnam → Singapore	Reading Chemical Engineering in NUS	ASEAN Scholarship at age 15; ASEAN Undergraduate Scholarship	Vietnamese	M/22
Phey	Vietnam	Vietnam → Singapore	Reading Finance in SMU	ASEAN Scholarship at age 15; ASEAN Undergraduate Scholarship	Vietnamese	M/22
Seng	Singapore	Singapore → UK	Reading Aeronautical Engineering in Imperial College	Undergraduate Scholarship offered by government-linked corporation	Singaporean	M/21
Adam	Singapore	Singapore → UK	Reading Economics in Cambridge	Undergraduate Scholarship offered by government ministry	Singaporean	M/21
John	Singapore	Singapore	Reading Mechanical Engineering in NUS	NA	Singaporean	M/21
Kendrick	Singapore	Singapore	Reading Law in NUS	NA	Singaporean	M/21
Pang	Singapore	Singapore	Reading Medicine in NUS	NA	Singaporean	M/21
Siew	Singapore	Singapore	Reading Law in NUS	NA	Singaporean	M/21
Wayne	Singapore	Singapore	Reading Business in SMU	NA	Singaporean	M/21
Wong	Singapore	China → Singapore → US	Reading Engineering in Carnegie Mellon	Undergraduate Scholarship offered by government statutory board	PRC; acquired Singapore citizenship at age 10	M/21
Zing	Singapore	Singapore	Reading Medicine in NUS	NA	Singaporean	M/21

[12] Bay, Phey and Seng were also involved in the life history interviews.

The life history interviews I conducted are divided into three main phases during which informants are invited to recount their experiences in: (i) schools prior and leading to their enrolment in St Thomas'; (ii) St Thomas' and leading to their trajectory upon graduating from St Thomas'; (iii) subsequent pathways after leaving St Thomas'. The accounts I focus on in this chapter are primarily produced toward the end of phase (ii), when informants were explicitly asked to describe their aspirations and sequence of events that led to their resultant trajectories. The generic questions I asked all 20 informants in this context are phrased approximately in the following manner, and in this sequence: (a) When did you start thinking about life after the A Levels? Can you describe the sequence of events that led to your decision after graduating from St Thomas'?; (b) How do your aspirations compare with your peers in school?; (c) Did you discuss your aspirations with your parents?. Questions (b) and (c) were not asked if the informants' accounts to the previous question had already provided the answer. These accounts may be considered personal narratives (Baynham 2011:64) or narratives of personal experience (Labov 1997, Ochs and Capps 2002), during which informants produced extended talk describing past events or situations with little overt co-construction or contestation from me as the interviewer.

5.4 Empirical explorations

I make three empirical observations in analysis of these accounts:

1. All informants described a conventional aspiration of attending university in the US/UK, or of reading Medicine or Law in Singapore amongst their peers in St Thomas'. Nonetheless, the way in which informants took up this aspiration may be differentiated along the lines of academic performance and nationality.
2. 19 out of 20 informants in life history interviews positioned themselves as preferring this conventional aspiration.
3. Informants who did not attain the conventional aspiration tended to justify their current educational pathways or told anecdotes of how they had to justify their trajectories to others. In contrast, such discursive moves were absent in the accounts of informants who attained the conventional aspiration.

5.4.1 A conventional aspiration in St Thomas'

A recurrent theme in all my informants' accounts is how each individual decided which universities to attend. In fact, the notion of not attending university at all was not mentioned. This is in the context of separate interviews with 20 informants, totaling 65.5 hours. The discussion on life choices after the A Levels often lasted at least 20 minutes for each individual. Any alternate idea to attending universities could have been brought up when discussing their life experiences in St Thomas' or earlier life stages, as when, for example I asked them, "Can you tell me when you started thinking about life after the A Levels?" or "How did your aspirations compare with others in school?", but this never occurred. Significantly, when discussing life choices after the A Levels, my informants all referred to an aspiration universally shared amongst their St Thomas' peers to attend top universities in the US and UK, or to read Medicine or Law in Singapore. I give some examples below.

Gabriel discusses in Extract (i) how he was applying to UK and US universities while he was in St Thomas', a choice that he calls the "proven track" (line 6).

Extract (i)

1 Luke: You can tell me the process of how you went to select
2 your schools, how you decided on your current choice
3 right now.
4 Gabriel: So I applied to UK and US schools. How I came
5 to the decision was mainly following what most
6 people did, the so called proven track. My friends
7 were pretty much doing similar things. Except those
8 who have decided they wanted to do Medicine. Then
9 those, quite a few, went for NUS. We will just ask each
10 other what we will be doing and which unis we
11 are applying to. But we didn't really discuss what are
12 the merits of certain courses, even certain unis. We
13 didn't go into that. Mostly we'll just be going for all the
14 uni talks, scholarship talks [organised by the school
15 to gather info.

(Interview with Gabriel, 24 June 2014)

Bay described a similar situation amongst his peer groups in class, and the school football team.

Extract (ii)

1 Luke: How about your classmates, your friends around you?
2 Generally, what were their aspirations?
3 Bay: I think a lot of the soccer guys [those in the school
4 Football team], the Singaporean guys, they want to go
5 overseas. A lot of them apply. Ok, there are two types.
6 One is they will stay in Singapore and do Medicine.
7 Then the other is to go overseas to do Medicine or do
8 whatever. The thing about St Thomas' is, if they want
9 it, they get it. So really some of the guys they got
10 Medicine, like Pang and Zing. Then some of the guys
11 going overseas now, Wong, Seng. I don't know the way
12 that Singaporeans think, maybe it's the St Thomas'
13 culture. Most of them are high achievers, so they only
14 aim for the best. If they think the best is Medicine, they
15 will get into Medicine. And they got it. If they think the
16 best is to go overseas to do something else, they also
17 get it. It's like if they want to go overseas, they just go.
18 My class I think half of them, we have 24, seven or
19 eight people went overseas. The rest about 15 or 16
20 left, half of them went to Medicine. The rest some of us
21 Life Science, some of us Engineering, some of us SMU
22 Law. My class is the freakin' high achievers. I think
23 most of those who went overseas, mostly on
24 scholarship.

(Interview with Bay, 10 Sept 2014)

Like Gabriel, Bay makes the claim in Extract (ii) that the conventional aspiration in St Thomas' was to head overseas or to read Medicine locally. In response to my question, Bay suggests that there are generally "two types" (line 5), people who want to remain in Singapore to read Medicine, and people who want to go overseas (lines 6-8). Significantly[13], Bay seems to be specifically referring to Singaporeans when talking about the "two types". He makes a specific reference to "Singaporean guys" in the football team (line 4), and the individuals ("Pang and Zing"; "Wong, Seng") he goes on to name as belonging to the "two types" are all Singaporeans in the football team (lines 9-11). This is before he goes on to talk about his class (lines 18-24), though it becomes unclear the extent to which the category of "Singaporean" would apply at this point.

5.4.2 Differences in aspiration according to ability

While all informants reported this conventional aspiration in St Thomas', it might be worth investigating how pervasive it really is. Is it really the case that all students took

[13] This reference to nationality will be further examined and discussed (pp. 119) when I look for variations in aspirations amongst informants.

up and held the same aspirations? As mentioned in the previous section, there are individuals who struggle to do well academically in the school, and who have been directed to different pathways by the school administration. It is entirely conceivable that there are distinct groups in St Thomas' with varying academic abilities and with correspondingly different aspirations. Amongst my informants, the closest exemplar of an individual who was not always a high performing student is Seng. Seng gained admission into St Thomas' in Year One via a supplementary test the school held for individuals whose PSLE results marginally missed the cut-off. He was always banded in the poorer performing classes in school, including in a DSA class in Years Five to Six. He revealed some of his struggles in his studies in Extract (iii) when speaking about his experience in the school football team.

Extract (iii)

1 Luke: So what was it like training with us?
2 Seng: Those were fun days, I must say. As in training 6 times a week.
3 Luke: At the beginning where got 6 times a week?
4 Seng: Yes it was always 6 times a week, I swear. My Dad was very unhappy
5 about it. I just like *tank* [term used in online gaming to mean a character
6 who bears the brunt of the damage for the team] everything (laughs). My
7 Dad wasn't very supportive of football.
8 Luke: No leh, during competition he still come down.
9 Seng: Yeah la, at the end of the day he will still come down. Cos he knows the
10 commitment is high, and in Year Five my studies quite *cui* [Singlish
11 term meaning a weak or fragile state].
12 Luke: But now, what does he think about it?
13 Seng: On hindsight very easy to say la. Cos Year Five we train a lot, so that
14 hard working mentality in Year Six crossed over into my studies. That's
15 what he said la. So Year Six he didn't give me a lot of like, last time
16 he always nag like "why you train so many times" things like that. But
17 after Year Six, after my 1st CT [Common Test]. You know, my CT I did
18 very well you know? My promos [Promotional Exams at the end of Year
19 Five] I only pass two subjects. Then my Year Six CT 1 I got ABBSS or
20 something. Which from like BUUEE[14] or something, was quite a big
21 improvement.

(Interview with Seng, 1 Aug 2014)

The above exchange is an excerpt of when I asked Seng to describe his experience in St Thomas', which occurred before I asked informants to discuss their aspirations. I disputed Seng's account that football training was scheduled for six times a week [lines 3-4], and Seng substantiated his claim by saying it was why his father was unhappy [lines 4-7], especially because his grades were poor at the time [lines 9-10]. Seng thus

[14] Following the Singapore A Levels grading system, the 'S' grade denotes a sub-pass, while 'U' denotes Ungraded. Both grades indicate failing to obtain a pass in the subject.

not only was struggling to do well academically, he also had to deal with his father's unhappiness at his involvement with the football team. His father's displeasure was something that Seng said he had to endure [ie "tank" line 5] at the time. In Extract (iv), Seng would link his poor grades to his future educational pathways while in St Thomas'.

Extract (iv)

1 Luke: So when did you start to think about life after the A Levels?
2 Seng: Cos in July [Year Six] I went for a scholarship talk, so that was when I
3 was, oh, time to think about it. My friends started studying for SATs
4 maybe during the June holidays? Cos that was sort of the best period,
5 before you start studying for A Levels. But I didn't take SATs, *wah lau*
6 [singlish marker for emphasis] I can't even pass my A Levels take what
7 SATs? A lot of my friends did it. Cos that was the period when the
8 application [for overseas universities] started to open, and especially for
9 the girls, if you want to go to the US or UK you need to apply during that
10 period with your predicted grades. So that's when they started.

(Interview with Seng, 1 August 2014)

Like Gabriel and Bay, Seng describes how his peers were preparing for SATs [lines 3-4], but he did not engage in the same preparations as he was still unsure if he could do well in the A Levels [lines 6-7]. To Seng, it was ludicrous to even prepare for overseas university applications if one was potentially going to fail in the A Levels. This is not to say that Seng never aspired to move overseas. But it does show how one's academic performance in St Thomas' has an effect on one's consideration of potential educational pathways. In a latter part of the interview, Seng says that he only applied for scholarships to study locally. However, he did well enough in the A Levels to be offered a scholarship to study overseas by a government-linked organisation. He was to change his mind and take up the opportunity to study in Imperial College London.

Seng was the only informant (out of 20) who revealed his struggles at trying to perform academically in St Thomas'. His account shows how his aspirations were linked to his academic ability, and plausibly demonstrates how the conventional aspiration in St Thomas' was not taken up by all students. Importantly, Seng's account describes struggles with his studies and with his father who opposed his participation in the school's football team [Extract (iii) lines 4-7]. His transnational trajectory from St Thomas' to the UK can hardly be construed as a smooth segue without 'friction'.

Seng's account also suggests another conundrum. Why is such talk about struggles with academic ability so rare amongst my informants? Factually, my informants are banded by their academic ability into three broad classes in St Thomas'. Admission into the St Thomas' Academy[15] is by voluntary application, so that many students who may also be academically brilliant may not be in these classes. On the other hand, membership in DSA classes are assigned by the school administration. My informants can be categorised as having been streamed into these different classes in Years Five to Six:

Table 5.3: Categories of classes in St Thomas' School

St Thomas' Academy	**Higher ability mainstream class**	**Mainstream class**	**DSA**
Chang Quentin Bay Phey Gin Vas	Gabriel Ling Yang	Xavier Fang Ming Cassandra Dong Andy Felicia Hans Henry Ying	Seng

Despite these officially sanctioned differences in academic ability, I have found no evidence in my informants' talk that they differentiated themselves along these lines when speaking about their experience in St Thomas'. For example, 'DSAs' nor any other term, were not used as labels for peers who had comparatively poorer academic results. Neither did informants admitted to the St Thomas' Academy use their classroom membership as a marker of difference between groupings in school. While all informants talked about studying hard in school [eg Seng in Extract (iii) lines 13-14], there was no reference to others who did not study hard or did not do well in school and therefore did not fit into their social circles. The inverse is also true. My informants never did mention how there were groupings seen to be more intelligent and which they could not be members of. If we return to Seng's description of his membership in the football team [in Extract (iii)], his poor academic results was never raised as an issue that affected his affiliation within the group. Such descriptions are also consistent with my own experience as a former student and teacher, especially when I was also coach of the school football team that Seng was a part of.

[15] The St Thomas' Academy is an academic programme in Years Five and Six tailored for the Sciences and Math that aims to teach students at more advanced levels than requirements for the A Levels.

How then can we explain the rarity of accounts of academic struggles (such as Seng's) and the lack of self-differentiation amongst students in terms of academic ability? I offer some plausible reasons. First, most of my informants might just happen to be rather good students who did relatively well in school. Individuals like Seng might be a real minority amongst the school population. The statistical scarcity of poor performing students could mean that researchers often only speak to high achievers in elite schools, and the students themselves have limited interaction with peers of low ability.

Second, the ethos of ability in the school (where ability is often assumed and only success is celebrated) might be so dominant that it becomes very difficult for individuals to talk about their failures or mediocrity. That is, students in St Thomas' have very much internalised as part of their identity this image that they are of high academic ability. Koh's (2014) study suggested a prevalent view amongst students in St Thomas' that they have earned their place in the school through their own academic merit. To admit a lack of academic proclivity might be tantamount to conceding that one is not worthy of a place in St Thomas'. It runs contrary to the image of worth and value – that students in St Thomas' are academically brilliant – carefully cultivated by official school discourses and portrayed to outsiders. Similarly, to accuse someone of lacking academic ability, such as through self-differentiation and comparison, might be so serious a charge in St Thomas' that it is seldom produced. The school's recognition of and provision for the psychological pressures felt by students cannot be seen as unrelated to this image of academic ability. One must also bear in mind that the interview with Seng was conducted after he has achieved excellent results in the A Levels and attained the conventional trajectory of studying in the UK. These achievements might have made it easier for Seng to talk about past failures.

Third, it might be that students know how membership in classes or even performance in internal school exams are not necessary predictors of final performance in the A Levels. For instance, not all students admitted via the DSA route were banded into 'DSA' classes. Some of them actually do perform well in internal exams and the A Levels. Students also know that internal exams are far more rigorous and of higher difficulty than the A Levels, so one's performance in St Thomas' is not indicative of one's ability at the national level. Consequently, while my informants are cognizant of the fact that there are friends who perform much better than them in internal school exams, they seldom talk about themselves or others as lacking in ability.

5.4.3 Differences in aspiration according to nationality

Besides academic ability, there could be other ways in which the conventional aspiration varies amongst my informants. The examples of responses in Extracts (i), (ii) and (iv) include my informants' descriptions of the general aspirations in St Thomas'. Note that my initial questions to Bay in Extract (ii) make no reference to specific groupings amongst their peers or in St Thomas'. It was therefore somewhat strange that Bay made references to what the "Singaporeans" were doing [Extract (ii) line 4], without me first raising it as part of my question. The implication is that the Singaporeans are somehow to be distinguished as a group, especially when we know that Bay is an immigrant from Vietnam. Another example of such references to a specific group is seen in Quentin's response below.

Extract (v)

1 Luke: How were your aspirations similar or different from those
2 around you at that time?
3 Quentin: In Sec 3 and Sec 4 I think most of the Vietnamese
4 wanted to get a scholarship to the US. We heard from our
5 seniors, a lot of them were in the US. They were telling us
6 college life is really fun and really different. We've been in
7 Singapore for four years, so we wanted to go to another
8 place to study, just to experience a new environment.
9 Luke: How about the Singaporeans?
10 Quentin: The Singaporeans, I think they just wanna do well
11 for A Levels, and I think a lot of them they wanted to go
12 overseas also.

(Interview with Quentin, from Vietnam, 25 Aug 2014)

Like my question directed at Bay [Extract (ii)], I was asking Quentin to compare his aspirations to his peers, which presumably would include Singaporeans and other nationalities when he was in secondary school. Quentin talks about the Vietnamese first [Extract (v) line3], which led me to ask about Singaporeans [Extract (v) line 9].

Bay and Quentin's responses are not isolated examples. In total, 11 informants in life history interviews made such unsolicited references to specific groupings when describing the conventional aspiration in St Thomas'. The labels used are always specific nationalities (ie "Singaporean" or my informants' own nationality) or "scholars" to mean immigrants recruited on scholarships by the state. These responses are summarised and tabulated below according to my informants' migratory status in Singapore.

Table 5.4: References to nationality or immigrant by informant

Informant	**Country of origin/age when migrating to Singapore**	**Unsolicited reference to nationality or immigrant status when talking about conventional aspirations in St Thomas'**
Cassandra	Taiwan / 3	NA
Fang	China / 6	NA
Gabriel	Singapore	NA
Hans[16]	Saipan / 3-6, 12	NA
Seng	Singapore	NA
Andy	Vietnam / 15	"Singaporeans"
Bay	Vietnam / 15	"Singaporeans"
Gin	Vietnam / 15	"Singaporeans"
Henry	Vietnam /15	"Vietnamese"
Phey	Vietnam / 15	"Vietnamese"; "Singaporeans"; "scholars"
Quentin	Vietnam / 15	"Vietnamese"
Chang	China / 15	"scholars"
Dong	China / 15	NA
Felicia	China / 15	NA
Ling	China / 15	NA
Ming	China / 15	"Chinese scholars"
Xavier	China / 15	"Singaporeans"; "Chinese scholars"
Yang	China / 15	NA
Ying	China / 15	"Singaporeans"
Vas	India / 15	"scholars"

It is notable that Seng and Gabriel (born in Singapore), and Cassandra, Fang and Hans (born overseas but moved to Singapore at a younger age), did not make any reference to nationalities or immigrants when discussing the conventional aspirations in St Thomas'. They talked about it in general without reference to any grouping [eg Gabriel's response in Extract (i) and Seng in Extract (iv)]. In contrast, 11 out of 15 more recent immigrants made references to a specific group by nationality, or used the label "scholars".

These unsolicited references to nationalities when talking about the general milieu in St Thomas' might be indicative of a presumption that there is a distinction to be made between Singaporeans and immigrants. That is, in those 11 instances, informants who were recent immigrants are positioning themselves as a separate grouping in relation to Singaporeans. But what is the basis for such a distinction?

All of the references to nationality or immigrant status were made in the context of describing the general aspirations in St Thomas'. Two informants, Gin and Xavier, made these references in the same context, but in additional terms of scholarships available to Singaporeans. Recall from Chapter Two that the Singapore government offers prestigious undergraduate scholarships to citizens that fund their overseas

[16] Hans moved to Singapore for the first time when he was aged three and stayed here till age 6. He then returned to Singapore again at age 12.

education. Immigrants would, in all likelihood, be well-aware of this fact, and this came through clearly[17] in Gin's [Extract (vi)] and Xavier's [Extract (vii)] accounts.

Extract (vi)

1 Luke: When did you start thinking about life after secondary
2 school?
3 Gin: Pretty much once I entered Year Five, school started talking
4 to us about universities very early. Like what you should
5 plan, what sort of [subject] combination you should be
6 taking, how to distinguish yourself and so on. So there is
7 very clear sort of guidance. Of course we talked about it a
8 lot. My classmates, a lot of them went overseas, actually
9 most of them went overseas. Most of the Singaporeans went
10 overseas cos they can get scholarships to go. It became very
11 clear at the end of Year Five, start of Year Six that I wanted
12 to go overseas.

(Interview with Gin, from Vietnam, 25 Aug 2014)

Extract (vii)

1 Luke: When did you start thinking about life after the A Levels?
2 Xavier: I wanted to apply to universities outside of
3 Singapore, in the UK and US, I didn't want to stay here, I
4 wanted to get a scholarship and get out of here. Maybe not
5 so much in Year Five, but in Year Six everybody's thinking
6 about the same thing. I mean everybody is faced with
7 university applications, scholarship applications. It was
8 part of the conversation. Maybe not so much between me
9 and my Singaporean counterparts, but very much so
10 between the Chinese scholars because we all faced the same
11 problem. We had to make choices, and we had to look for a
12 way out. So the conversation was more among us.
13 Everybody wants to apply to schools in the UK and US, but
14 ultimately it comes down to money. A lot of us aren't
15 eligible for scholarships that were offered by the Singapore
16 government or agencies or anything like that. So it's down
17 to if your parents have the means, or if you are good enough
18 to get a scholarship, these are the two routes that we could
19 go for.

(Interview with Xavier, from China, 21 June 2014)

Like other informants, Gin and Xavier both described how they and their peers in school were thinking about going overseas. Gin's reference to Singaporeans as a group occurs when stating how most of them can go overseas "cos they can get scholarships to go" [Extract (vi) lines 9-10]. Xavier talks about "Singaporeans" and "Chinese scholars" by distinguishing how he was mainly discussing his aspirations with the latter group.

[17] As aforementioned, I cannot be entirely sure that Bay was only referring to Singaporeans when he makes this statement of his class, "I think most of those who went overseas, mostly on scholarship" [Extract (ii) lines 22-24]. The reference to "Singaporean" is much clearer in Extracts (vi) and (vii).

The reason is because the Chinese scholars "faced the same problem" [Extract (vii) lines 8-11]. The problem is one of money, and the Chinese scholars were not eligible for the same scholarships as the Singaporeans were [Extract (vii) lines 14-16].

So the lack of access to the same scholarships for immigrants might be one factor structuring the distinction between the Singaporeans and immigrants when talking about aspirations in St Thomas'. Are there other factors? Phey was the only informant who discussed in depth how Singaporeans differed in their considerations of choices after St Thomas'. Like Quentin in Extract (v), Phey had begun his account by describing the aspirations of specifically the Vietnamese students first, when, according to him, most of the Vietnamese wanted to go abroad. I then asked him about the rest of the school.

Extract (viii)

1	Luke:	How about the rest of the St Thomas' population?
2	Phey:	Oh you mean Singaporean students ah? Can feel
3		Singaporean students more determined cos I think they got
4		the finance. So they got a lot of options in going UK, US. And
5		I think they already plan ahead much further than the
6		scholars. Cos I think their parents got more information
7		than our own parents, cos our own parents wouldn't know.

(Interview with Phey, from Vietnam, 8 Aug 2014)

It is significant how Phey assumes that I was referring to "Singaporean students" [Extract (viii) line 2) when I asked my question, almost as if only the Singaporeans (not other groupings) can be the logical contradistinction to his discussion of Vietnamese students that had gone on before. Nor does he wait for me to confirm his question. Instead, Phey goes on to elaborate that the Singaporeans shared the same aspiration of going abroad, but were different in other aspects (ie "more determined" to go abroad due to better finances; they "plan much further ahead"; "their parents got more information").

Could this distinction between the status of Singaporeans and immigrants also be because of a substantive difference in aspirations between the two groups? My informants' responses [eg Extract (ii), (vi) and (vii)] never did specify how the aspirations between the two groups could be dissimilar, and in fact often talked about similarities [eg Quentin's response in Extract (v) lines 10-12]. Nor did I explicitly ask them about any such difference in the interviews. I therefore compiled a table summarising my informants' own aspirations (from both life history interviews and

peer group discussion) according to whether they mentioned the option of going to the US/UK, or to read Medicine or Law in Singapore.

Table 5.5: Educational pathways considered by each informant

Life history interviews			
Informant	**Country of origin**	**Did informant mention the US/UK in own aspirations?**	**Did informant mention reading Medicine/Law in Singapore in own aspirations?**
Gabriel	Singapore	Yes	Yes
Seng	Singapore	Yes	No
Andy	Vietnam	Yes	No
Bay	Vietnam	Yes	No
Henry	Vietnam	Yes	No
Gin	Vietnam	Yes	No
Phey	Vietnam	Yes	No
Quentin	Vietnam	Yes	No
Chang	China	Yes	No
Dong	China	Yes	No
Fang	China	Yes	No
Felicia	China	Yes	No
Ling	China	Yes	Yes
Ming	China	Yes	No
Xavier	China	Yes	No
Yang	China	Yes	No
Ying	China	Yes	No
Cassandra	Taiwan	Yes	No
Hans	Saipan	Yes	No
Vas	India	Yes	No
Peer Group Discussion			
Informant	**Country of origin**	**Did informant mention the US/UK in own aspirations?**	**Did informant mention reading Medicine/Law in Singapore in own aspirations?**
Adam	Singapore	Yes	Yes
John	Singapore	Yes	No
Kendrick	Singapore	Yes	Yes
Pang	Singapore	No	Yes
Siew	Singapore	Yes	Yes
Wayne	Singapore	Yes	Yes
Wong	Singapore	Yes	Yes
Zing	Singapore	No	Yes

Table 5.5 shows how there is a broad division between the aspirations of Singaporeans and those who were immigrants in St Thomas'. Informants who were already immigrants in Singapore (with the exception of Ling) never mentioned that they themselves ever considered reading Medicine or Law in Singapore. On the other hand, eight out of 10 Singaporeans mentioned that they did think about reading Medicine or Law locally. This was in addition to the fact that all 18 immigrants considered going to the US/UK, and eight of 10 Singaporeans did the same. Why did the immigrants not consider reading Law or Medicine in Singapore when most of their Singaporean peers

in St Thomas' thought about it? I surmise that it may have to do with the generally lower English proficiencies of immigrants[18] (which may prevent them from having an interest in reading Law), as well as the high costs of reading Medicine in Singapore for international students[19].

Table 5.5 thus not only corroborates what my informants have described as a conventional aspiration in St Thomas' School, but also demonstrates a nuanced difference between Singaporeans and immigrants. There is the aspiration to attend universities in the US or UK (applicable to both Singaporeans and immigrants), and the option of reading Medicine or Law locally (mostly amongst Singaporeans).

To recap, I have shown how my informants reported a conventional aspiration amongst their peers. This aspiration is aligned with St Thomas' active promotion of educational pathways to the US and UK. However, there are differences in the way my own informants take up this aspiration. First, I explored how differences in academic ability might be linked to varying up-take of the conventional aspiration. It was uncovered that accounts of academic struggles are a rarity, but do exist, demonstrating that not all moves for students in elite institutions may be construed as 'easy' and 'frictionless'.

Second, when talking about a conventional aspiration in St Thomas', recent immigrants tended to make unsolicited references to nationality or immigrant status. This flagged a possible difference amongst my informants along the lines of nationality and time of entry into Singapore. The difference was at times discussed in terms of scholarships that Singapore citizens, not immigrants, were eligible for [see Extracts (vi) and (vii)]. In Phey's case [Extract (viii)], it was also discussed in terms of other factors such as financial ability and their parents. In eight other instances, it was assumed without explanation, and any actual difference in aspirations was never explicitly outlined in interviews. The difference in aspirations between Singaporeans and immigrants was confirmed when I looked at the educational pathways considered by each individual. So it could be that my informants' discussion of aspirations in St Thomas' are being structured by presuppositions that Singaporean and immigrant students are likely to be

[18] I had known Ling in St Thomas' as a student with a much higher English proficiency compared to most of her Singaporean peers in school.
[19] For the academic year of 2016/2017, annual tuition fees for medical students in NUS are $26400 SGD for citizens and $55450 SGD for international students. There are no scholarships available for international students to read Medicine (National University of Singapore website a).

different in aspects that included access to scholarships and targeted educational pathways.

Both findings suggest that even as a certain trajectory might be spoken of as conventional in St Thomas', the aspirations of my informants are not always congruent or monolithic. As the data demonstrates, there are divergences along the lines of academic ability and nationality amongst my informants.

5.4.4 A preferred trajectory

This is not to say that the conventional aspiration of heading to the US/UK or of reading Medicine or Law locally were the only educational pathways considered by my informants. When describing their own aspirations, the conventional aspiration was often framed as the preferred, though not only path. This can be seen in Xavier's comments below.

Extract (ix)

Luke: Did you talk to your parents about where you wanted to go?

Xavier: Yeah I said "hey I'm going to private schools, I'm going to apply for scholarships. I know you guys can't pay, and I'm not going to ask you to pay. I'm just going to try my luck, if I get a scholarship, good for me I'll go, if not I'll just go to NUS or NTU". I think was pretty clear with them, even though my mum was going to sell the house, and we are going to pay for you right now. First of all, even if you sell the house, the money is not going to be enough to cover three years of tuition. Secondly, I wouldn't let you do it because I wouldn't be enjoying my life as a college student knowing that my parents sacrificed all these things for me so I can just be here, I wouldn't be happy doing what I would be doing. Third, it's not a wise choice right? I mean, I know people here in the US who have gone into hundreds of thousands of dollars of debt to go to college, and I don't feel it's the wisest choice you can make. Singapore was the safety option, it was the safety net. If I don't get anything from Britain or the US, then I'll fall back on NUS or NTU.

(Xavier, from China, Swarthmore College, 21 June 2014)

Prior to this, Xavier had just described how he managed to gain admission to Swarthmore College in the US at the same time as most of his peers were applying to universities in the US and UK. When I asked if he spoke to his parents about his aspirations, Xavier responds by shifting into a performance of what he said to his parents [Extract (ix) lines 3-7]. Within this performance, Xavier positions himself as favouring the trajectory to the US and UK on the condition that he gets a scholarship (line 6), using "I'll just go to" (line 7) to signal that NUS and NTU are secondary options. He then elaborates on why he does not wish his parents to pay for his overseas education (lines 8-20). He ends his account by framing the trajectory of remaining in Singapore as a "safety net" (line 21), echoing his previous statement in line 7 that NUS and NTU are secondary or "fall back" options (line 22). Thus, heading to the US and UK is positioned as a more favourable option to remaining in Singapore.

As exemplified by Xavier in Extract (ix), the lack of financial support was the commonly cited reason amongst informants who had thought of going overseas for why they eventually remained in Singapore (in both life history interviews and peer group discussion). For my informants, the educational pathway to the US and UK was often discursively conceived as the better option compared to remaining in Singapore, unless one wanted to read Medicine or Law locally. This is before financial considerations and the (un)availability of scholarships were reported to constrain their (both Singaporeans and immigrants) eventual trajectories. In all, 15 out of 20 informants mentioned finances as a consideration when negotiating moves abroad. 19 out of 20 informants portrayed the position that they preferred the conventional aspiration. Among the eight informants who did not go overseas despite preferring to, all eight mentioned the lack of money as one of the factors[20]. These findings are summarised in the table below.

[20] Examples of these accounts [eg Phey in Extract (xiii)] will be investigated when I focus on informants who did not embark on the conventional trajectory.

Table 5.6: Summary of informants' talk about aspirations

Informants who described the conventional aspiration in St Thomas'[21]	**Informants who talked about the conventional aspiration as their preferred track given no constraints**	**Informants who talked about their financial constraints in choice of educational pathway**	**Informants who achieved the conventional aspiration**
All 20.	19 out of 20. Chang (from China) did not do so.	15 out of 20, including Seng (from Singapore). Gabriel (from Singapore), Andy (from Vietnam), Cassandra (from Taiwan), Fang (from China) and Ming from China) did not do so. All five of them went overseas.	11 out of 20 (see Table 1).

At this point, I have shown how informants described a conventional aspiration amongst their peers in St Thomas'. With regard to their own choice of trajectory, this conventional track of heading overseas was favoured over remaining in Singapore. Despite the prevalence of such a position amongst my informants, there are exceptions and glimmers of resistance.

5.4.5 Resisting the conventional aspiration

Chang provides one instance of resisting the conventional track of going to the US and UK in her interview. She produces an ostensibly conflicting account from the other informants by initially stating that she "didn't think of going overseas", and that she only applied to universities in the US and UK because her father wanted her to [Extract (x) lines 2-4]. We will see in Extract (xi) that her account shifts when explaining why she applied to certain UK universities.

Extract (x)

1	Luke:	What did you want to do?
2	Chang:	I didn't think of going overseas, I also don't know why.
3		I did apply overseas because my father wanted me to
4		apply [laughs]. I applied to all the schools, the US
5		schools all rejected me, cos I didn't want to go to the
6		US. My SAT scores were quite low, I can't make it into
7		any US school. I anyhow did [the SATs], I didn't want
8		to prepare. Cos my parents wanted me to do it. I didn't
9		want to go to the US totally. All my friends, my
10		roommates, they die die [Singlish term for extreme

[21] This excludes the peer group discussion, when the same conventional aspiration was brought up by informants.

11 determination] wanted to go to the US. American
12 Dream, they believe in it. I don't believe in it [laughs]
13 Singapore is their stepping board, their dream is to go
14 to the US. A lot of people have this intention, actually
15 most scholars have this idea. Because our previous
16 batch, a lot of people went out.

(Interview with Chang, from China, 25 June 2014)

Beyond the fact that Chang states how she "didn't think of going overseas", and that she does not believe in the "American Dream" (lines 11-12), it is to be noted that she describes the same phenomenon as the other informants when talking about her peers' aspirations. We also see that she refers to "scholars" to talk about a specific group in St Thomas' without prompting (ie the distinction between Singaporeans and scholars/ recent immigrants discussed previously).

As she continued talking in response to the same question, Chang's position regarding the aspiration to go overseas begins to shift.

Extract (xi)

1 The only university I wanted to go to was Cambridge maybe,
2 so I applied to Cambridge, Imperial College, University of
3 Warwick, UCL and Birmingham. I was accepted by all five. Of
4 course they will say Cambridge Pure Math is the best in the
5 world, and one of my favourite actresses was buried in
6 Cambridge. Cos last time we went to Cambridge for summer
7 camp, when I was in China, in Sec Two. I went to the UK for
8 three weeks, and Cambridge was one of the places we visited.
9 I visited with my friend, and we have like a 约定 [a mutual
10 promise], a few years later let's all come here to study. I like
11 the UK, not the US. So I applied to Cambridge. I don't know
12 why, I got in, very funny. I got rejected by the college I
13 applied to, which is St John's. St John's is an arts college but I
14 was going to do Math. I got into Magdalene. I applied to St
15 John's because the actress graduated from there, I didn't
16 even check, anyhow filled in the application. I was not very
17 serious about my university applications [laughs]. Of course
18 my parents wanted me to go to Cambridge. When I got
19 accepted by Cambridge, all my friends just said, "just go, you
20 know how many Singaporean parents dream that their kids
21 can go to Cambridge? You got a chance, why don't you want
22 to go?" I didn't go to Cambridge cos I wanted to do what I
23 liked. I know I love [Chinese orchestral] music most in my life,
24 I stayed in Singapore because of music.

(Interview with Chang, 25 June 2014)

Here, Chang acknowledges that she did want to enrol in Cambridge University, stating that, "Cambridge Pure Math is the best in the world" [Extract (xi) lines 4-5]. She also revealed that her motivation to study in Cambridge did not emanate during her time at St Thomas', but can actually be traced to when she was still in middle school in China. In spite of her parents' wishes and her peers' puzzlement, Chang decided to remain in Singapore where she could pursue her interests in Chinese orchestral music in the local music scene. Notwithstanding this, it is notable that Chang does not evaluate Cambridge in a negative way. Indeed, she acknowledges the attraction of Cambridge to herself (lines 4-5) and to others (19-22).

Importantly, Chang suggests that her initial interest in Cambridge was partially triggered by one of her favourite actresses, not just the economic value of an education in Cambridge. Indeed, Chang prizes her own interests in music over the value of a Cambridge education. These stances all run contrary to the supposed careerist logic that drives migratory moves among elites. The excerpt below is another example where the consideration of transnational moves is not as dispassionate as often described. Extract (xii) was part of a focus group discussion with the peer group when we were discussing the conventional educational tracks taken by students from St Thomas'. Wong migrated to Singapore from China when he was one year old. He had won a scholarship from a government organisation to read Engineering in Carnegie Mellon, the US, and was due to leave two weeks from the day this discussion occurred.

Extract (xii)

1	Wong:	Actually I don't want to go overseas (1)
2	Luke:	Then?
3	((some people start sniggering))	
4	Unknown:	that's w(h)hy
5	Luke:	Then?
6	((some continuous laughter from lines 5 to 10))	
7	Luke:	[you are going in- you are going- you are going in two
8		weeks leh
9	Phey:	[you're on scholarship]
10	Siew:	[hello: what are you saying?]
11	Wong:	no I'm serious I don't want I-I don't want to go overseas
12		because=
13	Wayne:	=because of Sharon
14	Wong:	n-not just because of her ah (1)
15	Siew:	a:h
16	((everyone joins in chorus of ahs and ohs))	
17	Luke:	o:h so there's another Sharon [o:r
18	Adam:	[>there's another Sharon<]

((everyone laughs))
Wong: I'm talking about you all AH
((everyone in chorus of ohs and cheers))
Wong: no next time weekends every time I want to play soccer I play with who *sia* [Singlish marker for emphasis] you tell me
((everyone responds at same time; inaudible response cries))
Wong: >no la no la< but seriously I-I tsk to be frank I don't want to go overseas is just ever since I was young my parents (0.2) has-has always said that I will only be successful if I get a scholarship and I go overseas=
Luke: =ok=
Wong: =so they didn't really care what school or what scholarship they just wanted me to get ah (0.2) so when I got already they were like very happy then I don't want to disappoint them also-cos (0.1) to be frank I wanted to study with you all in Singapore (0.2) cos I thought law was a (0.1) something that might suit me ah-but (1) parents expectations

(Discussion with peer group, 3 Aug 2014)

Prior to Extract (xii), the group was discussing why so many students in St Thomas' wanted to go overseas. Wong adds to this discussion by revealing that he did not want to do so (line 1). Wong's revelation actually runs counter to the dominant narrative amongst informants regarding the conventional track ie most students prefer this track. This could explain the long pause of one second, when participants in the interaction were waiting for Wong to elaborate on his claim. The claim was met by two sets of responses. In the first set, some participants began sniggering (line 3) and it developed into continuous laughter (lines 5-10). The second set of responses demonstrated how Wong's claim appeared unexpected and did not immediately make sense. For example, I initially prompted Wong to explain himself by using "then"[22] (lines 2 and 5), before stating that Wong was actually to leave in two weeks (lines 7-8). Siew questioned the sensibility of Wong's claim by asking, "hello what are you saying?" (line 10). It was also telling how Phey marked Wong's claim as unexpected by reference to Wong having earned a scholarship (line 9), with the implication that one does not normally reject a scholarship. Both sets of responses (ie laughter and questions) indicate how Wong's claim is taken up by the other participants to be out of the ordinary; it was something that provoked incredulity (the continuous laughter) and required an explanation. As Wong commenced to try to explain himself (lines 11-12), he was interrupted by some teasing as participants speculated what the reason might be for

[22] "then" can be used as an interrogative in Singlish constructions to elicit explanation or elaboration.

Wong not wanting to go overseas (lines 13-19). He finally reveals the reason in line 20, that it is because of his ties with the peer group that he did not want to go.

The point of this excerpt is to instantiate how informants like Wong do display glimpses of resistance to the dominant narrative of conventional aspirations. In Wong's case, it was his friendship with the peer group that tied him to Singapore and which were part of his considerations when negotiating a move abroad. Both Chang's (Extract xi) and Wong's (Extract xii) accounts thus also reveal emotional and social ties rather than strictly mercenary considerations so prevalent in descriptions of elite migrants.

Still, when considering all my informant's narratives of conventional aspirations in St Thomas', Chang's and Wong's accounts are rare instances of resistance. Wong's own resultant pathway was to the US, in spite of his stated affiliation to his friends. Statistically, 40% of students (out of 1250) in each cohort of St Thomas' are offered a place to study overseas (though presumably not all will take up the offer for various reasons), while another 200 to 300[23] (about 20% of each cohort) go on to read Medicine or Law in Singapore. This means that about 50% of graduates do not achieve this aspiration. Amongst my own informants, 11 out of 20 (involved in life history interviews) and 8 out of 11 (in the peer group discussion) achieved the conventional aspiration.

Consequently, it might be pertinent to see if there is any difference in the way informants talked about their trajectories, based on whether they attained the conventional aspiration or not. In the next section, I compare how informants who remained in Singapore, and those who took up the preferred trajectory, discussed their educational pathways.

5.5 A difference in the accounts of informants with diverging trajectories

In comparing the accounts of informants who attained the conventional aspiration and those who did not, I found that none of the 10 informants who went overseas and the one individual who remained to read Law actually offered an explanation for why they

[23] This is based on an estimate that half of all Medicine and Law students in Singapore each year are from St Thomas', as stated by the school's brochure. There are about 600 places to read Medicine and Law in Singapore universities (National University of Singapore website b, Singapore Management University website).

did so, until I explicitly asked six of them about it[24]. At the same time, among the nine informants who did not attain the conventional aspiration, eight gave accounts that justified their resultant trajectories (the exception was Chang who did not prefer the conventional aspiration). Three out of the same nine informants told anecdotes of how they had to justify their current trajectories to others. Such ways of telling were unsolicited during the interview, and were voluntarily proffered in their accounts. I provide examples below.

5.5.1 Justifying their trajectories

Phey and Bay were the only two informants (out of 20 life history interviews) who did not apply to overseas universities, even if they did consider leaving Singapore.

Extract (xiii)

Luke: So when did you start thinking about what to do after the A Levels? Can you describe it chronologically?

Phey: In Year 3 and Year 4 [in St Thomas'], actually initially I wanted to go to the US, to explore a different environment. But only if I got scholarship. Then in Year 5 and Year 6 I found out that getting a scholarship to the US is quite hard. Cos I see a lot of seniors, the previous batch, also study here for four years, then go US. So we thought, ah, that should be the way. But actually no. Those guys are really good [academically] and they have the financial ability, so they can actually move on to the US. But a lot of my batch actually cannot, cos no finance, so if no scholarship then no choice, stay here. When I come to the end of Year 5, when I do research, I feel that actually very hard to get [a scholarship to go overseas]. And also must invest a lot in SATs, take SATs then every [US university] application costs 90 dollars. One of my friends who got a scholarship to the US, he applied for 17 schools. It means the fixed cost itself is a lot. Then if you don't get [accepted], then how? So I think there's no point. Singapore is already very good. You go to US and get a lower [ranked] school than Singapore also pointless. So I didn't apply at all."

(Phey, from Vietnam, SMU Accounting, 28 June 2014)

[24] By August 2014 in the data collection process, I had begun noticing a pattern in my life history interviews with informants. That is, informants who did not attain the conventional aspiration tended to explain their current trajectories, while those on the preferred track did not do so. I made a conscious decision to start asking some informants on the preferred track to explain their decision (Fieldnotes 27 August 2014:6).

In Extract (xiii), Phey begins with a chronological description of his decision-making process. This chronology might also be perceived as one that shows how his aspirations had to be negotiated and changed over time. He had to reshape his aspirations in Years Five and Six as he found out that it would be difficult to earn a scholarship that sponsored his overseas education (lines 12-17). Like Xavier in Extract (ix), Phey takes in Extract (xiii) the position that he would have preferred to go overseas, on the condition that he won a scholarship (lines 3-5). Crucially, Phey's account develops to include elements that appear to be a justification of his choice to remain in Singapore. We see this when Phey says "But a lot of my batch actually cannot, cos no finance" (lines 12-13), before going on to say why he did not apply to go overseas. In other words, what begins as a chronological narrative of events in response to my question in lines 1-2 shifts into a justification for why he did not go overseas. Also significant is how Phey's justification does not negatively evaluate the trajectory of heading to the US and UK. His critique of the track was about the costs of applications, not the track itself (lines 17-22). Instead, he defends Singapore's education system by stating that "Singapore is already very good" in terms of the education it offers (lines 22-23). We see the same shift from describing a sequence of events to a justification of his educational pathway in Bay's account in Extract (xiv).

Extract (xiv)

1	Luke:	Can you tell me when you started thinking about life
2		after the A Levels?
3	Bay:	One day after A Div [the inter-school football
4		competition that ended in May in Year Six], I had a
5		serious thought about it, I kind of listed out the pros
6		and cons, and talked to my parents, should I apply
7		overseas? They tell me it's up to me, they will support
8		me all the way. If I need the financial assistance they
9		will try to help me also. So after a while I decided to
10		not even apply overseas. I didn't even take SATs back
11		then. I just want to stay in Singapore, get another
12		scholarship, then get a bond and work here. I'll work
13		here, serve my bond first, then think and see how next
14		time. Because firstly, Singapore is accessible to
15		Vietnam. It's like 2 hours, 3 hours flight. If I want to
16		visit my parents, it's easy and it's less expensive
17		compared to anywhere else in the world. And
18		secondly, I'm used to Singapore already. After four
19		years I think I'm used to the transport system, the
20		weather, the people. So going away is another
21		environment I have to adapt to. And I'm not the type
22		of person who will adapt damn quickly to the
23		environment. I kind of chose the safe option to stay in

24 Singapore. And the important factor is the ease of
25 getting a scholarship. Cos if I go overseas, it's not like
26 I'll confirm get a scholarship. But staying in Singapore
27 is ok, as long as my results are good, it's fine."
(Bay, from Vietnam, NUS Engineering, 10 Sept 2014)

Bay begins by describing a sequence of events that included speaking with his parents (lines 3-14). Like Xavier [Extract (ix)], Bay raises in Extract (xiv) the issue of finances in this process (lines 8-9]. He uses "Because" (line 14) to mark a shift from the chronological description of events to his list of reasons for not heading overseas. Besides the availability of scholarships and a lack of finances mentioned by other informants, Bay talks about the proximity to his parents and family in Vietnam as a key factor in his decision. This is congruent with glimpses of social and emotional ties (as opposed to strictly mercenary concerns) produced in the accounts of Chang (Extract xi) and Wong (Extract xii). Also in line with how Xavier assessed Singapore as a "fall back" in [Extract (ix) line 22], Bay, in Extract (xiv), frames Singapore as a "safe option" (lines 23-24) where scholarships are more readily available (lines 24-26). Like Phey, he defends Singapore by saying that, "staying in Singapore is ok, as long as my results are good, it's fine" (lines 26-27).

Both Phey's and Bay's accounts thus include a notable discursive move where a description of events shifts into a justification of their educational pathways. It must also be emphasised that the accounts of justification instantiated by Phey in Extract (xiii) and Bay in Extract (xiv), are not solicited. While the development of the narrative is guided by my initial questioning, the shift from describing a sequence of events to justification of their resultant trajectory is not triggered by interaction with the interviewer, and is therefore more a reflexive action on my informants' part and less an emergent property from co-construction or contestation with the interlocutor (me). The fact is that all eight informants, who preferred the conventional aspiration but did not achieve it, independently produced similar discursive moves of justification. It offers compelling evidence that there must be some underlying factor structuring their narratives in such a way. I suggest that such a discursive move can be better apprehended when we consider other patterns in these accounts, when informants who deviated from the conventional aspiration told anecdotes of being questioned about their trajectories, and when informants who achieved the conventional aspiration did not produce such shifts in discourse.

5.5.2 Telling anecdotes of how others questioned their trajectory

In addition to the above forms of telling, three informants in life history interviews (Phey, Quentin and Chang) who did not achieve the conventional aspiration also told of how they were questioned by peers about their educational pathway in their current universities. The first example of such discourse is from Quentin [Extract (xv)]. He had recounted chronologically how he was to enrol in the School of Design and Engineering in NUS. Quentin's response included the excerpt below.

Extract (xv)

Then NUS people they have this stereotype, SDE [School of Design and Environment] people are the rejects. The A Level rejects. Like my A levels grades is 3 As and 2 Bs right, but their requirement is like 3 Bs and 2 Cs. Low requirement. So obviously those who cannot get into anything else they have to go there. Then for me it's like, I have a choice. I made the choice to go there. So they like, sometimes people just ask me, they always ask me the same question "oh are you from St Thomas'? Oh you are from St Thomas'? oh then why? Why did you go to SDE?" [laughs] I said I choose to go there, not because I have to go there.

(Quentin, from Vietnam, NUS Design and Environment, 25 Aug 2014)

The second example is from a focus group discussion with 11 members of the peer group that I was embedded in for my research. Prior to what occurred in Extract (xvi), we were discussing the issue of choosing universities, and how many students in St Thomas' seemed to have the same aspiration. Both Wayne and John are Singaporeans who remained in Singapore. John had previously revealed in the same discussion that he was unable to go overseas as he did not win a scholarship.

Extract (xvi)

Luke: So do you all agree that in St Thomas', amongst yourselves and your friends, you have this mindset of going overseas, or taking Law or Medicine?

Wayne: It's not what we think, it's what other people think. Like when I go for orientation all that, then other people, "eh? From St Thomas'? Why never go Law? Why you come SMU business?" I don't like. I just don't like.

John: Yeah like I'm the one of the very rare people in NUS Mechanical, rare St Thomas' guys. So they will be like "oh my god why are you here in Mechanical Engineering?" yeah things like that. Then they will ask "Your A levels fucked up?", then I, "No I got 5As", then

14 I don't want elaborate so much. But yeah it's partly like
15 you already got a good grade for A levels, so you are
16 thinking you want to try and use the good grades for A
17 Levels. Cos for me I have to go back to Mech Engine, so
18 like I go back to ground level again and I need to fight
19 again with the rest. If you already got a good grade for A
20 levels why don't you get a better course? So you sort of
21 start ahead of the rest, continue being ahead. Yeah, but
22 after some time, I one year inside already, I also like used
23 to it lah.

(Discussion with peer group, 3 Aug 2014)

The contexts in which Quentin, and Wayne and John told their anecdotes (of how peers questioned their choice of trajectory) are actually different. Quentin told the anecdote while recounting his experience in NUS, while Wayne's and John's anecdotes were told in order to demonstrate Wayne's point that "other people" [Extract (xvi) lines 4-5) seem to have a certain presumption about graduates from St Thomas'. Despite these differences in context, it does show that at least five informants who deviated from the conventional aspiration (three from life history interviews and two from the peer group discussion) shared these experiences of having to justify their trajectory to others[25].

For Quentin, Wayne and John, the basis for why they were asked these questions is the same – their status as graduates of St Thomas' and a perceived mismatch with their current educational trajectory. This is seen in the foregrounding of and explicit reference to St Thomas' when they recounted the questions that were posed to them. All three anecdotes were told through a shift into performance, when the questioning by their peers were dramatised. In Extract (xv) line 8, Quentin's account of the anecdote begins with "oh you are from St Thomas'?" Also, Wayne's recollection of the question starts with "eh? From St Thomas' ah?" [Extract (xvi) line 6]. In the same way, John begins his anecdote by foregrounding how he is one of the "rare" people in NUS Mechanical Engineering who had graduated from St Thomas' [Extract (xvi) lines 9-10], before saying how it leads to questioning by his peers i.e. "So they will be like, 'oh my god why are you here in Mechanical Engineering?'" (lines 10-12). Quentin, Wayne and John hence clearly associate their status as graduates of St Thomas' with these experiences of being questioned about their trajectories.

[25] My informants' accounts of having their trajectory questioned resonated with me during the data collection process. I, too, remained in Singapore for my undergraduate studies after my A Levels, choosing to enrol in NUS' Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and was asked the same questions by some peers.

In contrast, when speaking with the 10 informants who went to the US and UK, and the one individual who studied Law locally, any explanation for why they did so was not voluntarily forthcoming.

5.5.3 Absence of explanation for those who achieved the conventional aspiration

I was only able to gain the information by deciding to explicitly ask for it with six informants. An example is Andy's response in Extract (xvii). In the preceding three minutes, Andy was describing in chronological fashion how he decided to read Engineering in UCL, leading up to this point in the conversation. Note also the same conventional aspiration he described as being prevalent amongst his peers in St Thomas' (lines 3-14).

Extract (xvii)

1	Luke:	How did your aspirations compare with your friends
2		in school?
3	Andy:	Most of my friends would try to go overseas. Like
4		Henry and Gin, both of them are very interested in
5		going to the US. Somehow they ended up in Singapore,
6		I'm not really sure why, maybe because they didn't get
7		enough of financial aid. For the Singaporeans, during
8		lunch and stuff we actually talk, and they said they
9		want to go to the US mostly. And some of them they'd
10		try to go to Oxbridge. Like XXX, he went to Brown, and
11		some of my friends in my class, mostly they went to
12		the US. I think many of them aspire to go abroad,
13		instead of staying in Singapore, like about one third of
14		the class maybe.
15	Luke:	So why did you think so many, like you, thought in the
16		same way?
17	Andy:	I think firstly, because of the [university] ranking? So
18		even though NUS is ranked quite high, and NTU[26] as
19		well, most of the top in the ranking table are from US
20		or UK. So many of them want to go to the US to have
21		better education, in the sense of ranking. I think it's
22		the most obvious factor. And then secondly, because
23		when you hear your seniors and the older people, they
24		say studying in the US is better, they teach a lot of stuff
25		and the life there, then you feel an aspiration to
26		experience those kind of things as well. So it's about
27		hearing the experience, and you yourself wanting to
28		feel the same thing and experience the same thing.
29		And then thirdly I think is about experiencing another

[26] NUS is ranked 22nd in the world and 1st in Asia in the 2014/15 QS rankings (QS website). NTU is ranked 39th in the world and 4th in Asia in the 2014/15 QS rankings (QS website).

30 culture abroad. I think because travelling abroad and
31 living by yourself independently, it's kind of a symbol
32 to show that you are a grownup, and you can take care
33 of yourself and be independent. You don't need your
34 parents to cook for you and those kind of thing.

(Andy, from Vietnam, UCL, 3 Sept 2014)

Andy responds to my question by referring to Henry and Gin first (line 4) as examples of "most" of his friends (line 3), both of whom are Vietnamese scholars like himself. He then shifts his description to "Singaporeans" (line 7). It is only on further prompting (lines 15-16) that Andy gives reasons for why students in St Thomas' conventionally want to go overseas.

We can perhaps begin to understand these patterns in my informants' accounts when we consider them as related rather than disparate features. Amongst informants who did not attain the conventional aspiration, informants produced a discursive shift from narrating a sequence of events to justifying their resultant educational pathway. Within this same set of informants, individuals also told anecdotes that they had to justify their trajectory to others because of their status as graduates from St Thomas'. On the other hand, all informants who went overseas and the one who read Law locally did not explain the rationale for their decision unless I asked them explicitly. The reasons for conforming to the conventionally-aspired track seem to be taken for granted, without need for justification.

This difference might be attributed to the fact that I am an insider of St Thomas', since my informants know that I was both a former student and teacher there. It could be that informants on the conventionally-aspired track assumed that I would know why they chose that path, and saw no need to tell me. But this is insufficient to explain why informants who did not achieve the conventional aspiration consistently felt compelled to justify their decision, or told anecdotes of having to justify it to others.

It is not unreasonable to infer that my informants' discourse of justification reflects an expectation that they ought to conform to the conventional aspiration in St Thomas' School. There is a certain normativity associated with this track, against which their life choices are perceived to be judged. This is partially validated by Extract (xvi) (lines 4-5), when Wayne specifically states that, "it's not what we think, it's what other people think." This perception (that they are being judged) does not necessarily emanate from

interaction with me, and is perhaps conditioned by a combination of other social experiences (such as Quentin's, Wayne's and John's when questioned by their peers). It is this perception that produces the discourse of justification or anecdotes of justification seen in Extracts (xiii), (xiv), (xv) and (xvi).

The discursive move can also be an indication that the attainment of the conventional track has become associated by informants with the ethos of ability amongst students from St Thomas'. In other words, the conventional trajectory has become a marker of a graduate of St Thomas' and conflated with academic ability; not embarking on the conventional track carries the risk of being seen as academically inadequate. If it is so rare and difficult for students to admit their lack of ability (as surmised previously), then it might also follow that they would defend their academic ability when it has been perceived to be diminished. It would therefore make sense for informants who did not attain the conventional trajectory to volunteer justifications, without provocation, for remaining in Singapore. The discursive move – shifting from chronological description to justification (eg it is not because of poor grades but a lack of money) – can then be construed as an instinctive defensive manouvre that preserves their image and identity as academic high achievers. Accordingly, this might explain why my informants' anecdotes of justification are also often accompanied by bald statements of their actual A Level grades [eg Quentin in Extract (xv) line 3; John in Extract (xvi) line 13].

My informants' positioning toward the conventional aspiration in St Thomas' is thus not only a preferred option for 19 out of 20 of them. For informants who have not attained it, the trajectory of heading to the US/UK or to read Medicine/Law locally is also a pathway that they feel an expectation to conform to. Insofar as such positioning with regard to their trajectory is consistently and independently produced across 20 individual informants in interviews, and in discussion with the peer group, I suggest that this patterned discourse demonstrates links to my informants' position as graduates of St Thomas' and academic elites. The ethos of ability in St Thomas' and the normalisation of particular educational pathways provide the conditions that structure my informants' talk about their aspirations and resultant trajectories. It shows one way in which their migratory aspirations and actual trajectories are not entirely deterritorialised, but linked to local socialisation processes.

5.6 Friction and signs of en-territorialisation in my informants' talk

This chapter seeks to understand my informants' migratory moves by contextualising their accounts of aspirations and trajectories in the local educational context of Singapore, particularly St Thomas' School. I aim to respond to literature that have described global migratory flows of cosmopolitan elites as frictionless, deterritorialised and motivated by economic logic. In examining interview data by my informants, I was guided by the following questions:

a) Do my informants share the same dispositions and values with regard to academic ability, and in relation to it, particular educational pathways? Do all informants aspire to and take up the trajectories normalised by the school?
b) How might their talk about aspirations and trajectories be linked to their socialisation into local educational contexts?
c) How might variations (if any) in their uptake of normalised aspirations and trajectories point to careerist or non-economic considerations?
d) What struggles and barriers to transnational moves – which might be construed as 'frictions' – do they encounter in their educational trajectories?

In analysing the interview data, I made these empirical observations:

1. Moving to the US and UK for university, or studying Medicine and Law locally are reported by all informants to be conventional aspirations amongst students in St Thomas'. These aspirations are aligned with the educational pathways that St Thomas' predominantly prepares its students for. Nonetheless, there are differences and nuances in the way informants took up the aspiration. Students of lower academic ability might be less likely to adopt it. For example, Seng's account [in Extract (iv)] showed that differences in academic ability might be linked to how students took up the aspiration of going overseas. His lack of confidence in passing the A Levels meant that he did not even apply to overseas universities in Years Five and Six. There are also broad divisions in terms of nationality. The aspiration to attend universities in the US or UK is applicable to both Singaporeans and immigrants, while the option of reading Medicine or Law locally applied mostly to Singaporeans.

2. 19 out of 20 informants positioned themselves as preferring the conventional track, though eight of them reported having to negotiate and change their desires in the face of overarching structures, in particular the lack of finances. Despite this prevalent narrative, there are exceptions and glimpses of resistance. While acknowledging the value of an education in Cambridge, Chang [in Extract (xi)] rejected the university's offer to pursue her interest in local Chinese Orchestral music. Wong [in Extract (xii)] revealed his affiliation to the peer group as a reason for why he did not want to move abroad, even though he did eventually attend Carnegie Mellon.
3. There was a distinctive discursive move of justification present in the accounts of informants who did not embark on the conventional trajectory. I argue that this is linked to my informants' position as graduates from St Thomas'. Informants perceive an expectation that they ought to conform to the conventional track, which might also be conflated with high academic ability (due to the ethos of ability in St Thomas'). Informants who did not embark on the track thus feel a compulsion to explain themselves and defend their academic ability.

These observations present a picture of how elite individuals such as my informants talked about and positioned themselves in relation to their aspirations and trajectories. I suggest some ways in which my findings might relate to existing migration literature that seek to understand them.

5.6.1 Responding to notions of frictionless, deterritorialised, dispassionate moves

Broadly, my informants' accounts do reflect the circulating discourses in St Thomas' and iterations of frictionless mobility. They tend to position themselves as favouring international mobility to the US and UK (as opposed to remaining in Singapore), and with the concomitant academic ability to gain a place in universities there. Informants seldom talked about a reluctance to engage in transnational migration. Instead, they talked about it as a conventional trajectory amongst their peers in St Thomas', and something that they themselves would readily take up. However, there are nuanced differences and variations in the way some individuals took up and positioned themselves to the conventional track.

First, my informants are not always concerned about the economics in migration, even if they often reported money as a main structural barrier. They show glimpses of personal interest and valuation of social relationships. My informants are thus individuals who have ties to the local via their own interests (ie Chang's pursuit of music) and their friends (ie Wong's affiliation to his peer group), hardly the dispassionate and deterritorialised people often described in the literature. These nuances therefore support Yeoh and Huang's (2011:684) view that migratory moves ought to be understood as negotiated moves in the social-cultural-political context of a place and "operative at family-community-country scales".

Second, mobility is not necessarily 'frictionless' and 'easy' for all cosmopolitan elites all the time. Besides the main structural barrier to transnational moves being reported as the lack of money (corroborated by Yang 2016a), Seng's account [in Extracts (iii) and (iv)] suggests that even academically elite students attending one of the best schools in the nation can face struggles and difficulties in academic performance, that in turn affect how they are able to move abroad.

Third, understanding mobility through the lens of 'friction' appears rather inadequate to characterise the context of my informants in St Thomas' School. Rather than transnational mobility being frictionless in the sense of lacking resistance to movement, my informants' aspirations to be mobile and actual embarkation overseas actually emerges from intense struggles during schooling. Global mobility is itself part of a very specific normative institutional ideology in St Thomas' School, which links mobility to academic ability. Students in St Thomas' experience tensions within this local institution if they do not do well in school, and if they do not profess transnational aspirations. Transnational mobility thus emerges from attempts to escape the embarrassment or shame of potential academic failure. It emerges from intense efforts and struggles during the process of study, which they may in the end portray as effortless, though the pressures of not attaining it are tangible in the interviews (cf my informants' discursive shifts to explain why they remained in Singapore). It might be said that students in St Thomas' are *pressured* or *hothoused* into transnational mobility. In this context, 'friction/frictionless' seems inadequate as a term of description, because it cannot quite capture the pressures they experience in engaging with mobility, even as their privileged rhetoric often includes the portrayal of eventual academic successes.

This leads me to consider the notion of deterritorialisation in migration studies that suggests a weakening of ties between the individual and local places. This is to an extent true for my informants who aspire to attend universities outside of Singapore. However, my informants' migratory aspirations are also shaped by and hence linked to the local school they attended. In other words, their transnational trajectory is in part due to *en*-territorialisation – being socialised into local ways of thinking and acting while being embedded in the institutional ideologies and practices of St Thomas' School. I argued above that their accounts of aspirations and trajectories are linked to their socialisation into St Thomas' ethos of academic ability and conventionalisation of a certain trajectory. The result is of individuals who undertake patterned educational pathways to the US and UK, or to read Law and Medicine in Singapore, commensurate with rather similar ways of speaking about these tracks. In line with Glick Schiller and Salazar's (2013) proposition, my informants' migratory moves may be better understood as a 'regime of mobility'. That is, their moves are structured and conditioned at institutional and national levels (ie St Thomas' in an elitist education system), with ties to the sociopolitical space in Singapore (Yeoh and Huang 2011). In this way, aspects of de-territorialisation (ie engaging in transnational mobility) and en-territorialisation (ie being socialised into local ways of behaving) that an individual portrays need not be mutually exclusive nor contradictory. Indeed, the data presented in this chapter suggests that the two can be intricately linked.

Having looked at how my informants' aspirations and trajectories might be linked to the local educational context, the next chapter will argue for another set of circumstances that seek to demonstrate my informants' en-territorialisation to the local. Moving away from the school, I focus on the national strategy of retaining talented citizens in Singapore through undergraduate scholarships. The next chapter might also be seen as a continuation of a line of investigation uncovered in the current chapter, where informants' aspirations are broadly divided by whether they are Singapore citizens or more recent immigrants. A key thread that I examine next is whether and how the state's differentiation of migrant status amongst academically elite students (through state scholarships) is reproduced amongst informants.

Chapter Six: State scholarships and en-territorialisation

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter is a response to literature that described migratory flows as frictionless, deterritorialised and dispassionate. I showed how there are variations showing glimpses of friction and personal interests in my informants' talk about their aspirations and trajectories. Their transnational aspirations and trajectories are argued to be conditioned by and linked to the local institution that is St Thomas' School. In this context, 'friction' as a term of description appears inadequate to describe the pressures experienced by academically elite students to conform to transnational trajectories. Such a process might be better apprehended as one of en-territorialisation.

This chapter continues to interrogate the notion of cosmopolitan elites being deterritorialised in their trajectories, and also considers how en-territorialisation as a term might have traction in the context of state scholarships. I have already discussed the Singapore state's rationale for recruiting immigrant students from neighbouring countries. Singapore's need to augment its population has been widely described (Yeoh 2007, Yeoh and Yap 2008), and the government has shaped its education policies in such a way as to retain local talent whilst attracting students from the East and Southeast Asian region (Gopinathan and Lee 2011). In Chapter Four, I addressed how state scholarships are a key institutional structure of attracting and retaining talent, and which my informants navigate when entering and leaving St Thomas' School. It is therefore apt to look at the ways in which my informants positioned themselves to such statist policies that seek to tie them to the local.

In this respect, I now focus on one type of scholarship that the Singapore state utilises to retain academically elite students in its local talent pool. The state provides undergraduate scholarships that are concurrent with a moral formulation of *noblesse oblige* in schools. These scholarships come with a contractual bond that ties individuals to the civil service, and are contiguous with a political economy that guarantees selected individuals (ie government scholars) a career for life in the government. However, these scholarships are only made available to Singapore citizens. The state's policy of prestigious scholarships thus seeks to tie talented individuals to the nation, but also

imposes a differentiation amongst academically elite students based on their migrant status.

This chapter is organised in the following manner. Pertaining to the policy of retaining Singaporean talent, I first address how the state's elaborate scheme of government scholarships offered to citizens has a moralistic dimension of service to the nation. This is developed through state rhetoric via the national press, as well as the school curriculum (as we have already seen in St Thomas' School). Academic ability is thus imbued with a sense of *noblesse oblige*. This moralistic dimension is coupled with real economic capital, as individuals who attain government scholarships are rewarded with life-long careers in the civil service. I examine data from life history interviews and focus group discussions when informants spoke about these scholarships in their aspirations and trajectories. This is in order to investigate whether and how the state's discourse and differentiation of academic elites regarding the scholarships is reflected in my informants' talk. I uncover that citizen and immigrant informants position themselves differently to these scholarships. In particular, Singaporean informants produced accounts that portrayed aspirations of moving abroad for university education. Yet, these aspirations are also aligned with, not opposed to the idea of returning to Singapore, and are commensurate with the state's strategy of tying them to the local through contractual bonds. Their alignment with the scholarship system can be explained when I consider how the Singapore state has constructed a nationalistic regime (available only to citizens) linking an elitist education system via scholarships to the local sphere of social and political power. My informants' transnational mobilities must be understood against the backdrop of such a political economy in localised settings.

Further to Chapter Five's findings that their talk about aspirations are linked to their socialisation into St Thomas', this chapter thus suggests that my informants show another sign of en-territorialisation through the nationalistic scholarship regime in Singapore. The discussion further complicates and adds to the notion that cosmopolitan elites are often rootless and deterritorialised when engaging in transmigration. The focus of this chapter is not to evaluate the efficacy of state strategies at rooting talented individuals to the nation. Rather, it is to present how academically elite individuals like my informants respond and position themselves in relation to these state policies that ostensibly impinge upon their transnational aspirations and trajectories.

6.2 The state's strategy of tying citizens to the local

Ng (2013:280-281) opines 'the global war for talent' as a competition amongst economies coping with the effects of globalisation, where the emergence of a 'global meritocracy' (Axelrod et al 2001, Brown and Tannock 2009) has coincided with increasingly permeable geographic and cultural borders, as well as the willingness of people to migrate. The attraction and retention of talent is therefore seen by governments as a strategic approach to address these challenges of a globalising economic system.

In Singapore's case, the state tries to manage citizens who are academically elite students by tying these individuals to Singapore and hence restricting their trajectories. One manifestation of such a policy is scholarships sponsored by the government, and which involve contractual bonds that scholars have to serve upon completion of their studies.

These scholarships are only eligible to Singapore citizens, and are a matter of intense competition and prestige, with links to attaining the highest echelons of power in Singapore. Scholarships that sponsor education in local universities are generally of lower value and lower prestige than those that enable overseas education (K. P. Tan 2008:17). Local scholarships have a 4-year bond, while overseas scholarships have a 6-year bond. The possible career pathways tied to each form of scholarship is also co-related to the value and prestige of the scholarship. An example of the most prestigious award is the President's Scholarship and Singapore Armed Forces Overseas Scholarship (SAFOS). Scholars returning from overseas universities[1] are rewarded with higher pay (even if they were in the same job as non-scholars) and often fast-tracked into key civil service positions compared to their contemporaries on local scholarships or non-scholars. Those in key civil service positions are in turn often co-opted into the ruling People's Action Party and future Members of Parliament. Of the 18 MPs in Singapore's

[1] On a side note, personal anecdotes suggest that the state seems to have cut deals with top foreign universities so that Singapore government scholars are guaranteed places in these institutions outside of formal application procedures. This is somewhat corroborated by a former A*Star scholar's blog that accused A*Star of signing back-door agreements with overseas universities to take in scholars without going through the formal application procedure (K. P. Tan 2008:18). Philip Yeo, then chairman of A*Star, responded with threat of legal action, stating that the statements made in the blog would have been understood to mean that A*Star had acted corruptly in its dealings with universities. The statements also cast serious aspersions on A*Star's scholars to the effect that they were not admitted to their universities on merit but only because their universities were bribed by A*Star to do so. The blogger chose to shut down his entire blog-site. All posts were removed voluntarily, and replaced with an unreserved apology to "A*STAR, its chairman Mr. Philip Yeo, and its executive officers for the distress and embarrassment" caused.

cabinet in 2014, nine of them were awarded government scholarships, out of whom eight were President's or SAFOS scholars or both.

6.2.1 The reward of state scholarships

Many Singaporeans apply for scholarships, not because they cannot afford to study in local or overseas institutions, but simply because of the prestige and career prospects that come with these awards. There are innumerable examples of the children of prominent political leaders and top civil servants who are also scholarship holders[2].

K. P. Tan (2008) gives a similar overview of such scholarships:

> "Through a very thorough process of high-powered interviews and written tests, scholars with the 'right' thinking, attitude, and character are selected from a pool of candidates with top examination results and notable extracurricular achievements. These scholarships are among the most tangible of meritocratic instruments in Singapore. The most prestigious scholars pursue degrees in well-known overseas universities and their subsequent contribution to society is secured mainly through a legal-contractual obligation (known as a 'bond') to work in a public-sector body... The government is expected to provide scholars who have returned with rewarding and challenging careers, particularly in the elite Administrative Service."
>
> (K. P. Tan 2008:17)

It is then important to note that the civil service is the largest employer in Singapore (Yong 2016), with employees largely guaranteed a job for life unless one engages in criminal activity. Barr (2006) provides much detail about the Scholarship system, which I reproduce here.

> "In essence it is a system that feeds people through a high-pressure, streamed national schools system that is dominated by exams, private tuition and rote learning from kindergarten to matriculation… most of the successful candidates pass through a handful of elite schools that add strong elements of both service and conceit to that recipe. The male students do

[2] Some examples: Lee Hsien Loong, the current Prime Minister and son of Lee Kuan Yew, was a President and SAF overseas scholar. His son was also awarded the SAFOS. The son of Walter Woon, the former Attorney General, was awarded an overseas scholarship.

their National Service (NS) and those with excellent matriculation grades are herded into a "scholars' platoon" (interview with Zulkifli Bahar- udin, Singapore, 26 March 2003) where they do officer training and are considered for SAF Scholarships (interview, Singapore, 28 March 2003). By the time the men have finished 2.5 years of NS, the brightest of the cohort – including the women who have not done NS – will have been offered bonded scholarships by one or other of the arms of government to study at a top foreign university, whereupon they will return to Singapore to serve out their bond for their employer. As junior members of the elite in their chosen bureaucracy, they join the clubs of the elite (Alpha Society for Administrative Officers, Temasek Society for senior SAF officers), attend the Civil Service College or the SAF Training Institute, and pass through more courses, tests and extensive bonding sessions. They are also initiated into an exclusive world of wealth, privilege and social esteem from which it would be difficult to walk away. The most promising performers in the Administrative Service are funnelled through one or several of the six most powerful ministries that make up the inner core of the system (Prime Minister's Office, Defence, Education, Trade and Industry, Finance, and Home Affairs)… Since the early 1980s there has also been an extensive amount of crossover from the SAF to the Administrative Service, statutory boards and Government-Linked Companies under a "dual career scheme", so a common culture has developed in which the distinction between the SAF officers and the Administrative Officers is often moot (interview with Bilahari Kausikan, Singapore, 15 April 2003; Huxley, 2000, p. 232; Worthington, 2003, pp. 23– 24). In 1993, dual-career SAF officers made up 10 per cent of the Administrative Service (Huxley, 2000, p. 232)."

(Barr 2006:7-8)

6.2.2 The moral dimension of state scholarships

The scholarship programme is itself an extension of the elitist education regime I described in Chapter Four. As observed by Koh and Kenway (2012:340-341), such state-sponsored elite formation runs parallel with curricula in elite schools like St Thomas'. Described in the previous chapter, the ethos of noblesse oblige is pedagogised in St Thomas' via the school's Character and Leadership programme (see Chapter Five

pp. 100). This is why Koh and Kenway (2012) argue that St Thomas' globalist outlook is developed largely for the national interest, where students are inculcated with a sense that their academic ability entails service to the nation.

This sense of noblesse oblige is also clearly seen in state scholarships. More than a legally binding contract, the scholarship bond is imputed with certain moral responsibilities in state discourse and policy implementation. In an open letter to the public in 2009, Eddie Teo, Chairman of the Public Service Commission listed two primary qualities that scholarship candidates ought to have, in addition to their academic achievements:

> "First and foremost, we look for the integrity of the candidate. Integrity is vital because while pragmatism may be a key concept for governance in Singapore, it is dangerous to have Singapore governed by public servants who are unprincipled pragmatists…
>
> The second most important quality is commitment. An 18-year old can have an interest in a public service career, but it is almost impossible to get a fix on his commitment to the Public Service or loyalty to Singapore because he has not yet started work."
>
> (Eddie Teo 2009)

As Singapore's future leaders, scholars are thus expected to have the moral responsibility and integrity to honor their contracts. While a scholarship brings opportunity, honor, and prestige to the recipient, terminating (or "breaking") a bond, the government believes, should bring dishonor and shame, beyond the straightforward requirement of paying damages for non-performance. What this implies is that even if a scholarship-holder pays off the contractual damages in lieu of serving the bond, as would be legally required, he/she would still be perceived by state discourse as 'breaking' one's bond and having committed an immoral act.

K. P. Tan (2008) provides the example of Hector Yee, a government scholar and undergraduate in 1998, who wanted to break his bond by paying damages because he believed he could not, in his own words, "deprive the world of the potential benefits that can be derived from my research" (K. P. Tan 2008:18). Philip Yeo, then-chairman of the Economic Development Board, decided in response to publicly shame bond-breakers by publishing their names in local newspapers. The argument provided by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the time, and generally agreed upon by the public,

was that "scholarships are not academic prizes, education bursaries, or general education subsidies. They are instead public funds spent on training promising Singaporeans to take up leadership or specialist roles in the public sector" (K. P. Tan 2008:18). Besides the ignominy of potentially being shamed in public, "bond breakers" are also blacklisted by the civil service (the largest employer in Singapore) and all government-linked corporations, so that they may not gain employment in these organisations. The only possibility of employment in Singapore for them is the private sector. There is hence a long history in Singapore of shaming scholars who have not lived up to the moral standards expected of them through identification in local mainstream media. The Ministry of Education itself has had to respond to periodic calls from members of the public about tightening selection procedures to ensure only persons of the right character are awarded scholarships (Ministry of Education 2010).

Having been socialised into these public and pedagogic discourses, students from St Thomas' (both citizen and immigrant) are well aware of both the economic rewards and moral dimension that comes with taking up these state scholarships. Let us now examine whether, how and which of my informants align themselves with these discourses, as well as how their alignments (or lack thereof) might relate to notions of friction and deterritorialisation.

Recall the preliminary broad research questions (first formulated in Chapter Two):

1. How are their cultural identities and sociolinguistic practices linked to their aspirations, trajectories, and wider circulating discourses in the local context of Singapore?
2. In what ways does an investigation of these links complicate and contribute to theorisations of cosmopolitan elites by academics and conceptualisations of such people by governments?

Applying them to the context of state scholarships, RQ1 translates into:

a) What attitudes and dispositions do my informants have toward state undergraduate scholarships? Whether and how do these positionings in talk reflect state discourses on *noblesse oblige*?
b) What are the differences and similarities in their positionings?
c) How might their positionings be linked to their aspirations, trajectories and the local context?

RQ2 translates into

d) How might these findings better inform us about notions of friction and deterritorialisation/en-territorialisation in the mobilities of elite migrants?

Let us now seek to answer these questions via the data.

6.3 Talk about state scholarships

As discussed in the previous section, the state scholarships that facilitate the formation of the political elite in Singapore is only targeted at citizens. This is not to say that immigrants are not aware of these policies and associated discourses. I investigate how all my informants evaluated or positioned themselves toward these state-sponsored scholarships in life history interviews and focus group discussions in their peer group. In examining the data, not all informants actually talked about these state scholarships as part of their aspirations and trajectories. Amongst 20 informants in life history interviews (two Singaporeans and 18 immigrants), four discussed how they considered and applied for these scholarships, while the rest made no mention of these scholarships at all. Within the peer group of two Vietnamese and nine Singaporeans, seven out of 11 stated that they considered these scholarships (with five applying), while four stated that they did not contemplate these scholarships at all. The table below summarises these findings.

Table 6.1: Summary of informants' talk about trajectories and scholarships

Informant * indicates individuals who are also part of the peer group discussion. ( ) indicates country of origin.	**S'pore citizen at point of leaving St Thomas'?**	**Did informant mention moving to the US/UK?**	**Did informant mention reading Medicine/Law in Singapore?**	**Did informant mention state scholarships sponsoring overseas education?**	**Did informant apply for state scholarships sponsoring overseas education?**	**Was informant successful in application for state scholarships sponsoring overseas education?**
Life History Interviews						
Andy (Vietnam)	No	Yes	No	No	No	-
Bay* (Vietnam)	No	Yes	No	No	No	-
Cassandra (Taiwan)	No	Yes	No	No	No	-
Chang (China)	No	Yes	No	No	No	-
Dong (China)	No	Yes	No	No	No	-
Fang (China)	No	Yes	No	No	No	-
Felicia (China)	No	Yes	No	No	No	-
Gabriel (S'pore)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gin (Vietnam)	No	Yes	No	No	No	-
Hans (Saipan)	No	Yes	No	No	No	-
Henry (Vietnam)	No	Yes	No	No	No	-
Ling (China)	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Ming (China)	No	Yes	No	No	No	-
Phey* (Vietnam)	No	Yes	No	No	No	-
Quentin (Vietnam)	No	Yes	No	No	No	-
Seng* (S'pore)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Vas (India)	No	Yes	No	No	No	-
Xavier (China)	No	Yes	No	No	No	-
Yang (China)	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Ying (China)	No	Yes	No	No	No	-
Peer Group Discussion						
Adam (S'pore)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
John (S'pore)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Kendrick (S'pore)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Pang (S'pore)	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	-
Siew (S'pore)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	-
Wayne (S'pore)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Wong (China)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Zing (S'pore)	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	-

I thus uncover that there are two groupings amongst my informants. Those who are Singapore citizens at the point of graduating from St Thomas' tended to include the state scholarships when talking about their aspirations and trajectories, while informants who were not citizens tended not to do so. We already know from Chapter Five that not all Singaporean informants aspired to transnational migration in their educational pathway. Part of the conventional route amongst Singaporean students in St Thomas' was to remain in Singapore to read Medicine or Law. Pang and Zing are examples of such individuals who stated that they did not want to move abroad, and made no moves to do so. Pang, Zing and Siew were the only Singaporean informants (out of 10 in both life history interviews and peer group discussion) who did not apply for these state scholarships at all. Pang and Zing are reading Medicine, while Siew is reading Law.

On the other hand, Yang and Ling are the only two out of 18 immigrant informants who mentioned the scholarships as part of their aspirations, and explicitly stated that they wanted to attain them. Such a distinction between Singaporean and immigrant informants (with the exception of Yang and Ling)[3] in my data parallels the divergent aspirations and trajectories between the two groups addressed in Chapter Five[4]. The evidence here further demonstrates how the state's differentiation of citizenship/migrant status is reflected in two different strands of aspirations and educational pathways undertaken by my informants (ie 7 out of 10 Singaporean informants applied for the scholarships while only 2 out of 18 immigrant informants did so).

Let us now focus on how these informants who included the state scholarships as part of their aspirations talked about these scholarships.

6.3.1 A lack of resentment about returning to Singapore

As the table shows, the majority of Singaporean informants aspired to go overseas. But do these informants express a desire to be peripatetic as the literature on cosmopolitan elites suggest? If open-ended transnational mobility were a pre-eminent goal amongst informants who did aspire to go abroad, we would have expected to see some form of rejection of these scholarships. At the very least, informants who took up these

[3] Yang's and Ling's cases will be examined later.
[4] The conventional aspiration in St Thomas' described by informants suggested that immigrant informants tended to want to go overseas, and only remained in Singapore as a secondary option. Singaporean students had the same desire to go abroad, or to remain in Singapore to read Medicine or Law.

scholarships would express some resentment at having their potential trajectories curtailed and having to return to Singapore. Yet, amongst eight Singaporean informants who considered going abroad, seven applied for sponsorship by the state. If we include Yang and Ling amongst informants who aspired to attain these state scholarships, none stated any explicit misgivings about the bond. Amongst the four informants who were awarded a scholarship, none expressed any sort of resentment that they were expected to return to Singapore.

To illustrate this lack of resentment, I provide examples of accounts by Gabriel and Seng in life history interviews. In this segment of the interview, both informants had already described their aspirations while in St Thomas', and were now giving an account of what they did in order to fulfill these aspirations.

Extract (i)

1 Luke: When did you decide on the scholarships?
2 Gabriel: I can't remember when I applied, but the option first came
3 about when, I think they sent out an email to those who did
4 relatively better in school.
5 Luke: You mean the school?
6 Gabriel: It was PSC through the school I think, so yeah I considered
7 that. And then, for me, I didn't see myself living overseas or like
8 staying permanently working overseas, so I thought that this is
9 a viable option. And civil service, I guess, the impression is more
10 of a stable routine, which I also don't mind. I prefer a more
11 stable job.

(Interview with Gabriel, 24 June 2014)

In Extract (i) of Chapter Five (pp. 113), Gabriel had said how he wanted to go to an overseas university as it was what everyone else in St Thomas' was doing. Here, Gabriel suggests some reasons why he applied for the PSC scholarship. In lines 7-8, he states that he does not see himself "staying permanently working overseas". The implication is that he was fine with studying overseas for a few years, but that he eventually wanted to return to Singapore. He describes the scholarship as a "viable option" (line 9), before further elaborating that he did not mind the career stability entailed by the scholarship (ie "stable routine"; "I prefer a more stable job" lines 10-11).

Recall that Seng never thought of applying to overseas universities while in St Thomas' as his results in school were not good enough [Extracts (iii) and (iv) in Chapter Five pp.115-116]. Even as he applied for scholarships, his aspiration was always to remain in

Singapore. In Extract (ii) below, he describes the process of his scholarship application after leaving St Thomas'.

Extract (ii)

1 Luke: So how did you apply for the scholarships?
2 Seng: I got my A level results in March, I didn't want to go overseas. I
3 wanted to stay local, cos I'm very homely, and to be honest,
4 I'm not the kind who will step out of my comfort zone. So in
5 the SIA[5] one especially, I didn't indicate local or overseas cos
6 there was no option. Interview also never ask. They just asked
7 me what I want to study. Then after that when I got the email,
8 overseas? Eh overseas! And me not wanting to go overseas is
9 not a logical and practical decision, which is I want to stay
10 cos I like my friends and I want to be with my friends. That's
11 not a good reason to reject an overseas scholarship. And it's like,
12 you don't know what kind of regrets you'll have in your life next
13 time. I could have gone overseas for four years but I decided to
14 stay local because I'd miss my friends and I didn't want to step
15 out of my comfort zone. It's not a very good reason.

(Interview with Seng, 1 Aug 2014)

Seng begins by providing the context of his scholarship applications. He had done rather well for the A Levels (he had revealed his actual results before this), but still did not want to go overseas because he is "very homely" and "not the kind who will step out of my comfort zone" (lines 3-4). Yet, when he was offered one, the "logical and practical decision" was to value the opportunity of studying abroad over being with his friends (lines 8-10). While this might suggest that Seng was in effect abandoning his friends via careerist logic, Seng does imply that he will only be away for four years (line 13). That is, he will return as required by the contractual bond. Like Gabriel in Extract (i), Seng does not express any resentment or reluctance regarding the prospect of return, even though he had the opportunity to do so in the interview. Moreover, both Gabriel and Seng formulate their reasons for staying in Singapore as the antithesis of being 'peripatetic', in terms of "stability" [Extract (i) lines 10-11] and being "homely" or "comfortable" [Extract (ii) lines 3-4].

We see a similar account in the focus group discussion in Extract (iii), when informants on an overseas scholarship did not object to the prospect of returning to Singapore. Adam and Wong had accepted their scholarships and were due to leave Singapore in a matter of weeks. Pang and Zing were reading Medicine locally.

[5] A government-linked corporation. That is, a private company owned by the Singapore government's investment arm.

Extract (iii)

1 Luke: Those who are going overseas, are you all coming
2 back?
3 Pang: All bonded by scholarship what.
4 Wong: Even if I'm not bonded by scholarship I'll also come
5 back.
6 Luke: What if somebody offers to buy out your scholarship?
7 ((Adam nods his head with lower lip slightly protruding))
8 Zing: Adam is tempted
9 Adam: Because as in, I'm open to living overseas and working
10 overseas. One thing that attracted me to my
11 scholarship is that I get a chance to live and work
12 overseas. So I'm ok with working overseas for a
13 few years not because I don't like Singapore but
14 because I feel that I've been too comfortable in
15 Singapore my whole life. Ever since you get to St
16 Thomas', everything is set for you, you have a certain
17 track to go, you meet people of a similar background.
18 So I knew from when I was in Year Five Year Six that I
19 want to study overseas and I knew that I'd be
20 ok to live overseas and work there for a few years.
21 And I'm quite sure that I'll come back eventually.
22 I'm very sure that I'll start a family in Singapore and
23 live in Singapore for the rest of my life.
24 Luke: Why are you so rooted to Singapore?
25 Adam: Family and friends lah, yeah.

(Discussion with peer group, 3 Aug 2014)

The discussion prior to this excerpt was about why many students in St Thomas' wanted to study overseas and some informants expressed that they were expected to conform to this trajectory [see Extract (xvi) in Chapter Five pp. 135]. I posed a hypothetical scenario where a private corporation offered to pay off their government bond[6] (line 6). It is worth attending to Adam's response in some detail, given that his indication that he is tempted to break his bond is rare amongst informants. In fact, he was the only individual to express such a view.

Adam does not offer an immediate direct response to my question. He nods his head (line 7) and then only speaks when his reaction was noted by Zing (line 8). Adam does not contradict Zing's statement that he would be tempted should some company offer to buy out his bond. He begins by first describing the context of his aspirations, why he took up the scholarship (lines 9-12), and then qualifying his desire of living overseas by stating it is not because he dislikes Singapore, but because he has been too

[6] Anecdotally, I know that this has indeed happened when corporations bought over the bonds of some of my own peers while they were still studying abroad.

"comfortable" in the country (lines 12-15). Adam's discourse regarding his "comfortable" life in Singapore is constructed via a more generic 'you', perhaps distancing himself from such a trajectory. So Adam's response here seems to indicate a tension between his desire to see the world (and be peripatetic), and the status of being 'comfortable'. Adam's expression of 'comfort' in Singapore (of a set track etc) is akin to the 'stability' that Gabriel seeks [Extract (i) lines 3-4] and also referenced by Seng [Extract (ii) line 4]. The difference is that Gabriel seeks such 'stability' while Adam feels a need to eschew it somewhat. Significantly, these informants are using low-key terms of 'comfort' and 'stability' to describe what is potentially a bright and powerful career in the government sector inaccessible to most students in Singapore.

Even in Adam's case where he would not mind having his bond bought over, he states that he would willingly return eventually to start a family and remain in Singapore for the rest of his life (line 21). When asked why (line 24), he suggests that it is because of his family and friends (line 25). So again, there is no explicit resentment at having to return to Singapore.

6.3.2 Talk of working for the state

By this point, there is no mention of serving the nation figuring in informants' talk about state scholarships. In fact, none of the Singaporean informants mentioned it at all. The only informant who referenced some sense of noblesse oblige is Ling. As aforementioned, Ling and Yang are the only immigrant informants (who happen to be twin sisters) who discussed state scholarships as part of their aspirations. When describing how they wanted to achieve their goals of studying abroad, both talked extensively of how they also wanted to attain these state scholarships.

Extract (iv)

1	Luke:	What were your plans at the time?
2	Ling:	At that time I was thinking that I wanted to work for the
3		[Singapore] government. Either a statutory board, or a
4		government related company[7]. I think St Thomas' has an
5		amazing thing, just to make people feel like they want to get
6		one of the PSC Scholarships, and one of the statutory board

[7] A statutory board is an organisation within the government (not full ministries) that has been afforded some autonomy in its operations. Government-linked corporations are privatised entities that have the majority of their shares owned by the government's investment corporation. Both forms of organisations offer scholarships that are in effect state-sponsored.

7 scholarships. It's the culture, just like why we want to become
8 团员 and 党员[communist party cadres], we see it as honour
9 if you are a scholar. And also another aspect, for most people in St
10 Thomas', they do have the natural means to go overseas, but for
11 some they really don't. For me, my parents, they have two children
12 going to university in the same year, I'd say it's almost a given that
13 we must find some independent financial resources. That's why
14 we applied for PR. We want to work for Singapore, that's why
15 we don't find it as a, "oh you have this bond, so you must come
16 back", and "you know you may find a better paying job or more
17 exciting life overseas". We don't think about that at all. We are
18 going to be back here [in Singapore] again, so the plan was just to
19 spend a few years overseas.

(Interview with Ling, from China, 7 June 2014)

The context of the discussion above is at the life stage when Ling had graduated from St Thomas' and was considering the universities and scholarships that were available to her. She suggests that she wanted to work for the Singapore government (lines 2-3), and attributes this desire to St Thomas' where the school "make people feel like they want to get one of the PSC Scholarships…" (lines 4-6). Significantly, Ling draws parallels between these scholarships in Singapore to her previous schooling environment in China where students often aspired to be communist party cadres. To Ling, both cultures associated these respective positions (scholars in Singapore and party cadres in China) with "honour" (lines 7-9).

Besides this reason for aspiring to attain the scholarships, Ling also suggests that it is a matter of practicality. The scholarships would enable her and her sister to afford an education overseas (lines 11-13), and this was why they applied to be Permanent Residents (ie PRs) in Singapore (lines 13-14). That is, Ling recognised that they were only eligible for the scholarships as citizens, and so applied to be Permanent Residents (a necessary step before one can gain citizenship) on that basis. Similar to other informants [eg Gabriel in Extract (i)], Ling did not express resentment at having to return to Singapore as she wanted to work for the government (line 14). Her aspirations were already to only live overseas for a few years, and were in line with the scholarship's bond requirements (lines 14-19).

The sentiment behind their motivation to gain citizenship were also echoed by Ling's sister, Yang, independently. Discussing her plans after graduating from St Thomas', Yang had this to say:

Extract (v)

1 I feel that Singapore citizenship is superior. And I planned to stay here
2 long term, even in Sec 3 Sec 4. My parents are different, we are not like
3 others who have to go to the US to earn big bucks. We really think that
4 Singapore is a place where we can settle down. A major reason we
5 applied for PR was because I wanted to have scholarships. I really
6 saw the benefits that all the citizens and PRs can get scholarships, but
7 others cannot. I really wanted a scholarship so I can go overseas and
8 work for the government. So why not apply? PR doesn't have much
9 commitment, you can be a PR and be elsewhere, so I think PR at that time
10 was an opening of opportunities. It's for practical purposes.

(Interview with Yang, from China, 18 Sept 2014)

For Yang, like her sister, "Singapore is a place where we could settle down" (lines 3-4). She states overtly that the primary reason for applying for PR was because she wanted to attain state scholarships (lines 4-5). Moreover, attaining permanent residency did not necessarily constrain their life choices (ie "you can be a PR and be elsewhere" lines 7-8), but "was an opening of opportunities" (line 9). These state scholarships were therefore viewed by Yang, not as a constraint on their trajectories, but one that enabled her to fulfill their aspirations of studying abroad and working for the government (lines 7-8).

Compared to Singaporean informants, Ling and Yang appear to position themselves in slightly different ways to the state scholarships. Like Singaporean informants, neither Ling nor Yang expressed any resentment about the bond. Indeed, Ling states explicitly how the bond is aligned with her own aspirations of returning to work in Singapore. Both Yang's and Adam's accounts suggest that they both look to "settle down" in Singapore. However, neither Ling nor Yang expressed the same sort of understatement when describing a career in the civil service. Instead of describing the trajectory in terms of 'comfort' and 'stability' like Gabriel and Adam, Ling discusses her motivation for desiring the scholarships in terms of 'honour' and wanting to work for the government [Extract (iv) lines 8, 13-14]. Yang also states that she wanted a scholarship to enable her to study overseas and work for the government [Extract (v) lines 7-8].

Empirically, all informants (including Yang and Ling from China) who aspired to and applied for state scholarships never expressed any misgivings about the bond. Instead, we see accounts like Gabriel's [Extract (i)], Adam's [Extract (iii)] and Yang's [Extract (v)] where they explicitly said that they would willingly return. For Singaporean informants, the trajectory of returning to Singapore for a career in the civil service is

described in low key terms of 'comfort' and stability', even if they are well aware that these trajectories are accessible only to a select few. This was seen in the accounts of all Singaporean informants, regardless of whether they eventually won a scholarship or not. Such a description was absent in the accounts of Ling and Yang, the only two immigrant informants.

It is also to be noted that none of the Singaporeans overtly talked about the moral dimension of scholarships or of service to the nation. The sense of noblesse oblige, so explicitly taught in St Thomas', is not raised at all. If they did feel strongly about serving the nation, they could have discussed this sensibility when addressing why they wanted to attain these scholarships, or they could have raised it as a reason for why they did not mind returning to Singapore. Yet, it did not occur. Ling's and Yang's accounts might be different in the way they talked about the scholarships in terms of "honour" and wanting to work for the government. Even then, they do not explicitly reference this sense of noblesse oblige either. These empirical findings are summarised below.

Table 6.2: Summary of how informants talked about scholarships

Informants who aspired to and applied for state scholarships *indicates immigrant status	**Express resentment at returning to Singapore?**	**Express some sense of noblesse oblige?**	**Describe trajectory in Singapore in terms of 'comfort' or 'stability'?**
Adam	No	No	Yes
Gabriel	No	No	Yes
John	No	No	Yes
Kendrick	No	No	Yes
Ling*	No	Maybe	No
Seng	No	No	Yes
Wayne	No	No	Yes
Wong	No	No	Yes
Yang*	No	Maybe	No

How can we explain these observations? With regard to the willingness of these informants to return to Singapore, it may indeed be the case that informants like Adam, Wong and Seng do have affiliations to Singapore that they value (ie their friends and family), and do not wish to forever abandon. It is these kinship and friendship ties that partially serve to root them to Singapore. Also, we cannot discount the material reward of a life-long career in the civil service or government-linked corporations as being an influence on their willingness to return. We can perhaps see this awareness in Gabriel's [see Extract (i)] and Adam's accounts [see Extract (iii)] who describe the pathway in

terms of 'comfort' and 'stability'. In other words, the political economy in Singapore[8] is recognised by informants as a favourable and stable one for them (though in Adam's case not necessarily preferred). This is in contrast to the economies and employment practices in North America and Western Europe (where my informants desire to attend universities) where strands of neoliberalism are stronger, and where the same economic rewards and stability are unlikely to apply[9].

The understated way in which Singaporean informants described future careers in the civil service is perhaps indicative of how they take such a trajectory for granted. Within the milieu and logic of an elitist education system that is linked to the job market in Singapore, a life of comfort is something they might feel they are entitled to and may expect, having attained the position of academic elites (graduating from St Thomas' with top A Level grades and armed with state scholarships). However, it is interesting that the two immigrants do not produce such low-key descriptions of a career in government. Rather, we see the two immigrant informants producing rhetoric in terms of wanting to work for the state (though not necessarily invoking a sense of noblesse oblige).

Consequently, we have two sets of informants (Singaporean and immigrant) producing accounts that emphasise different motivations for why they desire state scholarships. This difference is perhaps linked to what a Singaporean informant may be taking for granted (as aforementioned), and which an immigrant does not. The accounts of 'stability' and 'comfort' that reference a career in the civil service might point to a particular sensibility – a classed and elite Singaporean subjectivity when positioning themselves in relation to state scholarships.

[8] It must also be noted that Singapore has the third highest GDP per capita in the world (World Bank website), and is often among the top cities in quality of living rankings (Mercer 2017). These factors all suggest a standard of living in Singapore comparable to any city in Western Europe or North America, especially if one were an academic elite with a state scholarship.
[9] Various scholars have consistently suggested how neoliberal economic policies in countries such as the UK have eroded job security and employment protection by diminishing state regulation (Navarro 1998, Harcourt and Wood 2007, Newman 2011).

6.4 Signs of en-territorialisation in the local political economy

A key aim of this chapter is to examine the notion that cosmopolitan elites like my informants might be deterritorialised and rootless. In order to do so, I proposed looking at how my informants positioned themselves to state scholarships that seek to tie them to Singapore through contractual bonds. In examining the data, I asked the following questions:

a) What attitudes and dispositions do my informants have toward state undergraduate scholarships? Whether and how do these positionings in talk reflect state discourses on *noblesse oblige*?
b) What are the differences and similarities in their positionings?
c) How might their positionings be linked to their aspirations, trajectories and the local context?
d) How might these findings better inform us about notions of friction and deterritorialisation/en-territorialisation in the mobilities of elite migrants?

Analysis of my informants' talk demonstrated:

- the emergence of two separate groups within my informants that reflect the state's differentiation of citizens and immigrants in its policy of prestigious state scholarships. At the outset, the data suggests that immigrants (with the exception of Ling and Yang) tended not to even consider these state scholarships in their aspirations and trajectories.

- When examining the discourse of those who did consider and apply for these scholarships, there was no sense of resentment that they would be required to return to Singapore. Instead of a sense of *noblesse oblige*, Singaporeans tended to talk about the scholarship as guaranteeing a life of 'stability' and 'comfort', while the two immigrants (ie Ling and Yang) talked about it in terms of wanting to work for the government.

All in all, my Singaporean informants' (and Ling's and Yang's) accounts portray aspirations aligned with, not opposed to the idea of returning to Singapore, and are commensurate with the state's strategy of tying them to the local through contractual

bonds. They further challenge and complicate the notion that cosmopolitan elites are often rootless and deterritorialised. Instead of a peripatetic existence as "astronauts" or "frequent flyers, who are insufficiently 'grounded'" (Yeoh and Huang 2011:682), my Singaporean informants often see themselves returning to Singapore. How do we account for the lack of an impulse to leave, or at least, to remain untethered amongst these informants?

From my informants' perspective, the rootedness of citizens to Singapore might partially be about careerist logic emphasised in migration literature. The local political economy provides a relatively stable and rewarding career for academic elites on state-sponsored scholarships [see Gabriel in Extract (i)]. This is to the extent that even some immigrant informants are willing to attain Singaporean citizenship in exchange for these rewards [Ling in Extract (iv) and Yang in Extract (v)]. Though we ought to be careful not to reduce this sensibility to an entirely cold and calculated manoeuvre, as informants have also revealed their ties to family and friends [see Seng in Extract (ii) and Adam in Extract (iii)]. But in what way is this phenomenon of rootedness amongst elites peculiar to Singapore?

At this point, Ong's (1999) notion of "flexible citizenship" might be helpful. She coins the term to refer to,

> "the cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions. In their quest to accumulate capital and social prestige in the global arena, subjects emphasise and are regulated by practices favouring flexibility, mobility and repositioning in relation to markets, governments and cultural regimes."
>
> (Ong 1999:6)

At first glance, Ong's (1999) "flexible citizens" are not much different from the rootless and deterritorialised cosmopolitan elites that have been the target of much critique in this thesis. However, she goes on,

> "These logics and practices are produced within particular structures of family, gender, nationality, class mobility and social power."

(Ong 1999:6)

So while my informants are operating in a context where there is a global competition amongst nations for talented migrants (Ng 2013), and where they are able to potentially engage in flexible mobility through their academic attainments, we are reminded by Ong (1999:6) that their "logics and practices" are produced within a certain context – my informants happen to be subjects in a state where academic talent is particularly prized and rewarded amongst citizens.

Separately, Ong (2007) suggests that political economies like Singapore need to be understood as rather different from those often characterised as neo-liberal in the Western Anglo-world. "In Great Britain and other advanced liberal nations, neoliberalism has been defined as a mode of 'governing through freedom' that requires people to be free and self-managing in different spheres of everyday life" (Ong 2007:4). In China and Southeast Asia, on the other hand, political power remains concentrated in the hands of the state, with principles of neo-liberalism being unevenly but strategically applied across various arms of government. This picture of "neo-liberalism as exception" (Ong 2006:3, 2007:5) appears apt when applied to the education systems in Singapore, China and Vietnam[10]. So while "neo-liberal thinking is directed toward the promotion of educated and self-managing citizens who can compete in global knowledge markets" (Ong 2007:6), the Singapore state has also constructed a nationalistic[11] regime (available only to citizens) linking an elitist education system via scholarships to the local sphere of social and political power[12].

This points to another facet of en-territorialisation – it is this nationalistic regime that can account for my Singaporean informants' positioning in relation to state scholarships and their rootedness to Singapore. Chapter Five has suggested that the socialisation processes in St Thomas' conditioned how my informants positioned themselves in relation to particular aspirations and trajectories. This chapter outlines more specifics by showing how Singaporean informants portrayed a classed sensibility (largely absent amongst immigrants) when talking about state scholarships. Both these chapters have

[10] Chua (2017) offers a similar take on Singapore's exceptionalism with regard to neo-liberal dogma. He focuses on public housing, multiracialism and state capitalism in Singapore in order to demonstrate how the state's communitarian ideology challenges and rejects western liberal approaches to governance.
[11] It is nationalistic in the sense that these policies (eg state scholarships) assert the interests of the Singapore state and its citizens as separate from the interests of other nations and their citizens.
[12] As far back as 1974, Fortune magazine described the nation as "Singapore Inc", by virtue of how it is run like a business corporation, with its bureaucrats labeled "mandarins" selected via a meritocratic system (Kraar 2015).

tried to describe the elitist space that my informants inhabit and demonstrate evidence of their rootedness to local spaces.

This is not to say that all informants are similarly en-territorialised. As mentioned, there may be different alignments with state scholarships and contractual bonds, and hence varying degrees of en-territorialisation – immigrants who are ineligible for these state scholarships are wont not to consider them at all; Yang and Ling from China whose aims of taking up Singapore citizenship are in tandem with their goal of winning state scholarships so as to attend universities abroad; Adam, a Singaporean, expresses a desire to remain overseas (Extract iii). Despite these nuances, it is undeniable that the elitist education system and linked political economy has asserted an influence on the lives and life choices of those who grew up in Singapore. As academically elite students, they have been devoting their entire lives since before they were 12 to the attainment of educational credentials, and been socialised into a nationalistic regime that values these achievements. For those who are Singaporean citizens, they are best placed to secure state scholarships that guarantee, in their own words, a life of "comfort" and "stability". Put simply, top-performing students in Singapore recognise that there is a straightforward path to a prestigious and valued career made accessible through their educational credentials[13]. It is no wonder that few Singaporean academic elites reject this trajectory.

How then might en-territorialisation compare to the notion of friction? Might en-territorialisation in local spaces be seen as an aspect of friction in mobility, slowing down transnational movement? Like the environment of St Thomas' in Chapter Five, I would suggest that en-territorialisation encompasses more complex processes in the context of state scholarships that 'friction' cannot capture. Let us first consider if state scholarships are a matter of introducing friction in my informants' mobility and transnational aspirations (ie preventing them from moving), or if these scholarships facilitate their transnational movement. Remember that these scholarships often sponsor and enable students to study in top-ranked universities around the world, before

[13] There is a flipside to this rhetoric of "comfort" and "stability". Individuals who resist and are perceived by the state to be overly critical in public tend to be excluded from careers in the nationalistic regime. In a public forum, Yeoh Lam Keong, a former chief economist of Singapore's state sovereign wealth fund, describes the situation in Singapore as a "market-based authoritarian regime". So intertwined is the state and the local economy that citizens know to police their own behaviours, because what they say would have repercussions for their careers, business prospects and government contracts (Yeoh 2016). A case in point is Cherian George, a former journalist and previously Associate Professor in NTU's School of Communication and Information. A recognised critic of the government, he was denied tenure despite recommendations to the contrary by the tenure committee (Neo 2015).

returning to Singapore, and my Singaporean informants' accounts suggest that they are not inimical to such a circular route. 'Friction' does not elucidate such a trajectory that is transnational in nature, yet ultimately involves being rooted to Singapore. Perhaps, 'friction' diminishes in utility as a lens through which to understand mobility when we consider the trajectories of academically elite students in Singapore. These trajectories are entwined with and a reflection of the elitist and statist local education system and job market. Instead of depicting mobility in terms of ease of or barriers to movement, it might be of greater relevance and accuracy to describe my informants' engagement with mobility in terms of en-territorialisation. Like in Chapter Five, the circular transnational trajectory that state scholarships entail suggests that aspects of de-territorialisation, such as a desire to migrate, need not be seen as contradictory to processes of en-territorialisation. Explicating the process of en-territorialisation in such a context, as I have done here in Chapter Six, means outlining the relationships between my informants' movement and the local system of scholarships; why and how mobility is valued in such a regime; the different degrees of embeddedness that individuals portray to the local political economy.

This chapter has thus suggested how Singaporean academically elite students are en-territorialised by being connected to the local political economy through state scholarships. The next chapter considers how the racial criterion of recruiting talented immigrants might also be linked to processes of en-territorialisation. Also, if Singaporean and immigrant academically elite students position themselves differently in relation to their potential trajectories, what does this mean in terms of their affiliation with each other? Is migrant status a key factor in their self-identification, or is it race? These questions are important in my investigation of friction in the migratory moves of cosmopolitan elites, as disaffiliation between locals and immigrants might be linked to social tension in the adaption of immigrants to local spaces. I will address these and other linked questions in the next chapter when I consider how my informants engaged in talk about self-differentiation.

Chapter Seven: Supposed racial similarities and en-territorialisation

7.1 Introduction

This chapter continues my interrogation of notions that cosmopolitan elites tend to engage in frictionless and deterritorialised moves, while suggesting that my informants present signs of en-territorialisation. Chapter Five argued that my informants' accounts of their transnational aspirations and trajectories provide evidence of their en-territorialisation in the context of St Thomas' School. In Chapter Six, I discussed one strategy the state has in seeking to tie talented individuals to the local – state scholarships targeting citizens. I argued that my Singaporean informants' disposition to align themselves with state scholarships and return migration might also entail a process of en-territorialisation in the local political economy. I now focus on another state policy with the same aim of intervening in and manipulating the migratory trajectories of academic elites, attempting to root talented immigrants to Singapore by virtue of their racial similarity.

Chapter Four has explained how the state's racial criterion in immigration is important in contextualising my informants' transnational movement into Singapore. In light of my arguments regarding en-territorialisation in the previous two chapters, the dimension of race now warrants investigation for a further reason. Singapore presents an example of an explicit racial criterion in the discrimination of elite talent. This is a policy that governments with neoliberal attitudes toward migration (especially in Western Europe) might be ostensibly averse to[1]. Given the incongruity of a case like Singapore's, it is worth examining how processes of en-territorialisation might work (or not) in terms of race. Might race be connected to similar processes of en-territorialisation amongst my informants that I have uncovered in Chapters Five and Six?

Recall that the Singapore government has adopted two primary criteria in attracting foreign students: they must have potential economic value; and they ought to fit the state-sanctioned racial categories in Singapore. This is why some scholars have labeled people with biographies like my informants 'designer immigrant' students (De Costa 2010). It is also why the vast majority of recruited students are from China, Vietnam,

[1] Carens (2000:56-59) describes this as a liberal tradition within views of social justice prevalent in Western Europe and North America where the state is required to be neutral with regard to individual choice and less interventionist in nature.

Indonesia and Malaysia, who are thought by the state to display cultural practices and phenotypic appearances associated with being Chinese (cf Tan E. 2003:753). With regard to my immigrant informants, the state has recruited them on scholarships at age 15 with the aforementioned dual criteria of racial congruence with Singapore's own population and academic potential. This is with the intention of augmenting the local labour pool and facilitating eventual settlement in Singapore. Consequently, it is apt to perceive ethnicity as one way through which the Singapore state seeks to tap into transnational migratory flows, by (a) anchoring talented migrants to the local, as well as (b) assuming that the local population would be more welcoming of racially similar individuals.

In setting the stage for the examination of data, I first argue that the racial criterion of recruitment is assumed by the state, but remains largely unexamined by both government and academia. I then proceed to elaborate on the public perception of immigrants in Singapore. An account of this is important, as it presents implications for how my informants experience life in interaction with their peers. Having sketched the context, I then focus on data that demonstrates how my informants talk about self-differentiation in relation to their peers. I argue that informants do not invoke race in their accounts, but demonstrate a consistent and relational way in which they positioned themselves (and others) along a continuum of 'Singaporean-ness'. That is, Singaporean informants positioned immigrants as less Singaporean (but with those from Southeast Asia being relationally closer than individuals from China); immigrant informants positioned themselves as more Singaporean than more recent immigrants; immigrant informants (both from Vietnam and China) produced the same 'anti-PRC' attitudes as their Singaporean peers. This is in light of the prevalent anti-immigrant and anti-PRC attitudes in Singapore society. My immigrant informants enter the cultural space of Singapore schools in which they have low status unless they can acculturate, and in this, the official classifications such as "SM1/2/3" (implying time of entry into Singapore) become an important source of cultural and structural (not just chronological) differentiation.

With regard to iterations of frictionless and deterritorialised moves by cosmopolitan elites, the uptake of prevailing anti-immigrant discourse by my informants (including immigrants among them) and reported strategies of acculturation all point to their socialisation into and hence en-territorialisation in local sociopolitical spaces. My

informant's accounts of self-differentiation suggest degrees of social tension and disaffiliation amongst different nationalities involving immigrants and Singaporeans. The existence of such disaffiliation points to potential friction in the transmigration process of recruited immigrant students, even if they might be assumed by the state to be racially and culturally similar to the existing polity.

7.2 The racial criterion of recruiting immigrant students

Despite increasing rates of immigration, the ethnic composition of Singapore's residents have remained relatively stable as a deliberate effect of preserving the government's multiracial policy. Between 1970 and 2010, "the Indian resident population rose from 7.0 per cent to 9.2 per cent, while the Chinese resident population fell from 76.2 per cent to 74.1 per cent and the Malay resident population from 15.0 per cent to 13.3 per cent" (Saw 2013:5). In response to the Malay community's concern about their falling proportion, the Prime Minister himself has explicitly assured the nation through his National Day Rally speech in 2010 that the existing ethnic mix will be maintained (Lin 2010).

This means that the vast majority of new immigrants who become citizens or permanent residents in Singapore must not only fit existing racial profiles generated by the state (ie 'Chinese/Malay/Indian/Others'), but that their proportion is calibrated to the same degree as Singapore's initial racial mix in 1965. In fair reflection of this 'frozen' racial composition in Singapore, the majority of immigrants who have attained residency in Singapore were born in Malaysia, and China, Hong Kong and Macau, followed by those from South Asia. This may also be related to the fact that Total Fertility rates for the Chinese and Indians have historically lagged behind the Malays[2].

Table 7.1: Resident population by place of birth (Department of Statistics 2010a:6)

Place of birth	**Number ('000)**		**Distribution (%)**	
	2000	**2010**	**2000**	**2010**
Total	3273.4	3771.7	100.0	100.0
Singapore	2681.4	2911.9	81.9	77.2
Outside Singapore	592.0	859.8	18.1	22.8
Malaysia	305.4	386.0	9.3	10.2
China, Hong Kong and Macau	155.0	175.2	4.7	4.6

[2] TFR figures for each race were 1.08 (Chinese), 1.06 (Indians) and 1.64 (Malays) in 2012 (National Population and Talent Division 2012b:4).

India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka	60.4	123.5	1.8	3.3
Indonesia	32.5	54.4	1.0	1.4
Other Asian countries	22.4	90.1	0.7	2.4
European countries	5.5	13.4	0.2	0.4
USA and Canada	3.7	7.2	0.1	0.2
Australia and New Zealand	2.6	4.8	0.1	0.1
Others	4.4	5.3	0.1	0.1

In corroboration of the statistics above, Tan E. (2003:753) observes the state's tacit encouragement of immigration by ethnic Chinese professionals from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. This in order to maintain the racial composition in Singapore, where new immigrants are presumed to fit the existing Chinese-Malay-Indian racial model sanctioned by the state (Tan E. 2003:753, Yeoh and Lin 2013:35). Such a rationale of racial recruitment can imply two linked assumptions. (a) Race is seen by the state as an anchoring factor, where cultural similarity would lead to affinity for the local. State policy sees it as a way of stopping the global migratory flows of talented individuals, organising them. Connecting back to Chapter Five, it can be seen as a major source of impedance or friction in the transnational mobility of migrants. (b) Immigrants who already appear to fit Singapore's official races would be more politically acceptable to the existing polity. Ethnically Chinese immigrants are assumed to be less likely to upset the racial and cultural equilibrium in Singapore.

This racial criterion in the state's overarching immigration policy is clearly reflected in the recruitment of students from foreign countries. Neither the most recent population census in 2010 nor the Ministry of Education provides statistics on the exact numbers and racial composition of immigrant students recruited thus far. In my experience as a teacher in St Thomas', the observable ratio of Chinese to non-Chinese immigrant students in St Thomas' is easily 5:1. We are also reminded of how the recruitment schemes targeting students from China dwarf all other available schemes targeting other nationalities (eg Vietnamese and Malaysians) in terms of sheer number and systematicity[3].

Despite the undisguised nature of this racial criterion, there have been few studies

[3] This was discussed in Chapter Four (pp. 83), along with the estimated numbers of students recruited from China (pp. 88-89).

concerned with how it plays out in the lives of people in Singapore (ie both Singaporeans and immigrants in interaction with one another). The government itself has been reluctant[4] to publish hard figures of immigrant students granted scholarships, even when asked direct questions in parliament (Hansard 2012:776). In academia, the literature regarding how immigrants and locals negotiate institutional life in local schools together is sorely lacking. This does not go unnoticed by Sanderson (2002), who points out that there is an absence of discussion of "issues concerning education policy, pedagogy, curriculum and the international student experience" and consideration of the "complexities of having large populations of students from other countries study in Singapore" (Sanderson 2002:100). Even where such studies exist (most notably in the discipline of Geography), most seek to uncover the migratory aspirations and desires, rather than experiences in institutional settings, of talented working adults from China in Singapore (Yeoh and Yap 2008) or of immigrant students in local universities (Collins et al 2014). The exceptions are Yang's (2016a) ethnography that includes accounts by immigrant students from China of how they experienced interaction with Singaporeans in local universities, and De Costa's (2016) work on how immigrant students in a secondary school negotiated language ideologies and their discursive positioning towards language learning. A relevant aspect of Yang's (2016a:77-96) work observes how SM2s[5] from China are often aware that Singlish is crucial to their adaptation. Singlish was perceived by these informants as both barrier and tool to developing affiliation with their Singaporean peers, even as some saw Singlish as a variety inferior to American and British standards[6]. Nonetheless, none of these studies looked to perspectives from *both* locals and immigrants regarding their positioning in relation to one another.

It thus makes sense for me now to attend to how state discourses about the recruitment of immigrant students structure the perspectives and experiences of all my informants. There is a question of how and whether informants position themselves in ways that mirror the state's distinction of citizen and immigrant statuses. Do immigrants try to fit in and do citizens welcome them? What strategies do both groups employ? Do their ethnic (dis)similarities (eg practices and sense of Chinese-ness) facilitate the development of affiliation with one another? As Yang (2016a) has noted, views toward

[4] This may be due to the rise in anti-immigration sentiment amongst members of the public, and the state's fear of exacerbating these sentiments. I address this issue in the next section.
[5] Recall that these are students from China recruited at age 18.
[6] This, in part, leads me to focus on how informants talked about Singlish in Chapter Eight.

particular styles and repertoires of language use such as Mandarin, Standard English and Singlish, could be a useful reference point.

Before I do so, however, such a recruitment policy must be contextualised against a backdrop of public perception regarding immigration. The following section will explicate this.

7.3 Public perception of immigrants in Singapore

The government's immigration policy itself has become politically-charged and controversial toward the late 2000s. Singapore citizens are portrayed by scholars as increasingly resentful of ever-rising immigrant numbers that are said to have put a strain on public infrastructure and services (Chong 2014, Yeoh and Lin 2012). Public pressure forced the government to restrict the flow of immigration ahead of the 2011 General Elections (National Population and Talent Division 2012a:17-18, Yeoh and Lin 2012). Additionally, the state's justification of welcoming more immigrants in a recent Population White Paper[7] (National Population and Talent Division 2013a) was met with stiff criticism from academics (Low et al 2013) and public protests (Goh and Mokhtar 2013, Hodal 2013), a phenomenon that is extremely rare in Singapore[8].

Chong (2014:215) submits that public display of anti-immigrant anxieties are a manifestation of resistance against the government's immigration policies, rather than overt xenophobia. Opposition political rallies during the 2011 General election saw some of these anxieties being aired in political speeches and public forums, to the extent that one permanent resident wrote to the mainstream press, "I have been made to feel

[7] The White Paper is based on the same motivation for economic growth and concerns for low fertility rates, an ageing population and a shrinking workforce we discussed earlier (National Population and Talent Division 2013b). It forecasts an eventual population of 6.9 million in 2030, with immigration contributing 15000 to 25000 new citizens and 30000 new permanent residents per year (National Population and Talent Division 2013b:3). To put these numbers into perspective, about half of Singapore's current resident population are not born in the country. The White Paper's projections will mean that Singapore-born citizens will become a minority.

[8] While Singapore's Constitution guarantees every citizen's right to freedom of speech and expression, and peaceful assembly without arms, these rights are severely curtailed by laws such as the Public Order Act. The executive branch of government has a broad remit to classify acts as being of threat to national security, public order or morality, and so impose restrictions on these rights. Labour strikes are also illegal unless they follow stringent rules in the Trade Unions Act and Trade Disputes Act. A two-day strike by Chinese nationals working for Singapore's train system in 2013 was deemed illegal with subsequent arrests and deportations, and was actually the only strike since 1986 (Wong 2013). All public gatherings must apply for a police permit, and activists who do flout regulations have been swiftly arrested in the past.

like a complete foreigner who should be deported immediately. Suddenly, I feel an atmosphere of loathing towards my family and me although it may not be real." (Samsudin 2011). Notwithstanding these examples of public discontent, Chong (2014) contends that such anti-immigrant sentiments were less directed at foreigners themselves, than at the policy failings of the government that had not anticipated the problems commensurate with increasing immigration (Chong 2014:216).

Moreover, these anti-immigrant anxieties are exacerbated by some segments of the public who perceive that many immigrants are simply using Singapore as a stepping-stone to further their own ambitions, with no concern for the nation's well-being. Chong (2015) presents these survey results of 1001 respondents conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies:

> "In the survey of local- and foreign-born citizens conducted by IPS, the majority of local-born citizens 'agreed' (49.9 per cent) or 'strongly agreed' (14.1 per cent) with the statement 'New citizens are likely to use Singapore as a stepping stone to other countries'. When asked if 'New citizens are likely to return to their country of origin after they have achieved some success in Singapore', 10.7 per cent of local-born citizens 'strongly agreed' and 47.4 per cent of them 'agreed'. These figures strongly suggest that a significant number of Singaporeans believe that immigrants are using the city-state as a stepping stone."
>
> Chong (2014:216)

Public perception of immigrants as "scroungers" is actually not unique to Singapore, but prevalent in many First World sites that have experienced inflows of migrants from less affluent and developed nations[9] (Chong 2013:3, Chong 2014:222). In Singapore, these sentiments have been partially accepted and reinforced through statements made by the government itself. Then Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew publicly acknowledged in 2008 that many immigrants were using Singapore as a "stepping-stone" to greener pastures, but asserted that there were benefits for Singapore even if only 30-40% of immigrants settled in the country (Li 2008).

[9] An example of similar anxieties in the UK pertains to a fear of an influx of Romanian and Bulgarian immigrants who might only claim benefits instead of actually working and contributing to the UK economy (Press Association 2014).

More importantly, the fact that the majority of immigrants are from China has meant that most of these stereotypical associations (eg 'scroungers' highlighted above) and tensions have been directed at immigrants from the People's Republic of China (PRC) (Yeoh and Lin 2013:32-33, Yang 2014:365). This is partly demonstrated by the phenomenon of Singaporeans heightening their national identity whilst distancing themselves from PRC immigrants, with the loudest objections not from non-Chinese citizens, but Chinese Singaporeans (Yeoh and Willis 2005, Yeoh and Lin 2013:43). The use of labels such as "PRC" in interaction, for example, is one way that citizens often distinguish between local Chinese and recent immigrants from China. Nonetheless, Yeoh and Lin (2013:43) suggest that these negative perceptions toward PRC immigrants stem not just from perceived cultural dissimilarities, but also reflect a dissatisfaction that the government appears to be treating immigrants better than its own citizens (eg by providing scholarships to them in local secondary schools and universities).

My immigrant informants were recruited at age 15 between the periods of 2004 to 2007. The racial criterion played a major role in their selection, while anti-immigrant sentiment might well influence how they interacted with their peers in schools.

Recall the preliminary broad research questions (first formulated in Chapter Two):

1. How are their cultural identities and sociolinguistic practices linked to their aspirations, trajectories, and wider circulating discourses in the local context of Singapore?
2. In what ways does an investigation of these links complicate and contribute to theorisations of cosmopolitan elites by academics and conceptualisations of such people by governments?

In line with the main agenda of this thesis, I apply these broad questions to the context of anti-immigrant sentiment and discourse in Singapore. RQ1 now translates into:

a) How do informants engage in self-differentiation from others when speaking about their experiences in local educational settings?
b) Whether and how the state's distinction of citizen/migrant status, or race, as well as the circulating discourses surrounding immigrants are reflected or reproduced in my informants' talk? How might my informants' positionings be linked to the local context?

RQ2 translates into:

c) How might these positionings in their talk better inform us regarding the state's racial criterion in immigration, as well as notions of friction and deterritorialisation/en-territorialisation in the mobilities of cosmopolitan elite migrants?

Let us now turn to the data.

7.4 The data

The accounts in this section are drawn from two sources: (i) the peer group discussion when the group was describing their experiences in St Thomas; (ii) life history interviews with informants who remained in Singapore after graduating from St Thomas'. Accounts from the life history interviews occurred at the last phase of the interview (see Chapter Five pp. 112) during which informants were asked to describe their experience in local universities. For both (i) and (ii), I focus on parts of these accounts when informants were talking about being different/seen as different from others. I begin with data from the peer group.

7.4.1 Discourses about immigrants within the peer group

The peer group was discussing their friendship circles in secondary school and who they hung out with, when Wong started talking about "people from China". Recall that Wong migrated to Singapore with his parents when he was a one year old. The peer group consists of members of St Thomas' football team, a mix of locals, Wong from China, and Phey and Bay recruited from Vietnam at age 15.

Extract (i)

Wong: But I don't click very well with people from China. I haven't met any foreign scholars besides the soccer guys, I don't really treat them as foreign scholars. But in my opinion, you know all the China people that we meet, I can't really click very well with them leh. Like they are very exclusive, even though I try to appear like I can talk to them cos I'm from China oh I'm from this province also, but besides the initial hoo-hah that we are all from the same province-

Phey: -What did you speak to them?

11 Wong: 你好牛皮啊 ((in accent from China))！[colloquial
12 Mandarin in China meaning "you are such a brag"] or
13 whatever.
14 ((everyone laughs))
15 Wong: Cos most of the time I interact with them is not
16 like in school life. In extra curriculum time then I will
17 meet them, maybe play basketball cos they are
18 hogging the courts and stuff. Then to interact with
19 them must appear like you are linked to them in some
20 way. You know, but, even though you talk to them and
21 they realise that we all come from the same
22 background, like really no connection leh. It's like the
23 things they are interested in, and the things that they
24 do, their drives in life is totally different lah. So really
25 no way to connect with them.

(Discussion with peer group, 3 Aug 2014)

Here, Wong introduces the notion of a particular grouping in St Thomas' that he calls the "people from China" (line 1), even though he himself was also from China. He uses the label of "foreign scholars" (line 2) to refer to them, but distinguishes the "China people" from those other "foreign scholars" he got to know in the soccer team, and whom he says he does not treat as "foreign scholars" (line 3). The "foreign scholars" in the soccer team Wong was referring to, are Phey and Bay. Wong suggests that these individuals from China are an "exclusive" grouping (line 6) whom he cannot "click" with (line 5), and he goes on to elaborate on how they are so. These individuals are constructed as speaking a particular style of Mandarin (lines 10-11), and of having different interests and motivations in life (lines 23-24). It is then important to note that Wong's production of an example of the Chinese speech style (line 11) prompts laughter from the entire group. The laughter might be indicative of how such a speech style is out of place and even seldom heard amongst members of the peer group, or that it is a well-known stereotype. Whichever the case, it is clear that Wong does not use such a speech style as a matter of course within the peer group, even if he is proficient enough to use it with the "China people" he describes.

Wong's introduction of the "China people" prompts me to ask about the general sentiment in St Thomas' regarding immigrants in Extract (ii).

Extract (ii)

1 Luke: Was there any sentiment in school that you felt? Or
2 general feeling about these people?
3 Siew: I think Vietnam ok, China is the one.

4 Wong Eh….
5 ((everyone laughs))
6 Luke: Can you elaborate?
7 Wayne: Maybe because all the Vietnamese play soccer
8 with us lah. So we know them then we can talk to
9 them.
10 Siew: Wong, this is not including you lah, you not counted.
11 Wong: I know-I know.
12 Siew: Like the general impression of the Chinaman right,
13 they never shave, then like their uniform like damn
14 smelly. But then honestly lah, that's the first
15 impression of them, first impression is by look what.
16 Then I just like "what the fuck, what's this guy doing?"
17 ((everyone laughs))
18 Siew: Then it was not a very good impression of them.
19 Luke: But integration wise, what do you feel? Between the
20 Vietnamese, the Indonesians and the people from
21 China, with Singaporeans, with locals.
22 Siew: For me, cos my class don't have any scholars. The only
23 interaction I have is with the Viets cos of soccer, so
24 generally I will feel that they are more integrated cos
25 that's how I know them.

(Discussion with peer group, 3 Aug 2014)

In this segment of the discussion, Siew suggests that there are sentiments circulating in St Thomas' regarding immigrant students. Siew points out two groups. Students from Vietnam are considered "ok" (line 3), while it is those from China who are associated with negative stereotypes (lines 3-16), though he also takes care to say that Wong is not considered one of the immigrants (lines 10-11). Siew hence distinguishes between more recent arrivals on scholarships, and Wong. Both Wayne (lines 7-9) and Siew (lines 22-25) suggest that the differing view with regard to the two groups could be because of a lack of interaction with students from China, though it also corroborates Wong's earlier account of these individuals as an "exclusive" group [Extract (i) line 6]. In fact, no one in the peer group actually states anything to the contrary throughout the discussion of these negative stereotypes associated with recent immigrant students from China, and of the lack of affiliation with such individuals.

This is again seen in Kendrick's account below. Kendrick is a Singaporean who only enrolled in St Thomas' in Years Five and Six. He describes the situation in his own secondary school before joining St Thomas', where the majority of immigrant students are from Malaysia and China.

Extract (iii)

Luke: The rest of you?

Kendrick: So like in XXX we have two distinct groups ah, one from Malaysia and one from China. What I feel is that the reason why we might find ourselves more familiar with Malaysians is because first, geographical proximity, we share almost the same culture, we speak almost the same. It's not like they are very different, Chinese students and Malaysian students, they are both scholars, they have a scholarship that they have to maintain, they have to study. But what is different is that the Malaysians were willing to come to talk to us. Because we share the same broken English and mix of Chinese, so it was very easy for them to assimilate. Whereas for Chinese students, I think we always scrutinise their English a lot, so they have this confidence issue of like they are not willing to speak to us in English. For Chinese students, because they come in such a huge horde, it's quite impractical to try to socialise with a lot of people. You find someone who is very comfortable, you stay together, and then you can speak the same language, so it's like expats who do not want to change even in a different society lah. Like they don't see themselves working in Singapore, they just want this education and take it as a stepping stone to go to other places. But for like our Malaysian friends, our Southeast Asian friends they may see their future that lies in Singapore lah, and there is interest in forming the bonds, hanging out with us.

Luke: So do you all feel this way? Like when they first came in, the scholars were using Singapore as a stepping stone?

Pang: Think most of us didn't think that much lah.

Zing: Yeah, didn't think that much.

Pang: It's not like when they come in then they force a few of us to not be able to go up to Year Five and Six. Not like they 抢我们的饭碗 [10]or what. At that point even if they did, we probably couldn't have appreciated it.

Luke: But would you agree with the general public sentiment that these people are just using Singapore as a stepping stone?

Pang: I feel that if we talk about them using us as a stepping stone, then we have to look at ourselves. You look at our group, Wong is going overseas, you went overseas, Adam is going overseas, Seng is going overseas. If we are not accepting to them, then we are being hypocrites when we are doing the exact same thing. So I think, always what now everything globalised world, globalisation, I think if you can earn it by your own merit it's perfectly fine wherever you go lah.

[10] Literally "stealing our ricebowl", idiomatic expression to mean competing in life.

(Discussion with peer group, 3 Aug 2014)

To Kendrick, students from China are also said to be less willing to socialise with locals (lines 10-12) compared to Malaysians. This is put down to geographical and cultural differences (lines 5-7), how students from China are less proficient in English (lines 15-17), they come in a "huge horde" (line 18), so they may just remain comfortable in their own group (lines 20-21). In comparing Malaysian immigrants with those from China, Kendrick is hence positioning Malaysian immigrants as more culturally and linguistically similar to Singaporeans than individuals from China (lines 5 to 7). That is, Malaysian ways of life are relationally closer to Singaporean cultural practices, compared to those from China.

Crucially, Kendrick reproduces the popular discourse of immigrants from China using Singapore as a "stepping stone" (line 25) as a marker of differentiation amongst immigrants. He sees immigrants from Southeast Asia (which includes Malaysians and Vietnamese) and immigrants from China as having different aspirations and future trajectories, where the former are more likely to remain in Singapore, and where those from China would go to other places (lines 22-29). For Kendrick, it is their aspirations and potential trajectories that influence whether there is an interest to form bonds and hang out with "us" ie locals (lines 28-29).

Despite acknowledging the public sentiment that these immigrants are using Singapore as a "stepping stone", there appears to be a lack of resentment about this amongst informants in the peer group during the discussion. Pang and Zing state that they never thought much about it during their time in St Thomas' (lines 33-34), and there was no direct competition for places in St Thomas' that they were deprived of because of immigrants (lines 36-37). Notwithstanding a lack of resentment on the issue of "stepping stone", Pang goes on to suggest that such a mindset of using another nation as stepping stone is actually prevalent within locals in the peer group (lines 43-45). To Pang, any resentment toward immigrants would therefore have been hypocritical. His response in lines 48-50 suggests an awareness of globalising forces and his and his peers' position within it as individuals competing on merit, with freedom of movement. The idea of a freely moving individual (as opposed to parochialism) is claimed as a meritocratic right. Such a view is aligned with the discourses surrounding the global war for talent (Ng 2013) and the state's strategies at tapping on such talent. It, perhaps,

also signals a confidence in his own abilities, so there is no fear or resentment that he might lose out in any competition with talented migrants. It is to be noted that none of the other Singaporean informants ever expressed any fear or resentment about competing with their immigrant peers.

Thus far, locals in the peer group have produced accounts of secondary school life that suggest that they saw recent immigrants on scholarships as different from themselves – there is a distinction to be made between Singaporeans and non-Singaporeans. Amongst non-Singaporeans, immigrants from China are also described as distinct compared to immigrants from Southeast Asia (eg Vietnamese and Malaysians). These different traits include culture, ways of speaking (ie style of Mandarin and proficiency in English), the numbers in which they arrive, and their tendency to affiliate with locals. Additionally, there are certain negative stereotypes associated with immigrant students from China, with these immigrants often constructed as an exclusive grouping unwilling to develop affiliations with others. Kendrick's account in Extract (iii) then provides an example of how immigrants from China are positioned as relationally further from Singaporean cultural practices, compared to other immigrants from Southeast Asia.

Given that these are prevalent discourses amongst individuals who have Singaporean passports and have spent most of their life in Singapore, we ought to consider how more recent immigrant informants engage in self-differentiation when describing their life in school. Do the immigrants take up or manage these discourses in the same way?

7.4.2 Discourses by immigrant informants

I begin with Phey's (from Vietnam) account [Extract (iv)] in more detail, which might point to various ways I could look at other informants' accounts. Phey is a core informant (one of two individuals) who was involved in both life history interviews and a participant in the peer group I was embedded in. I was therefore most familiar with his life story and experiences in Singapore. This exercise pointed to clues with which I could compare and examine accounts by other informants from Vietnam and China. I uncovered that informants tended to distinguish themselves from others along the lines of: (i) nationality and time of entry into Singapore; (ii) academic ability; and with both (i) and (ii) associated with proficiency in particular styles of English and Singlish.

Before this phase of the interview, Phey was describing his aspirations and trajectory after leaving St Thomas', to the point when he enrolled in SMU[11]. I then began asking him about his experience in the university.

Extract (iv)

1 Luke: So when you enter SMU, how did you find the culture?
2 Phey: I would say you must be more street smart than St
3 Thomas'. St Thomas' you only need to work hard.
4 Team work you don't have to worry that much,
5 because people in St Thomas' usually very driven, you
6 know, so you don't have to push your teammate lah.
7 But in SMU got some people, in group project, assign
8 them, they just throw Wikipedia stuff, have to redo.
9 Then got some *pangseh*[12] meeting, so you have to take
10 up their work. *Aiya*[13], one sem [semester] I had to
11 *tank*[14] two projects by myself, wah then I die [laughs].
12 Yeah so it's more about teamwork and knowing the
13 real world lah. Not everyone is that kind of St Thomas'
14 level, so you have to do it by yourself sometimes.
15 That's why I admit I'm proud of St Thomas' because St
16 Thomas' level is quite high in terms of being a good
17 team player, being a good student, that's all. Simply a
18 good student. People here they study for a lot of
19 purpose. Just to get a degree, just to kill time. Got
20 some guy, got project start meeting then, 'ok lah, get B
21 can already lah'. [laughs] Then I must get A- minimum
22 to keep my scholarship. Then when I hear some guys
23 say this, then how I want to work with him anymore? I
24 just do by myself lah. So that's why quite stressful. So
25 you must always bid [for modules] with your friends
26 who are willing to work. So less stressful lah,
27 everyone will work.

(Interview with Phey, from Vietnam, 8 Aug 2014)

While describing the culture in SMU, Phey's unsolicited point of reference was immediately to compare it with St Thomas' [Extract (iv) lines 2-3]. To Phey, students in St Thomas' tend to be "driven" (line 5) so that one does not have to worry about pushing one's teammates (lines 4-6). Hence "team work" is something that could be taken for granted, and not worried about too much (line 4). On the contrary, SMU is described as "the real world" (lines 12-13) where "team work" actually involves doing most of the work as an individual if one wanted to acquire good grades (lines 7-14).

[11] Singapore Management University
[12] Singlish term meaning to miss an arranged meeting without valid reason and often without prior notice.
[13] Singlish discourse marker to indicate exasperation.
[14] Term used in online roleplay gaming meaning a character who takes on the most damage or burden.

Phey explains this distinction in terms of the "St Thomas' level" (line 16), where everyone is a "good team player" and a "good student" (lines 17-18). The implication is that not all SMU students are at the "St Thomas' level". Being from St Thomas' is therefore one way in which Phey differentiated himself from other students in SMU. We will return to this theme later (pp. 196). For now, let us look at other ways in which Phey engaged in self-differentiation.

The motivation to do well academically in SMU, translated into how Phey enrolled in modules, by doing it with "friends who are willing to work" [Extract (iv) lines 25-26]. This prompted me to then ask about his social circle in Extract (v).

Extract (v)

1	Luke:	But your friends? Are they from St Thomas' or in SMU
2		you meet and find that they are hardworking?
3	Phey:	Oh got a group of Vietnamese scholars, we are in the
4		same accounting school then we bid together. There's
5		a Vietnamese club, I'm the finance director so I know
6		everyone. Also some of my friends like XXX? From St
7		Thomas'. Initially in year one, I just bid with anyone so
8		I know some friends also.
9	Luke:	Did you meet any Vietnamese who come on their own
10		funding?
11	Phey:	A lot. It's the first time I meet them.
12	Luke:	Do you feel any difference when interacting with
13		them?
14	Phey:	Got la they are less experienced than us. As in in terms
15		of local culture. They also can't really speak English.
16		But actually, in SMU the Vietnamese are very close.
17		Cos we have a smooth running [Vietnamese] Club. For
18		those who come directly from Vietnam, we have our
19		own programme to take care of them. Since they start
20		learning English here, we are the ones who help them
21		to get to SMU, so the bond is very good. But in NUS,
22		there's a stark difference. Cos really the Vietnamese
23		who came earlier usually talk bad about those who
24		come later. Cos they wear differently, they wear a very
25		Vietnamese way, like backward people. I don't like
26		that, but they always talk bad about them in this way.
27		Their English is also not very fluent, some heavy
28		southern accent. So some people hate it and don't like
29		to interact with them. They want to feel elitist lah. But
30		I don't like that. Cos there are a lot of Vietnamese
31		direct. So they form their own community club, and
32		they have their own style of hanging out. So people
33		who have stayed here for seven years, they can't
34		really mix, so you can't really blame them. But not me
35		lah, I try to talk to them and mix with them.

(Interview with Phey, from Vietnam, 8 Aug 2014)

Here, we learn that most of Phey's social circle in SMU consists of other Vietnamese scholars [Extract (v) line 25]. Importantly, Phey was the one who referred to the "Vietnamese scholars" as a distinct grouping himself [Extract (v) line 3], which led me to ask the question about other Vietnamese students [Extract (v) line 9]. When asked explicitly by me [Extract (v) lines 12-13], Phey agrees that there is a cultural difference between the Vietnamese who have arrived earlier, like himself, and those who have just moved to Singapore. This difference is described in terms of familiarity with local culture [Extract (v) lines 14-15]; how more recent immigrants dress in a "backward" and "Vietnamese" way [Extract (v) lines 24-25]; how their English is not fluent and has a heavy southern Vietnamese accent [Extract (v) lines 27-28]. Implicit in this talk is how the practices of more recent immigrants are measured against Singaporean practices, which is the desirable standard to achieve. That is, in Phey's account, there are degrees of experience and knowledge vis-à-vis culture in the place called Singapore. Phey is positioning himself as being relatively more Singaporean than the newcomers.

Phey also suggests that unlike SMU where "the bond is very good" [Extract (v) line 21], in NUS there are some earlier Vietnamese immigrants who do not like interacting with the more recent arrivals, and "want to feel elitist" [Extract (v) line 29]. So in this account about NUS, Vietnamese who have been in Singapore longer see newcomers as more foreign and backward – by implication they see themselves as closer to the values and practices circulating in NUS. To Phey, the reason for this difference in interactional pattern is structural – there is no similar Vietnamese Club in NUS. In this context, Phey also distances himself from such discriminatory behaviour and says on three occasions that he does not like it [Extract (v) lines 25-26; 29-30; 34-35].

It is notable that there is a group of individuals that is missing in Phey's account of life in university – students from China. He does mention how his social circle included Singaporeans and other nationalities such as Indonesians and Malaysians. This is especially when we consider how immigrants from China constitute the majority of scholars recruited by the state at secondary school and university levels. This prompted me to ask about his interaction with students from China in SMU.

Extract (vi)

1	Luke:	But would you include other nationalities in your
2		[Vietnamese] club activities?
3	Phey:	Yeah we are open to all lah. Actually the international

4		students are closer to each other, then after that
5		Singaporeans.
6	Luke:	So there'd be PRCs coming to your events?
7	Phey:	Ahh not really PRCs. Malaysians, actually friends lah.
8		Whatever international friends we have.
9	Luke:	What's the proportion in SMU, you think?
10	Phey:	20% international students, a lot.
11	Luke:	ok, is there a lot of PRCs compared to the rest?
12	Phey:	A lot. Half.
13	Luke:	Half of the 20%? How come none of them go to your
14		events?
15	Phey:	They don't want lah. They have their own club and
16		events.

(Interview with Phey, from Vietnam, 8 Aug 2014)

I used the label "PRCs" [Extract (vi) line 6] to refer to students from China. It is a label common in colloquial discourse in Singapore. That Phey takes up the term without question [Extract (vi) line 7], suggests that he, too, must have been familiar with the label. Despite students from China making up half of all international students in SMU, Phey suggests that none of them are his friends [Extract (vi) lines 7-8]. According to Phey, even when the Vietnamese Club's activities are open to all nationalities, students from China would rather participate in their own events [Extract (vi) lines 15-16].

At this point, Phey's accounts have demonstrated some ways in which he differentiated himself from others:

1. Difference between students from St Thomas' and students in SMU [in Extract (iv)].
2. Referred to "Vietnamese scholars" as a distinct grouping [Extract (v) line 3].
3. When asked, acknowledged internal differentiations amongst the Vietnamese students in terms of when they arrived in Singapore [Extract (v) lines 23-28]. He also positions himself relationally as closer to a Singaporean than a newcomer.
4. Described some disconnect between Vietnamese immigrants and those from China [in Extract (vi)], similar to accounts by the peer group in Extracts (i-iii).

These ways of differentiation can be seen in the talk of other informants. Another example is Bay's account in Extract (vii).

Extract (vii)

1 Luke: How is it like in hall [NUS hostels]?
2 Bay: In hall we don't really have many nationalities. Mainly
4 Singaporeans, Malaysians, Vietnamese and PRCs. The
5 PRCs just have a clique amongst themselves. All the
6 hall activities they don't participate. Really cannot
7 click [with them], cos they only stick amongst
8 themselves. Cos the stupid Office of Student Housing,
9 OSH or whatever, they have this quota of PRCs that
10 they want the halls to fill. Like out of 500 residents,
11 you must have like 100 something PRCs. And it's like
12 quite messed up, cos they already have the tendency
13 to stick to themselves, and you give them one hundred
14 people to stick with. They don't even care about hall
15 activities. Ok some, like 20% of them? 20 or 30% of
16 them, they will join stuff like photo comm
17 [photography committee] or video comm
18 [videography committee], they are the people who
19 want to stay in hall, but they don't want to do sports,
20 they don't want to dance, so they do background stuff
21 to get the hall points[15]. So those are the people who
22 stay for a long time. But a lot of PRCs they stay for one
23 year, cos they got assigned to halls. Not like they
24 applied, but they were assigned, because of the quota.

(Interview with Bay, from Vietnam, 27 Aug 2014)

Here, Bay makes an unsolicited reference to different nationalities that live in NUS' hostels. However, unlike Phey in Extract (v) where I was the one who started using the term "PRC", Bay here uses the label of "PRCs" himself [Extract (vii) line 4] to denote students from China. Bay's account not only describes PRCs as an exclusive grouping [Extract (vii) lines 4-5 "the PRCs just have a clique amongst themselves; lines 8-9 "they only stick amongst themselves"], but also suggests various ways in which PRCs are different. PRCs "don't participate" in hall acitvities" (line 6); "they don't want to do sports, they don't want to dance" (lines 20-21). There is even a palpable sense of resentment as Bay refers to "the stupid Office of Student Housing" (line 8) that forcefully assigns students from China to halls even as these students are assumed by Bay to not care about hostel activities.

This stereotype of students from China as an exclusive grouping and unwilling to interact with other nationalities was common in the accounts of all five Vietnamese informants who remained in local universities. These accounts by the Vietnamese

[15] Places in hostels are limited, so that all residents who wish to continue boarding in their second year must compete by earning points through participation in hall activities such as in Sports or the Performing Arts.

informants all referred to students from China as a monolithic whole, and do not make internal differentiations amongst them. This is even when the Vietnamese informants do differentiate themselves from more recent Vietnamese immigrant students. We have already seen Phey doing so by referring to the recent immigrants' unfamiliarity with local culture, with dress sense and style of English as two particular points of differentiation [Extract (v) lines 14-28]. Bay's account in Extract (viii) gives another example of self-differentiation from more recent Vietnamese immigrants.

Extract (viii)

1	Luke:	Did you meet any Vietnamese who just came over?
2	Bay:	I met some of them lah, but ok lah cannot click. Cos
3		they have different interests, cos they just came over,
4		they want to study, can't really speak English. I met
5		Vietnamese from different schools also, like NJ
6		[National Junior College]. When I first came in year
7		one, a lot of Vietnamese in hall [hall of residence], but
8		they were from different schools, NJ, AC, so I click with
9		them also, because they are like Vietnamese and
10		studied in JC in Singapore, we have more common
11		things compared to the Vietnamese who just came. A
12		lot of them play soccer and DOTA[16], so I spend time
13		playing with them, I got close to them.

(Interview with Bay, from Vietnam, 10 Sept 2014)

Besides an unsolicited differentiation in terms of "can't really speak English" [Extract (viii) line 4], Bay also suggests that these new comers "have different interests" and "want to study" [Extract (viii) lines 3-4]. In contrast, Bay was able to befriend other Vietnamese scholars who came earlier by playing "soccer and DOTA" with them [Extract (viii) line 12]. Bay's sense of differentiating himself from more recent Vietnamese immigrants is thus based on a style of English, as well as one's focus on studying. Like Phey's account in Extract (v), the differentiation can also be perceived as about becoming more like a Singaporean, engaging in practices and activities (ie English, soccer and DOTA) that are common amongst Singaporeans living in hostels. Both Phey and Bay's accounts of differentiation thus suggest that relationally, Phey and Bay position themselves as more Singaporean[17] compared to more recent Vietnamese immigrants.

[16] Defense of the Ancients, an online Mass Multi Player Online Role Playing Game.

The table below summarises how Vietnamese informants engaged in self-differentiation from recent Vietnamese immigrants.

Table 7.2: How Vietnamese informants engaged in self-differentiation from recent Vietnamese immigrants

Informant	**Country of origin**	**Self-differentiation from recent immigrant students**
Bay	Vietnam	Style of English; focus on studying
Gin	Vietnam	Style of English; focus on studying; way of dressing
Henry	Vietnam	Style of English; way of dressing
Phey	Vietnam	Style of English; way of dressing; familiarity with local culture
Quentin	Vietnam	Style of English; way of dressing

Also significant was how all five Vietnamese informants produced accounts that included stereotypes regarding immigrant students from China. They do not refer to stereotypes associated with being Vietnamese, unless speaking about the more recent Vietnamese arrivals. This finding does corroborate reports by scholars documenting negative perceptions of immigrants from China (Chong 2014, Yeoh and Willis 2005, Yeoh and Lin 2013), and further suggest that these circulating discourses (that we have also seen in the peer group) have permeated local universities. Consequently, there is a sense that these Vietnamese immigrants are converging on the same discourses regarding a Singaporean/non-Singaporean binary that the Singaporeans, such as those in the peer group [Extracts (i-iii)], operate with.

But how do my informants from China (the primary subject of negative stereotypes) resist or take up these discourses? Do they differentiate themselves relationally along degrees of localisation in similar ways as informants like Phey? Let us now look at accounts of self-differentiation by informants from China. We begin with Chang in Extract (ix).

7.4.3 Accounts by informants from China

Extract (ix)

1 Luke: How was it like in NUS?
2 Chang: Because NUS, you don't have a class, like secondary
3 school you still have your civics group. So I know very
4 few people from my course. Luckily I was from USP[18],
5 USP the class size is very small, so you get to know the
6 people in the same seminar, at least you get to
7 make some friends from USP. But then from Maths, I
8 really know no one, other than those from St Thomas'
9 who went to Maths with me. I only know the two girls
10 from my secondary school, we went to Maths
11 together, the rest I really know no one. And the
12 majority of Math students are PRC scholars. Because
13 you know SM2 SM3 when they join NUS, they can only
14 take engineering and science. They cannot take any
15 other courses, so there are certain engineering and
16 science courses with a lot of PRC students. Computing,
17 information systems, also a lot of PRC students.
18 Luke: So you didn't hang out with them?
19 Chang: Very hard to fit in. it's like SM2 students they come
20 together they are one clique. It's like you can make
21 friends with them, but when you are in trouble or
22 when they are in trouble, they won't come to find you,
23 you won't go to them.

(Interview with Chang, from China, 21 Aug 2014)

In Extract (ix), Chang describes her friendship circles in NUS, with reference to particular groupings that she is not a part of. She uses the label of "PRC scholars" [Extract (ix) line 12], and "SM2 SM3" [Extract (ix) line 13] to mean more recent students from China who have been given undergraduate scholarships by the state. This is even when she herself is from China, and is on a similar scholarship as well. When asked, Chang explicitly states that she finds it difficult to fit in with these "SM2" students [Extract (ix) line 19], whom she describes as an exclusive "clique" [Extract (ix) line 20]. I then tried to find out why by asking the following question in Extract (x).

Extract (x)

1 Luke: Would you say that there's a slight cultural difference?
2 Chang: Yes, of course, especially SM1 is quite awkward.
3 Because when we join uni, those SM2 SM3 the school
4 will take care of them, because they are directly under
5 NUS. Then local students, because they are local ma.

[18] The University Scholars Programme (USP) is an academic programme that NUS undergraduates may apply to join. It typically only admits academically top-performing individuals who are obliged to live on campus (ie University Town) in hostels exclusive to USP students.

6 We are not here not there. Sometimes we face a very
7 funny dilemma. When we go to a class, you can see the
8 PRC students sit in front, then the Singaporean
9 students sit behind, so where do you sit? Sit in the
10 middle? But which group do you join during
11 discussion? I don't know, because if you join the China
12 side, they will like, you come here at 15 years old, then
13 your accent doesn't really sound right, and your
14 mindset is totally local. Then the locals will say you
15 are Chinese. So it's like you get rejected by both of
16 them, so you don't know where you should go. That's
17 what SM1 students face in uni I feel.

(Interview with Chang, from China, 21 Aug 2014)

Here, Chang labels herself as "SM1" [Extract (x) line 2], that is to be differentiated from "SM2" and "SM3" [Extract (x) line 3]. Recall in Chapter Four, the state's scholarship scheme targeting students from China at various educational levels. These same institutional labels for the scholarships are now appropriated by Chang to mark different groupings in NUS. Compared to the newer immigrants, SM1s such as Chang have a different accent and a local "mindset" [Extract (x) lines 13-14]. In Chang's account, the disjuncture between these groups is partially created by the institutional recruitment system of foreign students, and experienced in an institutional site (ie the classroom). Given that the majority of Singaporean students in her classroom would presumably have been ethnically Chinese, the cultural differences here are also marked along the lines of nationality rather than ethnicity or race. In response to my next question, Chang also suggests other factors that prevent SM2s from socialising with others.

Extract (xi)

1 Luke: Would the large number of SM2s in NUS account for
2 the issues of integration then?
3 Chang: Yeah of course, there are 200 of them. They come
4 together, they had the bridging course period which
5 they have to do. I think the bridging course is 1.5
6 years before they start in NUS. That's why we think
7 SM2 there's a problem, because they never get the
8 chance to socialise with local students in the 1.5 years.
9 That's why it's very hard for them to integrate. Last
10 time English lesson is not compulsory, they don't even
11 have the chance to speak English. That's why after
12 four years [in NUS], probably they still cannot speak
13 properly. It's a huge problem for SM2s
14 really, we all know that, they have no chance to
15 integrate, they just stay in school.
16 Luke: Do the SM2s themselves see it as an issue?

17 Chang: Yeah, they know, but they can't change it. They will
18 complain that it is the local students who are not
19 willing to interact with them. But at that age in uni,
20 very hard already. Unlike secondary school, the school
21 will force, they will mix us, we had no choice, but then
22 uni is very difficult. Like last time, our form teacher
23 will say you should not speak Chinese in the
24 classroom at all, but uni you can't.

(Interview with Chang, from China, 21 Aug 2014)

To Chang, a major factor in the SM2s' lack of socialisation, lies in the inability to speak English [Extract (xi) lines 9-13], though she is clear about the institutional causes for this as well (lines 17-24). Chang here attributes both cultural and institutional factors for constructing the condition of newer immigrants and constraining their opportunities to integrate. Chang's description of the SM2 and SM3 groupings as exclusive and not willing to interact with others, actually parallels Phey's portrayal of SMU students from China who do not participate in the Vietnamese Club's activities [see Extract (vi)]. Phey's account, however, does not make any differentiation among students from China, and he does not use the same labels of SM1/2/3.

It is to be noted at this point that only immigrant students from China used these labels of SM1/2/3, and only amongst themselves. Both Singaporean and Vietnamese informants did not know these terms when I explicitly asked them about it. In the course of my fieldwork, I realised that knowledge of the details and labels in the state's recruitment of foreign students is not widely circulated, and is usually only known by the students themselves or by teachers and officials involved in the recruitment process.

Crucially, my Vietnamese informants do not use any label for more recent Vietnamese immigrants even if they might also differentiate themselves from the newcomers [eg Phey in Extract (v) and Bay in Extract (viii)]. The state does not differentiate "SM1/2/3" in equivalent terms, nor do Vietnamese informants coin their own labels. Further, Vietnamese informants only differentiated themselves in cultural terms (eg style of dressing and language), with no mention of structural factors [unlike Chang's account in Extract (xi)].

Chang's accounts also demonstrate that there seems to be a stereotype associated with students from China circulating amongst the wider student population, and I asked her about it.

Extract (xii)

1 Luke: How about the stereotype that the PRC students in
2 general don't seem to integrate as well with the locals
3 compared to the Vietnamese, the Indonesians and the
4 Malaysians? Do you agree with that kind of view?
5 Chang: In general yes, but there are a few China students who
6 can integrate well also. I think the Vietnamese and
7 Indonesians can integrate well because they are
8 ASEAN what, they are from the region. They are kind
9 of local in a certain way. The culture, the climate,
10 everything is quite similar, unlike China. Because
11 China is so big. Like my friend and I integrate quite
12 well because we are from Guangdong [province in
13 southern China]. Because there are Cantonese here
14 what, so we still can feel that there are some
15 similarities there.

(Interview with Chang, from China, 21 Aug 2014)

So Chang actually agrees with the stereotype, but suggests that it does not apply to her [Extract (xii) lines 11-12]. Chang positions herself as relationally closer to Singaporeans, comparable to the Vietnamese and Indonesians. By doing so, she brings up another factor besides English that could facilitate socialisation with locals. In Chang's view, which we also saw earlier in Kendrick's account in the peer group [see Extract (iii)], regional similarities in culture and climate could also have a part to play [Extract (xii) lines 6-10].

We have seen how Chang agreed with the stereotype in [Extract (xii) line 5], but taking care to say that there are exceptions such as herself [Extract (xii) lines 5-6, 11-12]. In fact, Chang makes an unsolicited differentiation within students from China, marking them (and herself) with the official scholarship labels of "SM1" (those recruited at age 15), and "SM2" and "SM3"(those recruited later) [Extract (x) lines 2-3]. Chang describes this difference in terms of familiarity with local culture and proficiency in English, just like the accounts by Phey and Bay. All four other informants from China, too, made these unsolicited references to SM1/2/3, thereby giving these groups of people structural or institutional rather than ethnic classifications, with the implicit invocation of the age at which they arrived in Singapore. I provide an example from Yang's account in Extract (xiii).

Extract (xiii)

1 Luke: What do you speak with your friends?
2 Yang: I speak Mandarin with my other Chinese scholar
3 friends. But when we are eating with other people

4 who are Singaporeans, we will all use English. Or
5 when we don't want people to know that we are very
6 outwardly Chinese, so like in the lift, we will speak
7 English. As in me and my boyfriend. Like you know,
8 when you are waiting for the lift and discussing
9 something in Chinese, and when the lift comes
10 [laughs] we switch to English.
11 Luke: Why won't you want people to know?
12 Yang: They will judge ma. But I tell you something I
13 observed. I went to eat Macdonald's with my
14 boyfriend [who is on a SM3 scholarship]. Then he saw
15 a big group of SM3 friends, that he had bridging
16 course with last time. [starts to whisper] but he
17 doesn't want to acknowledge them, yeah, don't know
18 why. Oh my god [laughs]. I think he also knows, he'd
19 rather associate with SM1s and USP people.

(Interview with Yang, from China, 7 Oct 2014)

In Extract (xiii), Yang makes a distinction between Chinese scholars and Singaporeans [Extract (xiii) lines 2-4] in terms of the language she uses with each group. Yang states that there are two instances when she and her Chinese scholar friends would use English: When they are "with other people who are Singaporeans" [Extract (xiii) lines 3-4]; and when they "don't want people to know" they "are very outwardly Chinese" [Extract (xiii) lines 5-6]. Yang's use of English with her Singaporean friends is easily understandable, given that the majority of young Singaporeans today already use English as a predominant home language, and English is the de facto lingua franca amongst most Singaporean youth (Stroud and Wee 2010).

Moreover, we see the influence of circulating discourses regarding Chinese immigrants reflected in Yang's account. She makes an ethnolinguistic evaluation by stating that she does not want others to judge her for being outwardly Chinese through her speaking Mandarin [Extract (xiii) line12]. She elaborates on this by recounting an incident between her and her boyfriend, and a group of SM3s. Her boyfriend is on a SM3 scholarship himself, but did not acknowledge the presence of other SM3s when encountering them in Macdonald's. Yang's narrative of this incident also sees a clustering of somewhat awkward responses. It was as if what she was saying is embarrassing. She suddenly breaks into a whisper when telling how her boyfriend did not acknowledge his peers [Extract (xiii) line 16]. She dramatises it by saying "oh my god", and laughs [Extract (xiii) line 18]. Crucially, she hedges her proposition, initially claiming that she does not know why her boyfriend acted as such [Extract (xiii) lines 17-18], but then provides the answer herself that he "knows" something and would

rather associate with SM1s and other Singaporeans [Extract (xiii) lines 18-19]. I continue probing this issue in my next question to Yang.

Extract (xiv)

1 Luke: But is there a difference between SM1 and SM3
2 people?
3 Yang: Quite different leh. I think those people, SM3, come
4 here to study. Only study. Their mentality is like I
5 must cherish this chance, this opportunity to study in
6 the best QS ranked school in Singapore. They'd be like
7 me, trying my best to get perfect scores, perfect As.
8 Actually I don't think the SM3s are all very
9 hardworking. They associate with their group and
10 then they have fun, they are not very driven. There
11 can be this kind. But I don't personally know many
12 SM3s, except my boyfriend. [laughs] they must be of a
13 certain standard to be known by me [laughs]. The
14 difference between me and my other Chinese friends
15 is they don't interact, but I do interact with other
16 Singaporeans. They are SM2s and SM3s. SM1 are very
17 good, I have to say. SM2s and SM3s they are quite
18 cliquish. When I was immature I treated the SM2s and
19 SM3s differently, like I think they very noob [slang for
20 newbie]. When I just came to uni, then I think huh you
21 don't know this? But now I acknowledge they have
22 certain abilities and skills better than me.
23 Luke: Noob in what sense?
24 Yang: Like they were not adapting well to the uni. Like on
25 orientation day, they have this like "which booth to go
26 to"? but I should understand right? They just came to
27 uni, they don't know what the education is like.

(Interview with Yang, from China, 7 Oct 2014)

In a way, Yang's account in Extract (xiv) is similar to my other informants from Vietnam and China in differentiating herself from more recent immigrants. Like Bay [Extract (viii) lines 3-4], Yang initially states that SM3s "only study" [Extract (xiv) line 4], but then backtracks to say it may not be true for all SM3s as there are some who are "not very driven" [Extract (xiv) line 10]. Like Phey's reference to newer Vietnamese immigrants [in Extract (v)] and Chang's [Extracts (xix) and (x)] reference to SM2s and SM3s, Yang also claims that SM2s and SM3s are "cliquish" [Extract (xiv line 18] and "don't interact with other Singaporeans" [Extract (xiv) lines 15-16]; she invokes the term "noob" to say how they are unfamiliar with local ways of doing things [Extract (xiv) line 19]. Importantly, Yang's accounts in Extracts (xiii) and (xiv) portray the same relational pattern exhibited by Chang and the Vietnamese informants, as she positions herself as being more localised than a newcomer.

But Yang also reveals that her evaluations of "SM3s" are influenced both by a regard for the official terms of the scholarship scheme (ie academic achievement in lines 21-22) and her preference for particular cultural styles (which here also includes fluency in institutional practices in lines 24-27). Unlike Chang's account that only discusses the cultural and structural factors differentiating SM1s from SM2s and SM3s, Yang provides a more complex picture where proficiency in conventional institutional practices and expectations is also valued.

While social disaffiliation between earlier and newer migrants in the classroom (such as those instantiated by Phey, Bay, Chang and Yang) have been well-documented in other settings[19], the situation in Singapore is further complicated when we consider circulating discourses regarding immigration and immigrants from China particularly. As aforementioned, anti-immigration sentiment and public discourse has risen since the 2010s, purportedly in response to straining public infrastructure (Chong 2013, 2014) and a four-fold increase in Singapore's non-resident population (ie non-citizens) from 1990 to 2010 (Singapore Department of Statistics 2010b:v). The government has, in turn, reacted by tightening immigration criteria since the 2011 General Election when the ruling party garnered its lowest percentage of votes in history. Immigrants from China, who presumably fit the state's proscribed racial model of 'Chinese-Malay-Indian' citizens, comprise the vast majority of all immigrants, so that they have been singled out in public ire and disdain (Yeoh 2013). My informants, both Singaporean and immigrant, would have been well aware of these circulating discourses and are seen to reproduce these discourses themselves. This could explain why my Vietnamese informants promulgated negative stereotypes about students from China, and informants from China [eg Chang in Extract (xii)] echo the same stereotypes but took care to state how they themselves are different from newer PRC immigrant students. We also see Yang displaying a more overt sense of superiority when differentiating herself from newer PRC immigrants in Extracts (xiii) and (xiv).

Thus far I have tried to show how all 10 immigrant informants (from China and Vietnam) differentiated themselves in terms of nationality (not ethnicity or race) and time of entry into Singapore. A common trait raised in the peer group accounts and by immigrant informants was the kind of English that one spoke, that marked one as more

[19] An example is Talmy's (2008) work on "Fresh-off-the-Boats" in the US.

localised than recent immigrants. All immigrant informants produced accounts that position themselves as more Singaporean. Another inference that may be drawn is that immigrant informants are joining in the widespread prejudices about immigrants and anti-PRC sentiment held by Singaporeans in St Thomas' and local universities.

Amongst immigrant informants, those from China all used official labels of SM1/2/3 in their accounts of self-differentiation, invoking both cultural and structural distinctions between the groupings. In contrast, Vietnamese informants did not use equivalent official labels when describing more recent Vietnamese immigrants, and only talked about cultural differences. The ways in which they differentiated themselves are summarised in the table below.

Table 7.3: How immigrant informants engaged in self-differentiation from recent immigrants

Informant	**Country of origin**	**Self-differentiation from recent immigrant students in terms of…**
Bay	Vietnam	Style of English; focus on studying
Gin	Vietnam	Style of English; focus on studying; way of dressing
Henry	Vietnam	Style of English; way of dressing
Phey	Vietnam	Style of English; way of dressing; familiarity with local culture
Quentin	Vietnam	Style of English; way of dressing
Chang	China	Style of English; unfamiliar with local culture; SM1/2/3
Dong	China	Style of English; familiarity with local culture; SM1/2/3
Felicia	China	Style of English; focus on studying; SM1/2/3
Ling	China	Style of English; SM1/2/3
Yang	China	Style of English; focus on studying; familiarity with local culture; familiarity with institutional practices; SM1/2/3

7.4.4 Self-differentiation in terms of being a student from St Thomas'

The accounts I presented to this point have largely been centred on how informants differentiated themselves in terms of nationality and relational closeness to local practices such as English use. But as Phey's account [in Extract (iv)] has demonstrated, their status as graduates of St Thomas' was also invoked when describing experiences in local universities. This potentially adds another layer of complexity when trying to understand how my informants negotiate institutional life with their peers, where a sense of elitism is also part of the picture.

I begin with an example from Ling's account below.

Extract (xv)

1	Luke:	Is there a difference with those other China
2		scholars?
3	Ling:	Yeah, like my friends who met other China scholars,
4		they feel a huge difference when communicating.
5		Actually my Singlish is very weird also, but it's a bit
6		more natural than those people [other students from
7		China] who try to speak proper English, in accent and
8		everything.
9	Luke:	So what you are using now you'd consider Singlish?
10	Ling:	No this is a strange version of Singlish. I'd say it's not
11		the proper Singlish.
12	Luke:	Is the way you are speaking now, how you'd speak to
13		your law friends?
14	Ling:	I'd speak in a more formal way, but yeah.
15	Luke:	What do you mean by proper Singlish?
16	Ling:	Like your proper Singlish, the way you speak. Err…
17		How to say? Actually in Law School [in NUS] people
18		don't speak like you. They speak with a bit of a British
19		or American accent. You use roughly the same words,
20		but they speak in a, how to say, a very diplomatic way.
21		Very proper sentence structures. I'd say they are
22		more like the typical St Thomas' guys, like maybe like
23		you see XXX [the council president in St Thomas'],
24		yeah they speak more like that.

(Interview with Ling, from China, 12 Oct 2014)

Prior to this excerpt, Ling had been discussing the different social groupings in NUS. She had mentioned meeting "other Chinese scholars" who were more recent arrivals in Singapore. This prompted my question in [Extract (xv) line 1]. To Ling, the difference between her and these other Chinese scholars is in the type of English they speak. Ling's Singlish is "a bit more natural" than theirs [Extract

(xv) line 6], but also "very weird" [Extract (xv) line 5]. In order to explain what she meant by "proper Singlish" that she uses with her friends in Law school, Ling invokes the "typical St Thomas' guys" [Extract (xv) line 22]. The form of Singlish used is described as "very diplomatic", with "very proper sentence structures", with a bit of a British or American accent" [Extract (xv) lines 18-21]. In the same vein, Quentin's account of self-differentiation not only invokes traits associated with St Thomas' (ie similar to Phey), but includes a certain style of Singlish in these traits.

Extract (xvi)

1 Luke: What's your school environment like now?
2 Quentin: Because now I'm in SDE [School of Design and
3 Environment in NUS [laughs] SDE is like wah, my
4 course is really, the people are like, I would say, they
5 didn't do well for A Levels. So obviously, compared to
6 St Thomas' it's totally different, St Thomas' is another
7 class. Because obviously St Thomas' is a very
8 intellectual environment. Everyone, the way they
9 behave, the way they talk, is very confident, is very,
10 how to say, is kind of high class lah. Then it's very
11 intellectual sometimes. But right now in SDE, it's like
12 they, a lot of them they speak Chinese. Then they
13 speak very bad English. Very very Singlish, very
14 *cheena*[20] English. I'm really like, I have a problem
15 with that lah. I don't like to see locals speaking in
16 those broken English, those very very *cheena*
17 English. Because maybe I came from St Thomas'. So
18 the way they speak English there is very proper
19 English.

(Interview with Quentin, from Vietnam, 12 Sept 2014)

Here, Quentin differentiates his current school environment and students from those in St Thomas'. Similar to Phey's talk about there being a "St Thomas' level" [Extract (iv) lines 17-19], Quentin states that "St Thomas' is another class" [Extract (xvi) lines 6-7]. He refers to two forms of English – one spoken in St Thomas' and another in SDE in NUS – setting them in contradistinction in order to define each. To Quentin, the "very proper English" (lines 18-19) spoken in St Thomas' is tied to the school's environment of intellectual ability (lines 8, 10-11) academic proclivity (lines 4-5 "people from my course … didn't do well for A Levels"), confidence (line 9) and high social status [line

[20] Singlish term for someone or something that is overly 'Chinese', often with connotations of lower social class.

10 “is kind of high class lah”]. In contrast, the form of English spoken by many of his peers in SDE is “bad English” (line 13) and “very Singlish, very cheena” (lines 13-14). The word “cheena” is colloquially used with pejorative connotations to describe someone or something that has an overly strong Chinese outlook or cultural association[21]. Someone who is “cheena” might be an individual who is more proficient in and affiliated to Chinese culture and languages than English. In fact, Quentin explicitly signals his strong disdain for this form of Singlish (lines 14-16). I decided to probe what he actually means by these ways of speaking in Extract (xvii).

Extract (xvii)

1 Luke: But it’s the way we are speaking now no?
2 Quentin: But I mean, we are speaking Singlish lah, but
3 there is *cheena* English which is different what. So
4 they will mix a lot more Mandarin words or Hokkien,
5 then sometimes is just purely Chinese. Then I’ve been
6 talking to other friends also. They say they also have
7 problems with that. Other local friends. For example,
8 like girls. Like we all think that when we see girls who
9 speak in those *cheena* English, then it’s a very, it’s a
10 demerit point [laughs].
11 Luke: So who thinks this way?
12 Quentin: Me, a few others, like Gabriel[22] also thinks the
13 same thing. Then another St Thomas’ guy, think most
14 of my St Thomas’ friends. They [girls who speak
15 cheena English] are not *ah lian* lah, which is like, I
16 don’t know, I just have the impression that they are
17 less educated. I hang out with those English-speaking
18 friends [in NUS]. Even if they are from SDE right, we
19 have the same problem with that. They’d be from CJ
20 [Catholic Junior College], Hwa Chong, those like, the
21 better half lah [better half of ranked Junior Colleges].
22 Luke: So you all so elitist. [laughs]
23 Quentin: [laughs] yeah we only say it among each other.
24 We all know it. Just that we can’t say it out to
25 everyone, but we all know it.

(Interview with Quentin, from Vietnam, 12 Sept 2014)

[21] The term 'cheena' is widely used in Singlish amongst certain segments of the population. Etymologically, it is from the Malay word for China or Chinese ie "Cina". It has taken on connotations of someone who has PRC links, either culturally or real. At the same time, being outwardly 'too chinese' is also historically linked to unsophistication in Singapore. It can be traced to how Singapore had English and Chinese medium schools before the 1980s; how the state introduced English as medium of instruction in schools; how the Chinese-educated suddenly became disenfranchised. Individuals who are more proficient in Chinese than English were then looked down upon by those more proficient in English. So people would say a Singaporean is 'cheena' as a mark of being not proficient in English, and therefore uneducated and lower class. 'Cheena' is hence a term mostly used amongst people who have done well in the English-MOI school system, particularly by academic elites.

[22] This is the same Gabriel involved in life history interviews. He was the same cohort as Quentin in St Thomas’. Both were members of the school football team.

Quentin differentiates the Singlish that both of us were using in the interview with the form (which he calls "Cheena English") that mixes "a lot more" Mandarin and Hokkien words[23] [Extract (xvii) line 4], or is sometimes "purely Chinese" [Extract (xvii) line 5]. To Quentin, the difference in style marked by these Mandarin and Hokkien linguistic resources is an indicator of constraints in one's educational level, proficiency in Standard English and social class. This is why he goes on to say how he and his male friends from St Thomas' would have a negative evaluation of girls who speak in this way [ie "demerit point" Extract (xvii) lines 7-10]. While he stops short of labeling these girls "ah lian"[24] [Extract (xvii) line 15], the invocation of the term shows how he does associate such speech with individuals he knows as "ah lian". Further, he reveals that he only associates with friends in SDE who predominantly use English, who had graduated from the better half of ranked Junior Colleges and secondary schools in Singapore [Extract (xvii) lines 18-21].

Quentin's evaluation of what he calls "cheena English" might be perceived as an ideological reflection of the strong co-relation between educational attainment, English proficiency and socioeconomic status in Singapore. Statistically, it is individuals with high academic attainments and socioeconomic status who are inclined to use English predominantly and with high proficiency in their lives. Conversely, individuals who are more proficient in Mandarin and Chinese languages (such as Hokkien) compared to English, tend to be of lower educational attainment and from the lower income groups (Gupta 1998, Lu 2005). Quentin's position, which he states is supposedly shared amongst his peer group, toward "cheena English" is therefore underpinned by these social realities in Singapore. This is reinforced by his limited experience of having only attended St Thomas' (a top ranked secondary school), and associating with graduates from better ranked secondary schools in Singapore, where students would more likely than not be more proficient in English and less proficient in Mandarin and other Chinese languages. Both Quentin's lived experience in Singapore and socialisation into the local elitist school system might explain why Quentin and his peer group would see Standard English as indexing high social status, with a certain form of Singlish (used in the interview and with friends in informal settings) as an acceptable colloquial (but not

[23] While he might not know it, the "cheena English" that Quentin is trying to describe here might be situated at what has traditionally been defined as the basilectal end of the Singapore English continuum. Some scholars (Bao and Wee 1999, Bao 2005, Bao and Hong 2006) have made the case that the speech form in question is not primarily English but a variety based on a Chinese substratum.
[24] A Singlish term used to label Chinese girls stereotyped as anti-intellectual, shallow, materialistic and boisterous in mannerism. It is rather similar to the term "Chav" or "Essex girl" in the UK.

vulgar) style. In other words, a different style of Singlish that incorporates "a lot more Mandarin words and Hokkien" is a denigrated form rejected by Quentin and his peer group.

In total, three out of 10 informants who remained in Singapore for their undergraduate studies (ie Phey, Quentin and Ling) talked about being different because they are from St Thomas', and associated their status as graduates of St Thomas' with particular styles of English or Singlish.

Table 7.4: How informants engaged in self-differentiation as graduates of St Thomas'

Informant	**Self-differentiation as graduates of St Thomas' in terms of…**
Phey (Vietnam)	Academic proclivity; style of English
Quentin (Vietnam)	Academic proclivity; style of English/Singlish
Ling (China)	Style of English/Singlish

7.5 Signs of en-territorialisation in talk on self-differentiations

This chapter continues my interrogation of the notion of frictionless and deterritorialised moves undertaken by cosmopolitan elite individuals such as my informants. I focus on the Singapore state's racial criterion in their recruitment of foreign students to join the local education system. I begun by arguing that there is an assumption and lack of critical inquiry regarding this racial criterion of recruiting foreign students, meant to anchor them to the local. I posited that questions needed to be asked regarding the experience of Singaporeans and immigrants who share and live in the same institutional space. There is a need to examine how race or ethnicity may or may not be a factor (among other factors) that facilitate their development of affiliation with Singaporeans/non-Singaporeans. I therefore investigated how informants talked about their position in relation to others, by looking at how they engaged in self-differentiation.

These were the questions I considered when examining the data:

a) How do informants engage in self-differentiation from others when speaking about their experiences in local educational settings?
b) Whether and how the state's distinction of citizen/migrant status, or race, as well as the circulating discourses surrounding immigrants are reflected or reproduced

in my informants' talk? How might my informants' positionings be linked to the local context?

c) How might these positionings in their talk better inform us regarding the state's racial criterion in immigration, as well as notions of friction and deterritorialisation/en-territorialisation in the mobilities of cosmopolitan elite migrants?

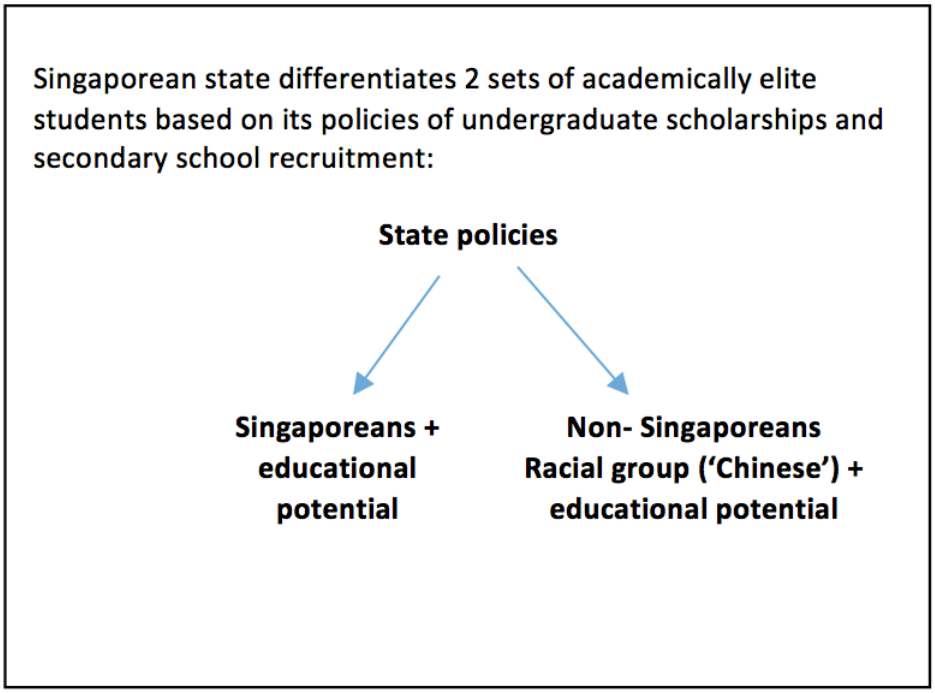
In sum, these are the empirical observations from the data:

1. Informants never invoked notions of race in their accounts of self-differentiation when describing their school environments.
2. Singaporean informants in the peer group produced accounts that distinguished themselves from immigrant students in St Thomas'. In these accounts, negative stereotypes tended to be associated with students from China.
3. In life history interviews, all 10 immigrant informants (five Vietnamese, five from China) differentiated themselves along the lines of nationality and time of entry into Singapore when describing their experience in local universities.
4. All five Vietnamese spoke of differences between themselves and more recent Vietnamese immigrants without use of specific labels. All five informants from China differentiated themselves from more recent Chinese immigrant students, using labels of "SM1/2/3".
5. All 10 informants stated the use and style of English as a key feature in self-differentiation from more recent immigrants.
6. Three out of 10 informants (Phey, Quentin and Ling) also associated students from St Thomas' as speaking a certain style of English or Singlish.

Like Chapters Five and Six, there are categories of nationality being reflected in the talk of my informants. In Chapter Five, there was a broad division in terms of aspirations between Singaporeans and immigrants. While both groups desired to attend universities in the US and UK, only Singaporeans talked about reading Medicine or Law locally. In Chapter Six, the state's differentiation of migrant status was reflected in how Singaporean and immigrant informants positioned themselves in relation to state

scholarships when talking about their aspirations and trajectories. In this chapter, it is seen in how informants positioned themselves in relation to their peers – iterated not through state sanctioned categories of race, but in the form of a Singaporean/non-Singaporean polarity when informants talked about being different or how others are different.

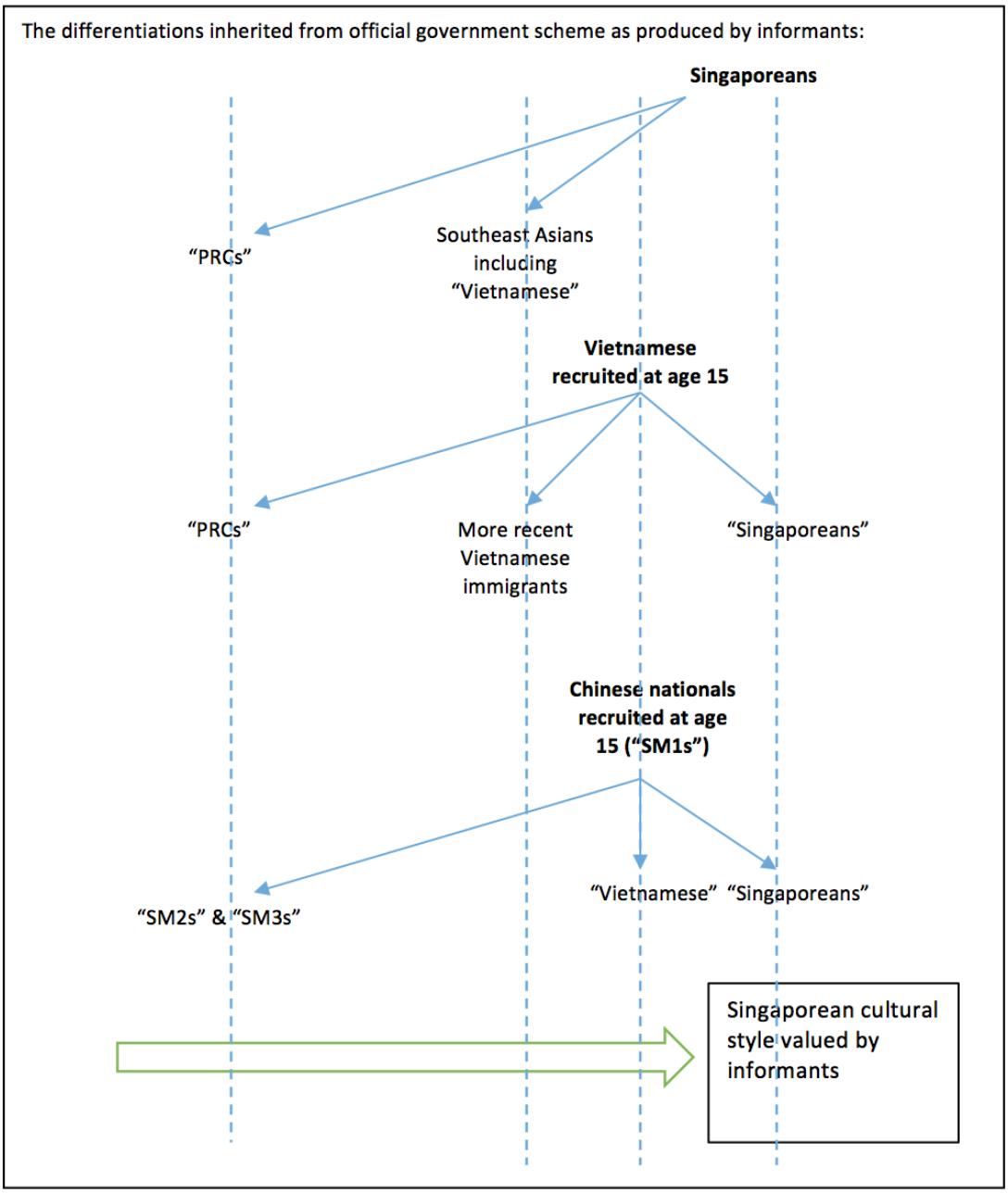
Figure 7.1: Differentiations of academically elite students by the state



The findings suggest that discourses about the Singaporean/non-Singaporean polarity are taken up by both Singaporean and immigrant informants. My informants' accounts demonstrate a consistent and relational way in which informants positioned themselves (and others) along a continuum of 'Singaporean-ness'. That is, Singaporean informants positioned immigrants as less Singaporean (but with those from Southeast Asia being relationally closer than individuals from China); immigrant informants positioned themselves as more Singaporean than more recent immigrants; immigrant informants (both from Vietnam and China) produced the same 'anti-PRC' attitudes as their Singaporean peers. The inference might be that holding these attitudes of 'anti-PRC', of dissociating from more recent immigrants, are one of the ways of becoming Singaporean. The propagation of anti-immigrant discourse by immigrant informants might therefore instantiate how they are aligning themselves with and reproducing a national Singaporean sensibility when it comes to interactions with other immigrants in

school settings. In these differentiations, race and ethnicity as defined by the state are never invoked. Instead, nationality and time of entry into Singapore are key points of distinction, with concomitant references to proficiency in certain styles of English or Singlish that are unregimented by the state.

Figure 7.2: Differentiations of academically elite students by informants



My findings about self-differentiation based on time of entry into Singapore actually parallels other descriptions of the experience of immigrant students in educational institutions [eg Talmy's (2008) FOBs]. The findings also offer a different vantage point to, whilst corroborating Yang's (2016a) ethnography of SM2 students in Singapore. In

his work, SM2s were seen to acknowledge their out-group status amongst Singaporeans, positioning themselves as less adapted to Singaporean practices such as Singlish (Yang 2016a:80-82). As my findings might also logically predict, Yang (2016a:83) found that many SM2s reported experiences when they felt discriminated against or insulted by Singaporean peers in university due to their lack of proficiency in English or Singlish.

In Singapore's context, these patterns of self-differentiation (in my informants' accounts) and discrimination [in Yang's (2016a) research] with links to use and style of Singlish and English might be further explained if they are seen in the light of wider discourses: (i) immigrants (where immigration is opposed by segments of the public); (ii) the status of English and Singlish in Singapore; and (iii) how styles of English are linked to notions of social class.

In Singapore, there exists a cultural hierarchy, with 'cheena' practices having associations with Chinese-ness and deemed to be unsophisticated when juxtaposed with styles of English and Singlish. This is in addition to circulating negative sentiments regarding immigration and PRC immigrants in particular. Within Singapore's educational institutions like St Thomas' and universities, proficiency in institutional practices and academic achievement are also valued. My immigrant informants enter this cultural space of Singapore schools in which they have low status unless they can acculturate, and in this, the official classifications such as "SM1/2/3" (implying time of entry) become an important source of cultural and structural (not just chronological) differentiation. The complication is that my informants from China are also academically elite, which confounds the traditional stereotypes about being 'cheena'.

Consequently, these accounts of self-differentiation produced by my informants connote levels of localisation, class and intellect. For example, Yang [in Extract (xiii)] states that she switches to English when she is around locals so as to avoid being seen as from China. Quentin's talk [in Extract (xvi)] about "cheena English" indicating someone who is "less educated" clearly implies a certain style of Singlish as acceptable amongst his St Thomas' peers. All of these suggest that immigrant informants are aware of and subject to overarching ideologies constraining language use in Singaporean contexts.

It might be more fruitful to conceive of the whole foreign student recruitment scheme as a complex overlay, bringing in elite cadres who at the same time, have traits that are more widely regarded as unsophisticated in Singapore. Importantly for my informants from China, being ethnically Chinese is not necessarily an asset that facilitates interaction and affiliation with Singaporeans. As Yang's account [in Extract (xiv)] demonstrate, overt Chinese practices, such as speaking Mandarin, are actually to be avoided in the presence of her local peers. Vietnamese informants appear to experience less discrimination in terms of their cultural and linguistic practices. Instead, what are valued are linguistic practices that index localisation, such as being proficient in certain styles of Singlish. Yet, Quentin's accounts remind us that my informants also occupy positions as academic elites in Singapore's education system. They operate in peer groups and informal contexts where only particular styles of Singlish are acceptable. Styles incorporating repertoires of too much Mandarin would be rejected as indexing lower social status, lower intellect, lower educational levels and being like a PRC.

7.5.1 Implications for the state's racial criterion and theorisations of cosmopolitan elite migrants

While I am not claiming generality given my small sample size, these findings do plausibly trouble the state's racial criterion when recruiting talented foreign students. The state's conceptualisation of race and ethnicity fails to recognise how overt 'Chineseness' is not valued in local contexts when academically elite immigrants interact with their Singaporean peers. Immigrant informants who are Chinese and who ostensibly fit into Singapore's largest racial grouping, actually face more challenges than Vietnamese informants when experiencing interaction with locals. My informants from China manage this by adopting strategies of acculturation – disavowing close associations with being from China, whilst emphasising their sense of being local. Put another way, immigrant informants from China possess different linguistic and cultural practices from Singaporean Chinese, even if both groups might be identified by the state as ethnically Chinese. These different practices manifest as inequalities when transported across contexts (different spaces). My informants respond to the altered value of their original practices by adopting acceptable repertoires (English/Singlish) when interacting with locals and abandoning repertoires that index migrant status. The state's apprehension of ethnicity – expecting that immigrants can fit in locally just

because they fit official racial categories – does not consider how cultural practices are re-valued when transported to a different space.

Importantly, prevalent anti-immigrant and anti-PRC discourses can be perceived as culminating in disaffiliation and social tension amongst these academically elite students along the lines of nationality and time of entry into Singapore. If mobility is to be conceived as including processes of transition and adaptation to local spaces (Yeoh and Huang 2011; also see Chapter Two pp. 32-33), then such instances of social tension must be seen as potentially leading to friction in mobility – by impeding the adaptation of academically elite immigrant students to Singapore's local spaces. Prima facie, one might contend that such tensions between locals and immigrants might reflect how immigrants are prevented from connecting to local spaces and lead to deterritorialisation. Yet, I would argue that the data presented in this chapter points to quite the opposite.

The data suggests that it is not just a clear-cut distinction in terms of immigrants versus locals, and how tension exists between these two groupings. Broadly, there is indeed social tension between Singaporeans and immigrants, but the situation is much more nuanced, as informants (both immigrant and local) always position themselves as more Singaporean in relation to other immigrant groupings that have arrived more recently. There is a relative and hierarchical set of relationships that groups (of various nationalities and time of entry into the country) position themselves vis a vis their academically elite peers. Such discursive positionings by immigrant informants appear to downplay the differentiation and tension between themselves and Singaporeans, while simultaneously establishing a distance from more recent immigrant arrivals. My informants' accounts of self-differentiation, production of xenophobic discourse, and reported strategies of acculturation might be better ascribed as processes of en-territorialisation. They produce such accounts precisely because of their operation in and connection to local contexts of prevalent anti-immigrant sentiment.

Consequently, the uptake of anti-PRC and anti-immigrant sentiment by even immigrant informants, as well as reported strategies of acculturation (eg abandoning Chinese practices in the presence of local peer groups) can be taken as signs of their embedding in local spaces and socialisation into local prevalent ideologies and practices. These are evidence of en-territorialisation, not deterritorialisation, in the context of prevalent anti-

immigrant and anti-PRC discourses in Singapore. It demonstrates how my informants do get "involved in the localised politics of place-making in the co-presence of others" (Yeoh and Huang 2011:682).

In Singapore's context, it is Singlish that is often referenced by my informants as a marker of localisation and affiliation with local peer groups, not supposed race or ethnicity. This is despite the Singapore government's disdain toward Singlish in official domains (Wee 2005). But how exactly are forms of English and Singlish valued amongst my informants? What role might Singlish play in the disaffiliation between people like my informants and more recent immigrants, and in processes of en-territorialisation? This will be the subject of my investigation in the next chapter.

Chapter Eight: Singlish and en-territorialisation

8.1 Introduction

This chapter continues to respond to the notion that the transnational moves of cosmopolitan elites are frictionless and deterritorialised. Chapter Five has shown how my informants' transnational aspirations and trajectories might be conditioned in St Thomas' School. Chapter Six argued that Singaporean informants' proclivity to accept state scholarships and return migration can be linked to the local sociopolitical space, where an elitist education system is entwined with stable careers in the civil service. In Chapter Seven, I argued that supposed racial similarity is not a strong determiner that rooted informants to local spaces. Instead, as a reflection of prevalent anti-immigrant and anti-PRC sentiment, informants (including immigrants) positioned themselves and others along a polarity of Singaporean-ness, often produced xenophobic discourse, and reported strategies of acculturation that involved dissociation from more recent immigrant arrivals. I have suggested that all of these findings in Chapters Five through Seven are signs of my informants' en-territorialisation in Singapore. Following my discussion of anti-immigrant discourse in my informants' accounts in Chapter Seven, it was observed that the practice of Singlish[1] was often referenced as an indicator of being localised. This chapter thus examines the role of Singlish in processes of friction and en-territorialisation amongst academically elite students in Singapore.

Recall from the review of literature in Chapter Two that some scholars have discussed the ability of elite immigrants to move across national borders. In the literature on elite schooling (Chapter Two, pp. 37), the transnational mobility of top-performing students is often taken to be seamless, by virtue of their accumulation of resources such as academic credentials that enable them to move between national school systems (Kenway and Koh 2013). In relation to academically elite students in Singapore, these are individuals who appear to perform well in local schools, and therefore fall into Kenway and Koh's (2013) broad characterisation of "nobility without a state". Yet, Ong (1999) cautions us that in the event of transnational movement, the reproduction of social power is never guaranteed even if immigrants appear to be well-resourced in terms of skills and languages.

[1] Please refer to Appendix B for a more in depth discussion of what Singlish is. Inter alia, I argue that Singlish might be better defined as a register in Agha's (2004) sense.

I have already uncovered that beyond the anti-immigrant sentiment addressed in Chapter Seven, informants in Chapter Seven also tended to refer to Singlish use as a marker differentiating individuals who are localised, from others who are not. I therefore begin by developing a more comprehensive understanding of my informants' attitudes toward Singlish. I examine interview data when informants expressed ideologies pertaining to Singlish and Standard English. Invoking Bourdieu's (1991) theory, I argue that informants tended to orient to two different social fields in interviews: a field of education where Standard English is consistently valued by them, and an informal field of socialisation amongst academically elite students where the value of Singlish is contested between my informants and more recent immigrants. Importantly, my informants' attitudes are also aligned with wider discourses circulating amongst young academic elites in Singapore (cf Cavallaro et al 2014). Bourdieu's (1991) theory allows me to explain how differences in the valuation of Singlish in the field of informal socialisation point to competing social positions. These differences possibly contribute to disaffiliation between two groups of academically elite students in Singapore: (a) recently recruited immigrant students who do not value Singlish; and (b) localised peer groups of academically elite students who claim to value and practise Singlish in their informal interactions.

In the sense that 'mobility' can include processes of transition and adaptation (Yeoh and Huang 2011), disaffiliation and social tension between groupings can also be seen to impede the movement and adaption of immigrants to local spaces (ie friction in mobility). At the same time, the specific valuation of Singlish by my informants and their claim to practising Singlish point to their being embedded in local spaces. In other words, the valuation and use of Singlish can be seen as a token of en-territorialisation in Singapore.

8.2 Differences in valuation of Singlish between my informants and more recent immigrants

I first turn to my data focusing on Singlish, to see whether and how it can be a source of friction and embeddedness amongst academically elite students in Singapore. I begin by formulating a set of research questions that guide my analysis of the data. I make particular empirical observations and provide excerpts to illustrate these observations.

In examining the data, I, once again, apply my overarching research questions to the context of Singlish in Singapore. Recall these questions (first formulated in Chapter Two):

1. How are their cultural identities and sociolinguistic practices linked to their aspirations, trajectories, and wider circulating discourses in the local context of Singapore?
2. In what ways does an investigation of these links complicate and contribute to theorisations of cosmopolitan elites by academics and conceptualisations of such people by governments?

RQ1 now translates into:

a) How is Singlish positioned and valued in relation to other linguistic capitals by various social actors (including my informants) in Singapore?
b) Might there be differences in valuation of specific linguistic capitals? How might these differences be linked to the local context?

RQ2 translates into

c) How might these differences in valuation translate into the creation of different social positions, disaffiliation and hence friction in mobility? How might valuations of Singlish point to a sense of being embedded in local spaces?
d) What implications might there be regarding how we understand and study the transnational movement of cosmopolitan mobile elites?

The data solicited in this section comes in a phase of the interview after I had asked informants (a total of 20 individuals) to describe their experiences in school, and they had produced accounts of social groupings and self-differentiation (seen in Chapter Seven). I proceeded to find out what they spoke with whom, as well as what they thought about particular forms of language. For the purposes of this chapter, I focus on bits when informants made reference to Singlish, and the ideologies they expressed about it.

When analysing these accounts, I considered certain biographical information that could potentially be significant in the ways informants evaluated Singlish. If we recall from Chapter Seven, my informants' accounts of differentiation demonstrate a consistent and relational way in which informants positioned themselves (and others) along a

continuum of 'Singaporean-ness'. Singaporean informants positioned immigrants as less Singaporean (but with those from Southeast Asia being relationally closer than individuals from China); immigrant informants positioned themselves as more Singaporean than more recent immigrants. So it might be that immigrant informants would value Singlish differently compared to Singaporeans. Also, given that there is a conventional aspiration amongst my informants of attending universities in the US and UK (seen in Chapter Five), while half of them embark on such a trajectory, there might be a link between my informants' migratory trajectories after leaving St Thomas' and their valuation of Singlish.

Another important thing to bear in mind is that 18 of my 20 informants were immigrants to Singapore, entering Singapore at varying points in their life histories[2], and so would have spent varying lengths of time living in Singapore. Accordingly, my informants' time of entry into and migrant status in Singapore, and their trajectory after leaving St Thomas' are all plausible factors that might be linked to any differences in their valuation of Singlish.

I make these empirical observations in analysis of my informants' accounts:

- 18 individuals showed awareness of using Singlish themselves in appropriate contexts.

- 14 individuals mentioned a link between Singlish and local culture or identity.

- A much lower number (ie five individuals) referred to Singlish as "bad" or "improper" English, with only one informant claiming that he did not want to speak it.

- No individual suggested that Singlish is "good" English, or that it is not "bad English".

[2] My informants' relevant migratory history is summarised in the table in Appendix A.

- Also crucial: no informant suggested the use of any other linguistic code (eg Mandarin) besides Singlish amongst their Singaporean friends. This is despite the fact that 12 informants are ethnically Chinese.

- There was no discernible link between my informants' time of entry into and migrant status in Singapore, and their trajectory after leaving St Thomas', to their evaluation of Singlish.

In what follows, I provide excerpts from my informants' accounts to illustrate these findings as well as delve deeper into some of them.

8.2.1 My informants' accounts

Amongst 20 informants, 19 claimed that they used Singlish with their peers[3]. I begin with an example from Fang in Extract (i). Fang had migrated to Singapore with his parents from China when he was about 10 years old. He had gained Permanent Resident status before giving it up and leaving for the US right after graduating from St Thomas'. At the point of data collection, he was reading Law in UC Berkeley as a postgraduate student.

Extract (i)

1	Luke:	So what would you speak with your friends and
2		family?
3	Fang:	I speak Singlish to my Singaporean friends **lor**, and
4		Mandarin to my parents. But I would use American
5		English with my American friends.
6	Luke:	What do you mean by Singlish?
7	Fang:	Like how we are speaking to each other now? With a
8		Singaporean accent and the **lah**s and **lor**s. So I speak
9		like that to Singaporeans in school now.
10	Luke:	And so you would speak differently to
11		American friends?
12	Fang:	Yeah, like with more of an American accent and
13		without Singlish words.

(Interview with Fang, Chinese national currently in US, 27 June 2014)

Fang's comments are actually typical amongst informants, in that it indicated a clear sense of how Singlish is only used with "Singaporean friends" (line 3). 19 out of 20 informants made similar comments about using Singlish with Singaporean peers. Also

[3] The only exception was Xavier, who claimed never to have acquired Singlish. I look at his account later.

notable is how he referred to the way he was speaking with me at that moment as an example of Singlish, with a clear link to a "Singaporean accent" and discourse particles such as "lahs and lors" (line 8).

Phey's comments in Extract (ii) provides an example where the contexts for when certain forms of English are acceptable is more clearly defined.

Extract (ii)

1	Luke:	So what do you speak with your friends in school?
2	Phey:	We use English usually. With my Vietnamese friends
3		we will speak Vietnamese and a mix of English.
4	Luke:	Besides your Vietnamese friends? What do you speak
5		with locals?
6	Phey:	English. I think it is very important to speak good
7		English **lah**. So I try to speak it.
8	Luke:	So we are speaking good English now?
9	Phey:	Now not so **lah**, I mean talking is ok, but in school
10		when in class must be more grammatical. Must be
11		proper English.
12	Luke:	So who do you speak like that to? [hand gestures
13		pointing to and motioning between Phey and Luke]
14	Phey:	With the guys in the soccer team? With close
15		Singaporean friends **lah**.
16	Luke:	But why do you speak differently with the soccer
17		guys?
18	Phey:	Cos we are friends what [laughs]. Locals must speak
19		like that.
20	Luke:	And what would you call this way that we speak?
21	Phey:	Singlish.

(Interview with Phey, Vietnamese currently in S'pore, 8 Aug 2014)

While Phey does not explicitly reference "Singlish" from the start, he talks about "good" (line 6) and "proper" English (line 11) that is "grammatical" (line 10), and to be used in formal classroom settings. The form of English he would use with his "Singaporean friends" in the soccer team is the form he was using with me in the interview, like Fang in Extract (i), peppered with discourse particles (words in bold in lines 7, 9 and 15). The implication is that the form of English used with his friends is not "good" and "proper". So Phey demonstrates an awareness that the form of English used in the interview is appropriate for more casual or informal settings (ie outside the classroom) and with a certain audience (ie Singaporean friends). 18 out of 20 informants produced accounts that showed such an awareness, though only five informants explicitly stated that Singlish is not "good" English.

But Phey's account also implies that Singlish is a marker of localisation (lines 18-19). Seng's account in Extract (iii) presents another instance when Singlish was explicitly linked to local culture (lines 10-11).

Extract (iii)

1	Luke:	What do you speak in your family?
2	Seng:	English? I mean Singlish **lah**, like how we are talking
3		now. My Chinese damn *cui*[4]. My parents also don't
4		speak it.
5	Luke:	And with your friends?
6	Seng:	The same **lor**.
7	Luke:	What do you think about Singlish?
8	Seng:	What do you mean?
9	Luke:	Like err… do you think it's useful or valuable?
10	Seng:	oh, it's ok **lah**. I mean, it's representative of our culture
11		right. So long as we can switch to English when we
12		need to it's ok. Like when I go to the UK, obviously I
13		won't use Singlish with them. But here in Singapore
14		everyone speaks like that what. So there's nothing
15		wrong. Like seriously, the more important thing is we
16		can switch right. That's what I think.

(Interview with Seng, S'porean moving to the UK, 1 Aug 2014)

Seng here makes a distinction between English and Singlish (line 2). When asked about how he might evaluate Singlish (line 9), Seng adopts a somewhat neutral stance "it's ok lah" (line 10) at the start, and then proceeds to explain why he thinks Singlish "is ok". To Seng, the issue is not necessarily about how valuable Singlish is (which my question in line 9 suggested), but whether individuals are able to switch between English (the standard form) and Singlish. Like Phey in Extract (ii), Seng's account indicates his stance toward the importance of "switching" between these two forms depending on the context. He claims he would not use Singlish "with them" (line 13), presumably people who are British. So Seng appears confident in his ability to "switch" between both forms when needed. While Seng was the only individual who explicitly displayed such an attitude, none of my 20 informants expressed anxieties about Singlish interfering with their use or learning of Standard English. Also important is how both Seng (born and raised in Singapore) and Phey (a Vietnamese who was recruited by the state at age 15) expressed similar stances toward Singlish as a marker of being local. In all, 14 individuals talked about Singlish in such a way.

[4] *Cui* – meaning fragile or weak; etymologically from Hokkien. In this case, Seng was using the word to describe his proficiency in Mandarin.

And yet, there is a clear exception to the accounts that we have seen thus far. Xavier was the only informant (out of 20) who claimed that he never acquired Singlish. Amongst the five informants who suggested that Singlish is not good English, his comments were also the most explicit in its negative evaluation.

Extract (iv)

1 Luke: What do you speak with your friends?
2 Xavier: Basically like how I'm speaking with you now,
3 American English.
4 Luke: So you don't use Singlish or Mandarin at all?
5 Xavier: I only use Mandarin with my parents, I don't
6 really have friends from China, and even then I would
7 choose to use English with them.
8 Luke: Oh, why is that? You don't use Mandarin with people
9 you meet from China?
10 Xavier: Yeah, I mean I'm more comfortable using
11 English generally.
12 Luke: I sort of remember you in class [in St Thomas']
13 already speaking with an American accent and all.
14 Why is that?
15 Xavier: I never picked up Singlish you know. I
16 have always wanted to leave Singapore and possibly
17 head to the States. Singlish is like this provincial,
18 backward language. So I always thought it would be
19 better to learn and speak proper English.

(Interview with Xavier, Chinese national currently in US, 22 Aug 2014)

To Xavier, Singlish has always been "provincial" and "backward" (lines 17-18), and incongruous with his initial aims of moving to the US, even when he was studying in Singapore. His account is seen to value American English over Singlish, associating American English with "proper English". The implication, of course, is that Singlish is not "proper". This is to the extent that he claims that he never did acquire Singlish (line 15). Also significant is how Xavier claims that he is more comfortable using English, even with peers who are immigrants from China whom he meets in the US (lines 10-11).

All five informants who evaluated Singlish as "bad" [either explicitly like Xavier in Extract (iv) or implicitly like Phey in Extract (ii)] did so by associating the forms of English with particular contexts of use. We saw this when Phey said "I mean talking is ok, but in school when in class must be more grammatical. Must be proper English" [Extract (ii) lines 9 – 11]. Xavier's evaluation of Singlish can also be linked to the context of the US, where he endeavoured to move. To demonstrate this similarity, I provide another example below by Cassandra.

Extract (v)

1 Luke: What do you speak now with your friends from Singapore?
2 Cassandra: We still use Singlish lah. We are all comfortable with it.
3 Luke: Would you use it elsewhere with other people?
4 Cassandra: Of course not! My American friends wouldn't understand
5 us right? And it's not exactly proper English. I mean, sometimes
6 we use it amongst ourselves, and our American friends with us
7 will be curious and ask what we are speaking. So sometimes it
8 can be a bit embarrassing. So we try not to use it with other
9 people around.

(Interview with Cassandra, from Taiwan, residing in the US, 26 June 2014)

Cassandra was born in Taiwan, but lived in Singapore from the age of three to 18 when she graduated from St Thomas' School. She had described how she still has a group of close friends from Singapore while living in New York. In Extract (v), her evaluation of Singlish as "not exactly proper English" (line 5) is illustrated with and linked to a situation when she is with both Singaporean and American friends. So these negative evaluations by the five individuals, including Cassandra, Phey and Xavier, are not discussing Singlish in purely abstract terms or its innate properties, but about the acceptability of Singlish in particular situations. I summarise the above findings in the table below:

Table 8.1: Summary of how informants talked about Singlish

Informant ( ) indicates country of origin and age of entry into Singapore	**Trajectory after St Thomas'**	**Talked about using Singlish with Singaporean friends**	**Talked about Singlish as appropriate for certain contexts**	**Talked about link between Singlish and Singaporean culture or identity**	**Talked about or implied Singlish as "bad" or "improper" English**
Andy (Vietnam, 15)	UK	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Bay (Vietnam, 15)	S'pore	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Cassandra (Taiwan, 3)	US	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Chang (China, 15)	S'pore	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Dong (China, 15)	S'pore	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fang (China, 6)	US	Yes	No	No	No
Felicia (China, 15)	S'pore	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Gabriel (S'pore)	UK	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Gin (Vietnam, 15)	S'pore	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hans (Saipan, 5)	US	Yes	Yes	No	No
Henry (Vietnam, 15)	S'pore	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Ling (China, 15)	S'pore	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Ming (China, 15)	US	Yes	No	No	No
Phey (Vietnam, 15)	S'pore	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Quentin (Vietnam, 15)	S'pore	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Seng (S'pore)	UK	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

Vas (India, 15)	US	Yes	Yes	No	No
Xavier (China, 15)	US	No	Yes	No	Yes
Yang (China, 15)	S'pore	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Ying (China, 15)	UK	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Informant ( ) indicates country of origin and age of entry into Singapore	**Trajectory after St Thomas'**	**Talked about using Singlish with Singaporean friends**	**Talked about Singlish as appropriate for certain contexts**	**Talked about link between Singlish and Singaporean culture or identity**	**Talked about or implied Singlish as "bad" or "improper" English**

Importantly, the data shows no discernible link between my informants' time of entry into and migrant status in Singapore, and their trajectory after leaving St Thomas', to their evaluation of Singlish. There is no clear difference in the valuation of Singlish when comparing Gabriel's and Seng's accounts (the two Singaporean informants) with those by immigrants. Also, talk about Singlish being appropriate for certain contexts and linking it to local culture is distributed across all informants, regardless of when they arrived in Singapore (ie either recruited by the state at age 15 like Phey, or immigrating at an earlier age like Cassandra). Amongst the five individuals who talked about Singlish as "bad" or "improper", Cassandra and Xavier moved to the US, while Phey, Dong and Gin remained in Singapore. So there does not seem to be a pattern here either.

The consistent expressed awareness of Singlish and Standard English as acceptable in different contexts is then significant. There is a general sense that Singlish is a marker of Singaporean-ness, to be used only amongst other Singaporeans. This is even as informants acknowledge the acceptability of only Standard English in formal domains such as the school [eg Phey in Extract (i)], or in foreign contexts where there are non-Singaporean interlocutors [eg Cassandra in Extract (v)].

These ideologies suggest that my informants (except Xavier) are generally orienting to two *social fields* (Bourdieu 1991) in their accounts, where the *social field* denotes a context in which individuals take up various positions based on their accumulation of and competition for different resources (Thompson 1991:14). There is the field of education in Singapore, at times linked with their transnational trajectories to universities in the US and UK [eg Seng's account of "switching" in Extract (iii)] – this is a field where only Standard English is recognised to be acceptable by my informants, not Singlish. At the same time, my informants also orient to a local field of informal socialisation with their Singaporean peers – a local market where only Singlish is

preferred, not any other linguistic code such as Mandarin. Xavier's rejection of Singlish [Extract (iv)] can be explained by his anticipation of conditions in a transnational field of education where Singlish is presumed by him to be worthless. It is American English that is valued by Xavier and which he acquired from the outset in accordance with his aspiration of attending university in the US. Xavier had no wish to remain and participate in the local market, and so saw no need for acquiring Singlish as a linguistic capital.

Corresponding to the differentiation uncovered in Chapter Seven, the ideologies in favour of Singlish expressed by my informants (sans Xavier) are to be contrasted with the views expressed by more recent immigrants recruited from China (ie SM2s and SM3s recruited at age 18 and 19 respectively) in Yang's (2016a) ethnography. Recall that my informants differentiated themselves from recent immigrants through cultural traits including proficiency in English and Singlish (Chapter Seven). From a different vantage point, Yang (2016a) describes how certain SM2s and SM3s were subject to being excluded from local peer groups precisely because of their language practices. I reproduce his summary of his informants' reactions:

> "What is noteworthy here is that those PRC scholars in Singapore who experienced such discriminations or feelings of insult found themselves in a position to resist or even launch counter-insults by mobilising certain cultural and symbolic resources available to them. For example, the PRC students' most typical counter-strategy is to belittle Singlish or Singapore-accented English, and implicitly those who speak them, by appealing to a symbolic hierarchy of Englishes which valorises the more authoritative British or American accents…
>
> I also came across not a small number of PRC scholars who actively resisted adopting the Singaporean English accent, convinced that the latter lacked aesthetic quality and international prestige… A not uncommon observation made by my interlocutors about Singaporeans' linguistic abilities is that (Chinese) Singaporeans are 'half buckets of water' (*bantong shui,* Chinese colloquial idiom meaning half-baked) in both English and Chinese, and therefore they have no legitimacy in laughing at the Chinese on the point of language incompetence. One cynical and grumpy informant

> once remarked thus regarding Singaporeans—'They speak *Singlish* as if it's *English*' and that 'They can't even speak a complete sentence in *proper* Mandarin!'"
>
> (Yang 2016a:83-84)

Yang's (2016a) informants are thus individuals who lack Singlish as a linguistic capital due to an undervaluation of and refusal to acquire it [like Xavier], orienting to a transnational field where American and British English is valued ("by appealing to a symbolic hierarchy of Englishes"); or because they have not been sufficiently socialised into Singlish as a practice. I suggest that these accounts by Yang's informants can be further made sense of when seen in the light of the motivations of immigrant students when moving to Singapore (Lu 2016), and also their aspired trajectories (seen in Chapter Five). These student immigrants (including immigrants amongst my informants) often talked about moving to Singapore to acquire Standard English as a capital, so as to potentially move on to universities in the US and UK.

Xavier, from China, who also participated in my previous work on 'designer immigrant students' in Singapore (Lu 2016), had this to say when asked in my previous research if the quality of English education in Singapore was a factor for his migration here:

> "Yes. I wouldn't imagine going to a non-English speaking country for school. That totally defeats the purpose of going abroad [from China]. I mean if I was fluent in English, then that [moving to Singapore to learn English] won't be a factor."
>
> (Xavier's response to interview in 2011, Lu 2016:288-289)

There is therefore a consistent stance shared by my informants and Yang's (2016a) more recent immigrants toward standard forms of English. This occurs when they orient to the field of education in Singapore that is connected with the fields of education in the US and UK, both of which are folded into a wider transnational field where American and British Englishes afford the greatest symbolic power. The key difference lies in my informants' valuation of Singlish as preferred in the local field of informal socialisation amongst their academically elite peers, versus the devaluation of Singlish by these more recent immigrants.

But how would my informants' expressed ideologies compare with wider discourses in Singapore, and how prevalent are their views? How are these differences in the valuation of Singlish between my informants and more recent immigrants connected to the creation of different social positions and disaffiliation?

8.3 Disaffiliation and tension amongst academically elite students

In this section, I situate my informants' expressed ideologies amongst circulating discourses about 'Standard English and ' Singlish' in Singapore. En passant, use of English in Singapore might be more accurately described as the use and reference to two *registers*[5] [in Agha's (2004) sense] of 'Standard English' and 'Singlish', especially also when *register* as a theoretical concept is aligned with the highly ideologised ways in which the two codes are referred to in discourse by the public and state. In Bourdieu's (1991) terms, these ideologies suggest the co-existence of a unified linguistic market for Standard English (in the field of education and labour market), and a local market for Singlish that is more contested. The devaluation of Singlish by more recent immigrants may be linked to their exclusion from the peer groups of localised academic elites, thus demonstrating impedance in their transition and adaptation to local spaces. On the other hand, the valuation of Singlish by my informants is an indication of their being embedded in local spaces.

8.3.1 Attitudes toward Singlish use in wider society

Despite the prevalence of its use, there are actually conflicting attitudes toward Singlish amongst the public in Singapore. Common discourses supporting its use tend to claim it as a part of national identity, while those against Singlish are inclined to position it as "bad English" (Wee 2005:56). Examples of these opposing perspectives are given below, via letters written to a local broadsheet:

[5] As previously mentioned, the argument for using the term *register* is developed more fully in Appendix B.

> "Singlish is a mark of how we have evolved as a nation and should surely have a place in our culture. Embracing Singlish as part of our heritage is not self-deception. It's about not being embarrassed by something that is unique and precious to how we express ourselves."
>
> (The Straits Times 3 November 1998)

> "I cannot support its promotion. . . . We must dissociate English from Singlish, its insidious enemy. . . . Is cultural indulgence worth lingual disrespect and diffidence?"
>
> (The Straits Times 30 October 1998)

More recently, studies have been conducted to determine more precise attitudes that segments of the Singaporean population might have toward Singlish, juxtaposed with Standard English. Amongst such research, it has been found that young people who have had higher levels of education are more inclined to see Singlish as a marker of cultural identity, without necessarily viewing it as "bad English".

Cavallaro et al (2014) combined a matched-guise study with interview data of 259 participants. Half of the participants were students in a local university, while the other half were adults in their 20s and 30s without university education. In fair reflection of the prevalent attitudes described by Wee (2005), amongst those who viewed Singlish positively, individuals often talked about Singlish as representative of Singaporean culture and identity. "Anti-Singlish" comments often described Singlish as not proper English, an impediment to learning Standard English and to be avoided in daily use. 53.1% of university students produced comments that were "pro-Singlish" about its use in informal contexts, and 26.1% of participants without tertiary education did the same. On the other hand, only 1.6% of university students expressed decidedly "anti-Singlish" comments, with 31.9% of those without university education who voiced similar opinions (Cavallaro et al 2014:391-392). By Cavallaro et al's (2014:393) reckoning, these findings suggest a link between educational levels and attitudes toward Singlish and Standard English – individuals with lower levels of education and with fewer opportunities to acquire Standard English are more inclined to view Singlish negatively. Cavallaro et al's (2014) study is to be compared with Leimgruber's (2014) who carried out a survey amongst 134 students at a local university. 56% of Leimgruber's (2014) respondents agreed that "Singlish is the only thing that makes [them] Singaporeans",

while 30% disagree and 18% are neutral (Leimgruber 2014:52). Both studies thus indicate a similar association between Singlish and cultural identity amongst students in university.

Tan and Tan's (2008) work then provides further evidence for how Singlish possesses covert prestige in informal domains amongst young students. They conducted a matched-guise test with a standardised questionnaire amongst 260 students from five mainstream secondary schools in Singapore. In the questionnaire, 79.2% of respondents associated 'Singlish' with Singapore, the highest rating amongst other items in the questionnaire including a sense of '*kaisuism*'[6] (second highest rating with 62.7% of respondents associating it with Singapore) and 'food' (third highest rating with 58.9% of respondents). Over 80% of respondents reported using Singlish with friends and classmates outside classroom settings, as well as with family members, while 22.3% of respondents reported using Singlish with teachers in English lessons. To Tan and Tan (2008), the results of their survey confirm that Singlish is valued and used by students in everyday life. It helps them "feel closer to friends" and makes the speaker sound "friendlier", that is, Singlish serves to establish affinity and reduce social distance (Tan and Tan 2008:476). Like Cavallaro et al's (2014) research, participants also indicated that Singlish is part of their culture. At the same time, the students clearly demonstrated an awareness that Singlish was only appropriate in particular contexts – outside of the classroom, with other students etc – while Standard English was deemed to be the preferred code in more formal situations.

All of these studies appear to be aligned with the ideologies expressed by my informants regarding Singlish and Standard English. My informants' valuation of Singlish as a marker of Singaporean identity, as well as the acceptability of its use in informal domains is generally held by younger and more highly educated individuals in Singapore (ie academic elites). Importantly, as Cavallaro et al (2014) suggest, individuals with lower levels of education were more likely to express negative evaluations of Singlish.

Even as the general public is divided about the status of Singlish, the co-existence of Singlish with Standard English in Singapore's linguistic economy has always sat uneasily with the government. The state frames Standard English as crucial to Singapore's development in a global economy, so that Singlish is a problem that

[6] 'Kiasu' is a Singlish word (etymologically from Hokkien) that literally means a fear of losing out.

prevents Singaporeans from acquiring the standard form and is thus a threat to the nation's economic progress (Wee 2005:57). Such a view is exemplified by then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's speech:

> "The ability to speak good English is a distinct advantage in terms of doing business and communicating with the world. This is especially important for a hub city and an open economy like ours. If we speak a corrupted form of English that is not understood by others, we will lose a key competitive advantage. My concern is that if we continue to speak Singlish, it will over time become Singapore's common language. Poor English reflects badly on us and makes us seem less intelligent or competent. Investors will hesitate to come over if their managers or supervisors can only guess what our workers are saying. We will find it difficult to be an education and financial centre. Our TV programmes and films will find it hard to succeed in overseas markets because viewers overseas do not understand Singlish. All this will affect our aim to be a first-world economy."
>
> (Goh Chok Tong 2000)

The attitudes held by Singaporeans with higher levels of education are thus at odds with the state's official position toward Singlish use. Such conflicting positions between academically elite individuals and the state have at times been played out in the public sphere. Gwee Li Sui, a local poet and one time Assistant Professor of Literature in the National University of Singapore, celebrated the rise of Singlish in an article for the New York Times (Gwee 2016). In the article, Gwee remarked that the government has reduced its antagonistic stance toward Singlish, observing that local politicians have begun employing Singlish in their speeches and campaigns. The article provoked an immediate rebuke from the Prime Minister's Office (Chang 2016), accusing Gwee of "making light" of the government's efforts to promote Standard English, and unequivocally repeating its stance that Singlish is a hindrance to economic development:

> "Standard English is vital for Singaporeans to earn a living and be understood not just by other Singaporeans but also English speakers everywhere. But English is not the mother tongue of most Singaporeans. For them, mastering the language requires extra effort. Using Singlish will

> make it harder for Singaporeans to learn and use standard English. Not everyone has a Ph.D. in English Literature like Mr. Gwee, who can code-switch effortlessly between Singlish and Standard English, and extol the virtues of Singlish in an op-ed written in polished Standard English."
>
> (Chang 2016)

Another example occurred in the context of the state's implementation of the Speak Good English Movement (SGEM), launched on an annual basis since 2000. In terms of the intentions behind the SGEM, it is not unlike other state-sponsored programmes seeking to manage and dictate language use in Singapore since its independence (Xu and Li 2002:275), such as the Speak Mandarin Campaign. Much as the self-explanatory title suggests, the SGEM seeks to actively promote Standard English amongst Singaporeans, while discouraging the use of Singlish (Wee 2014:86), often advancing claims that Singlish is ungrammatical and interferes with the learning of Standard English (Wee 2014:91-92). In 2010, an opposing campaign called the Speak Good Singlish Movement was launched by anonymous individuals on Facebook. While the manifesto of the campaign generally took a humorous tone, it included substantive arguments and critiques about Singlish and Standard English that pointed to the authorship of ostensibly educated individuals who were highly proficient in both registers (Wee 2014:88).

Surveys on attitudes (eg Cavallaro et al 2014, Leimgruber 2014) toward Singlish amongst individuals with higher levels of education (ie at least attending university), as well as the frequent clashes between educated Singaporeans and the government about the status of Singlish, both point to a common valuation of Singlish held by academically elite Singaporeans. My informants' ideologies about Singlish are thus seen to be aligned with these circulating discourses held by Singaporean academic elites. How then might Singlish contribute to disaffiliation and social tensions amongst academically elite students in Singapore? It is worth returning to Bourdieu and how my informants are orienting to two different social fields in their accounts about Standard English and Singlish.

8.3.2 A transnational field of education

As suggested by Cavallaro et al (2014) and by my discussion of circulating discourses in the previous section, the orthodox position toward Singlish – as valuable in situations of informality, as a marker of Singaporean-ness, to be used only amongst other Singaporeans – is particularly prevalent amongst academic elites. This is even as the government and less educated individuals tend to hold a more negative view of Singlish. Yet, just as Bourdieu's original formulation of field was critiqued as a 'static economy' by Ong (1999) that does not address transnational movement of peoples, Singapore's linguistic economy is seen to be destabilised by processes of immigration. The recruitment of immigrant students by the state brings in people such as SM2s and SM3s from China, who have different cultural and linguistic capitals, and different valuations of existing capitals in Singapore.

At the national level for Singapore, there appears to be a linguistic market in the field of education where Standard English is promoted by the state and (mis)recognised by all social actors as a pre-eminent linguistic capital symbolic of educational attainment. All social actors in Singapore, regardless of educational level and migrant status, recognise the value of Standard English in official domains. Even academically elite individuals who value Singlish as a marker of cultural identity do not seek to valorise Singlish as a replacement for the Standard. This field of education is integrated with a transnational one. It is demonstrated by the state's rhetoric regarding the economic value of Standard English in a global economy and concomitant fear that citizens might only be proficient in Singlish. It is also seen in the way my informants [eg Seng in Extract (iii); Xavier in Extract (iv)] and Yang's (2016a) research participants orient to linguistic markets in the US and UK. The borders of this social field of education might consequently be said to be transnational and global in scale. Recall that this observation of a transnational field of education is in line with Kenway and Koh's (2013) analysis in their work on elite schooling in Singapore. Students acquire particular capitals of international currency that enable them to move overseas to top universities. For my informants, Standard English is one such crucial linguistic capital[7].

[7] Similar observations have been made by various scholars (eg Heller 2003, Cameron 2012) who address the status of English as a valuable commodity in the global labour market, as well as the motives of economic rationalism undertaken by individuals who prefer linguistic capitals that can be more readily converted into economic capital.

In this field of education, the state's recruitment of talented student immigrants thus appears rather seamless, much like Kenway and Koh's (2013) depiction of students in the elite secondary school. The transnational movement of these immigrants into Singapore's schools is relatively smooth, as they recognise the value of Standard English and devote themselves to acquiring this capital. Amongst my informants (even immigrants who possessed initial low proficiencies in Standard English), all of them do end up successful in attaining Standard English as a linguistic capital and converting it into cultural capital in the form of academic qualifications and admittance to universities. All my informants, including immigrants, attained at least a B in General Paper in the A Levels; those who applied all earned a place in top-ranked universities in the US and UK. As noted by Yang (2016a), the academic performance of more recent immigrants such as SM2s and SM3s in Singapore's universities are also generally exemplary, often dominating the Dean's Lists in these schools (Yang 2016a:78).

Theoretically, Bourdieu's (1991) original account of standard language in a linguistic economy (ie Standard French in France) is positively co-related with social positions of power and prestige amongst academic elites for anyone who possesses the right linguistic capital. In Singapore, Standard English affords this symbolic power in the field of education, and Kenway and Koh (2013) have assumed the seamless transition of academically elite students through various schools across international borders due to their possession of such capitals. Yet, as discussed in the previous section, Yang's (2016a) account suggests that his recent immigrant informants are excluded from local peer groups due to a devaluation and lack of Singlish. How can I explain this disaffiliation between social actors through their different valuations of Singlish? How might the specific valuation of Singlish by my informants also point to their embeddedness in local spaces?

8.3.3 The local field of informal socialisation

Taking into account the previous discussion on conflicting attitudes toward Singlish, the local linguistic market pertaining to Singlish appears to be contested by at least three groups of social actors: (i) localised academic elites (both Singaporean and immigrant) who uphold and claim to practise it as a marker of local cultural identity; (ii) recent immigrants from China who see it as a less valuable form of English compared to American and British forms; (iii) lower educated Singaporeans who see it as an

impediment to acquiring Standard English. The divisive nature of such a linguistic market might be denoted as *sociological fractionation* by Agha (2004), "where one group resists the scheme of values upheld by another (countervalorisation), or misrecognises, or ideologically distorts, such values in fashioning norms for itself" (Agha 2004:27). The effect of such contestation in Singapore is the disaffiliation between these three groups along the lines of access to Standard English and Singlish, and how they value these linguistic capitals. This is in line with Agha's (2004) [8] own general depiction:

> "Thus, two members of a language community may both be acquainted with a linguistic register, but not have the same degree of competence in its use. Many speakers can recognise certain registers of their language but cannot fully use or interpret them. The existence of registers therefore results in the creation of social boundaries within society, partitioning off language users into groups distinguished by differential access to particular registers, and to the social practices which they mediate; and through the creation and maintenance of asymmetries of power, privilege, and rank, as effects dependent on the above processes."
>
> (Agha 2004:29)

In Bourdieu's terms, the disaffiliation between localised academic elites like my informants from more recent immigrants like Yang's (2016a) informants might occur in two coterminous ways. First, my informants' claimed competence in both Singlish and Standard English registers, coupled with their understanding of the appropriate linguistic codes in certain contexts are crucial in the embodiment of their embeddedness in local culture and as academic elites in Singapore. In Bourdieu's (1991) own words,

> "…competence, which is acquired in a social context and through practice, is inseparable from the practical mastery of a usage of language and the practical mastery of situations in which this usage of language is *socially acceptable.* The sense of the value of one's own linguistic products is a

[8] While I cite Agha (2004) here, I am also aware of his criticisms (Agha 2007:229-231) regarding Bourdieu's (1991:51) claims that habitus is not transmitted through language. In contrast to Bourdieu's proposition, Agha (2007:229) argues that it is through communicative events and metalinguistic discourse (such as those assigning valuations to Singlish by my informants in interviews) that habitus is produced. I am inclined toward Agha's (2007) account, while acknowledging Bourdieu's heuristic explanation for how social differentiation might occur through language.

> fundamental dimension of the sense of knowing the place which one occupies in the social space."
>
> (Bourdieu 1991:82)

That is, my informants' claim that they value and use Singlish amongst Singaporean peers is a sign of their alignment and sense of affiliation with other localised academically elite students (ie valuing Singlish as "socially acceptable" is "a fundamental dimension of the sense of knowing the place which one occupies in the social space").

Second, the differences in claimed competence and valuation of Singlish between my informants and more recent immigrants is indicative of *competing* social positions (cf Thomson 1991:14) in a field between the two groupings. Different valuations and access to Singlish as a linguistic capital is associated with different social positions for individuals who do not engage in the same social practice in the same way.

Consequently, besides the field of education, there is another field of informal socialisation amongst academic elites in Singapore. It is Singlish that is the valued linguistic capital in the field of informal socialisation amongst academic elites, more so than Standard English and Mandarin (the supposed autochthonous tongue of the majority ethnic Chinese)[9]. It is Singlish that is linked to solidarity and friendship networks with local Singaporeans. Possession of Singlish is hence a reflection of localisation and relationships formed with other Singaporeans. My informants' (sans Xavier) claim that they value and practise Singlish amongst their Singaporean peers suggests their participation in this field of informal socialisation with a "sense of the value of one's own linguistic products" (Bourdieu 1991:82), and is therefore a sign of their connection to local spaces. Conversely, Xavier's claim [Extract (iv)] that he did not use Singlish because it is "provincial", and his concomitant ambitions to move to the US at the outset, can be taken as indications of his lack of connection to the localised field of informal socialisation.

[9] This is in line with Yang's account [Extract (xiii) in Chapter Seven, pp.191], when she narrated how she would avoid using Mandarin in the presence of Singaporean peers. Also see Quentin's account about 'cheena English' [Extracts (xvi and xvii) in Chapter Seven, pp.197-198], where the use of too many Mandarin features in Singlish is seen to be unacceptable in his local peer group.

Without Singlish, academic elite individuals [such as Yang's (2016a) informants] are liable to be positioned as outsiders by localised academic elites and continue to have low social status associated with being an immigrant [as seen in Chapter Seven and Yang's (2016a) account], less able to participate in the field of informal socialisation. The borders of this field of informal socialisation can therefore be roughly demarcated by the differences in valuation of Singlish held by localised academic elites (like my informants) juxtaposed against those held by more recent immigrants [like Yang's (2016) informants]. This points to disaffiliation between the two groupings.

In what way might such disaffiliation and social tensions lead to friction in the transnational movement of academically elite students? In my review of migration literature (Chapter Two), I addressed how some scholars have argued for an understanding of 'mobility' to include not just the movement between two points, but also the process of transitioning and adaptation from one point to another. Specifically, Yeoh and Huang (2011) suggest how the "migratory moves of the talented and skilled have to be understood within a broader cultural politics both in terms of a politics of moving (and belonging) and a politics of place" (Yeoh and Huang 2011:683). Accordingly, 'frictionless mobility' can be seen as understating the process of transition and adaptation when moving from point A to B, depicting such moves as smoothly continuous. The case of Singlish thus points to potential friction in mobility when academically elite immigrant students enter the cultural space of their localised peers. Immigrants who do not acquire Singlish are vulnerable to encountering disaffiliation from and social tension with localised individuals.

The discussion thus far has demonstrated how differences in the valuation of Singlish contributes to the disaffiliation between my informants' position as localised academic elites and more recent immigrants who do not value Singlish in the same way. I argued that this disaffiliation might lead to friction in the transnational movement of elites into Singapore. Rather than a straightforward account of accruing power and prestige through attaining Standard English in the field of education, the existence of another field of informal socialisation and Singlish's role in this linguistic market adds a layer of complexity to the situation of academic elites in Singapore. In the field of education, Standard English might enable one to gain the position of academic elite. In the field of informal socialisation amongst the peer groups of academically elite students, Singlish is associated with the formation of Singaporean friendship networks; a marker of

localisation; a sign of being embedded in local spaces. Both Standard English and Singlish are thus important linguistic capitals linked to being an insider amongst Singapore's localised academic elites.

8.3.4 Why would local academic elites value Singlish the vernacular?

This then leads us to consider a peculiar phenomenon – localised academic elites in Singapore (such as Dr Gwee Li Sui and my informants) are the ones who value Singlish the *patois* as marker of Singaporean-ness, while the less educated tend to view it negatively. This is in contrast to Bourdieu's (1991) original formulation of the linguistic market in France, where Standard French is symbolic of French national identity at the expense of the valuation of the *patois*[10]. How might one explain such a different situation in Singapore?

As described in Chapter Four, the Singapore state has tried to harness the advantages of a global economy, yet define a local cultural identity tied to its concept of an equal multi-racial nation (Chua 1998). This led the government to establish an ideological position regarding Standard English. The state positions Standard English as a racially-neutral language that allows inter-ethnic communication within the nation, as well as of utility in the global economy. At the same time, the state defines English as unsuitable for expressing the heritage and culture of Singapore's official racial groupings. This is why government rhetoric has often distinguished English from official mother tongues as a dichotomy of economic tool and cultural tie (Wee 2003).

Conceivably, it is the absence of a state imposed national language – an ideological vacuum in nation-building – coupled with the massive shift toward English-use (also outlined in Chapter Four) amongst all citizens regardless of race, that has allowed room for academic elites (like Dr Gwee Li Sui) to champion the value and status of Singlish the *patois* as a marker of national identity. As already discussed, the ideological position

[10] To be sure, Bourdieu (1991:18-19) also describes how French elites were able to use the *patois* when it suited them to do so (eg the Mayor of Pau using the local vernacular in his public speech in order to gain the political trust and goodwill of local villagers). Bourdieu (1991) calls this a strategy of *condescension*, "reserved for those who are sufficiently confident of their position in the objective hierarchies to be able to deny them without appearing to be ignorant or incapable..." Bourdieu (1991:69). Yet, the situation in Singapore is different in the sense that localised academic elites would use Singlish amongst themselves in an unmarked manner, not just to condescend to the level of individuals less proficient in Standard English.

of academic elites is that Singlish is preferred in the field of informal socialisation, and no one is clamouring to valorise Singlish at the expense of Standard English in the field of education. Such an ideological stance held by academic elites thus actually serves to affirm, not undermine, existing hegemonic nation-building ideologies: (i) regarding the economic value of Standard English in the field of education, enabling citizens (including the academic elites themselves) to plug into a global economy; (ii) regarding the need for a racially-neutral language to unite the various linguistic and ethnic groups in Singapore. It maintains the exclusive position of academic elites in contrast to the less educated with less access to Standard English. In the context of increasing immigration of talented individuals, this ideological position also serves as an act of *distinction* (Bourdieu 1991:18), excluding recent immigrants from participating in the local field of informal socialisation, potentially relegating talented immigrants who gain Standard English without Singlish to a lower social status. In Bourdieu's (1991:18) terms, the unequal distribution of Singlish amongst academically elite students in Singapore points to the ability of those who possess Singlish to exploit this system of differences in order to secure a "*profit of distinction*". Accordingly, the state's balancing act of engaging in the globalised economy, while managing localised racial identity politics, might have unintentionally culminated in these parallel social fields and linguistic markets pertaining to Standard English and Singlish.

8.4 Singlish as source of tension and token of en-territorialisation amongst academically elite students

The aim of this chapter is to respond to depictions of frictionless and deterritorialised mobility supposedly undertaken by cosmopolitan elites, while assessing whether and how en-territorialisation might be taking place. I turned to my data to see whether and how Singlish as a capital might contribute to disaffiliation amongst academically elite students in Singapore, and if it might indicate their connection to the local. These were the research questions set out at the beginning:

a) How is Singlish positioned and valued in relation to other linguistic capitals by various social actors (including my informants) in Singapore?
b) Might there be differences in valuation of specific linguistic capitals? How might these differences be linked to the local context?

c) How might these differences in valuation translate into the creation of different social positions, disaffiliation and hence friction in mobility? How might valuations of Singlish point to a sense of being embedded in local spaces?
d) What implications might there be regarding how we understand and study the transnational movement of cosmopolitan mobile elites?

In seeking to answer these questions, I examined my informants' expressed ideologies about Singlish in interviews. I uncovered that they generally reported a consistent valuation of Standard English in scholastic domains, while claiming to prefer Singlish as a marker of Singaporean-ness when interacting with Singaporean peers. This is in contrast to more recent immigrants [ie Yang's (2016a) informants from China] who devalue Singlish. I situated these discourses among wider attitudes held by segments of Singapore society, and posited that these ideologies point to two social fields in Bourdieu's (1991) sense: a field of education where Standard English is uniformly valued by social actors in Singapore, and a field of informal socialisation amongst academically elite students where the value of Singlish is contested. The contestation between social actors regarding the value of Singlish contributes to disaffiliation between localised academic elites (such as my informants) and recently recruited academically elite immigrant students [such as Yang's (2016a) informants)]. More than just reproducing state categories of migrant status and reflecting anti-immigrant sentiment (in Chapter Seven), the disaffiliation amongst academic elites in Singapore is also about differing/competing valuations of linguistic capitals (in this case Standard English and Singlish), orienting to different linguistic markets in the field of education and localised field of informal socialisation.

8.4.1 Implications for theorisations of cosmopolitan elite migrants

The examination of my informants' valuation of Standard English and Singlish through Bourdieu's (1991) theory has enabled me to point to the existence of two social fields pertinent to my informants' lived experiences in Singapore. There is the field of education and a field of informal socialisation where different linguistic capitals are important in the contestation of power. The state's promotion of Standard English and official mother tongues would theoretically suit the linguistic practices and valuations of recruited immigrants from China who value Standard English and are already highly proficient in Mandarin. In actuality, while these immigrants might be successful in the

field of education, they might face obstacles to participating in the field of informal socialisation amongst academic elites, an area where the state has less control. It points to impending problems in the state's immigration and language policies. At a time when the state increasingly positions Mandarin as instrumental to developing close economic ties with China (Wee 2003), localised academic elites who are ethnic Chinese increasingly distance themselves from the state's policy of Mandarin as Mother Tongue. The role of recruited student immigrants from China who possess Mandarin then becomes ever more fundamental to the state's economic agenda. Might a more prominent social position for these immigrants lead to keener competition and wider fissures with localised academic elites?

The invocation of Bourdieu's theory thus opens up an area of inquiry in addressing the positionings of globalised elites in any given setting. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role that vernaculars like Singlish might play in disaffiliation between groups of people, and consider the possibility that individuals might have contrasting social positions in different social fields, I suggest that the discussion of capitals must be done in conjunction with the identification of specific social fields that informants orient to in their talk. In assessing the lived experiences of globalised elites in any particular locality, analysts cannot just attend to the unified education and labour markets (as states are wont to do) where these individuals often appear to possess the required cultural capitals in order to be highly successful and well-integrated. Indeed, the Singapore government itself places far greater emphasis on recruited immigrant students' successful transition into the field of education than the immigrants' ability to socialise and develop affiliations with their peers. Students recruited on scholarships have to maintain a minimum grade point average in school, or risk having their scholarships terminated. There is no equivalent penalty for failing to socialise and be acquainted with Singaporean friends. Besides the field of education, one also has to examine the field of informal socialisation where different valuations of various capitals are likely to translate into inequalities and sources of disaffiliation between social actors, especially locals and immigrants. Like the anti-immigrant sentiment seen in Chapter Seven, this disaffiliation might lead to impedance or friction in the transnational moves of elites, if we understand mobility to include processes of transitioning and adapting to local spaces (Yeoh and Huang 2011). Singlish, when valued differently, potentially impedes, or serves as a kink in the supposedly smooth and continuous movement of recruited immigrant students into the cultural spaces

inhabited by localised academically elite students. An analysis of both social fields is required in order to gain a more comprehensive picture of transnational mobility engaged in and frictions encountered by global elites.

This then points to another aspect of inadequacy when friction in mobility serves as a focal lens through which we study transnational movement. While examining friction can point to the differentiation and social tension amongst academically elite students, it does not highlight the competitive nature of social life, nor does it offer an explanation for how such differentiation in social positions can occur. In this, Bourdieu's (1991) theory was helpful in demonstrating how Singlish is a linguistic capital with contested values by more recent immigrants and localised students. And it is through such differential access to and valuation of Singlish that competing (different) social positions emerge. That is, Singlish points to: (i) localisation vis a vis the transnational mobilities of academically elite students; and (ii) distinction within the national sphere.

Finally, I suggest that my informants' (sans Xavier) consistent attitude toward Singlish and claim that they use it with their Singaporean peers are evidence of their en-territorialisation in local spaces. These are not individuals who are entirely deterritorialised as they engage in migration, "indifferent to where they lived" (Robbins 1998:3), and who "do not harbor a desire for guarantees of communal security" (Bauman 2011:82). Rather, my informants do participate in and develop cultural ideologies and practices as a reflection of being embedded in local peer groups that they value, not reject. My informants' sense of Singlish's acceptability in the field of informal socialisation is one indication of their localisation and embeddedness in Singapore. In other words, it might be apt to perceive Singlish use as a token of localisation and hence en-territorialisation amongst academically elite students in Singapore.

Chapter Nine: The *en*-territorialisation of academically elite students in Singapore

9.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter presents a summary of my findings in relation to theorisations on the transnational movement of cosmopolitan elites. I argue that notions of frictionless (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013:186) and deterritorialised (Yeoh and Huang 2011:682) movement are inadequate to describe the mobilities of academically elite students in Singapore. Rather, these mobilities are better understood to include processes of en-territorialisation that they undergo in localised "regimes" (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013) or "social-cultural-political matrices" (Yeoh and Huang 2011:684). Such evidence of en-territorialisation presents implications for our understanding of cosmopolitan cultural practices, the state's recruitment of talented immigrants, and narratives regarding elite immigrants circulating amongst the Singaporean public. I also suggest that my informants are not uniquely placed, with plausible similarities to academically elite students in Hong Kong. I end by proposing that future studies of such individuals ought to be ethnographic in nature with a focus on their lives in institutional settings.

9.2 A summary of the thesis

The start of this thesis (in Chapter One) argued for the topical relevance of studying individuals like my informants who are often highly successful in school and appear to engage in intense transmigration. These are individuals highly sought after by national governments, yet also the source of much nationalistic resentment in local politics. A review of literature (in Chapter Two) situates academically elite students like my informants as most compatible with the migrant type of 'cosmopolitan mobile elite'. However, there are particular inadequacies when it comes to describing the mobilities and cultural practices of such cosmopolitan elites in current research. In migration studies, there is a cumulative tendency to characterise the transnational movement of elites as being frictionless, deterritorialised and motivated by economic logic, often without adequate empirical grounding (Skey 2013:238). In the literature on elite schooling, such descriptions of the seamless transition of top-performing students across transnational education systems are also prevalent (eg Kenway and Koh 2013), with a lack of attention to how differentiations might emerge amongst this set of

academically elite individuals (eg De Costa 2016). In the literature on language and education, the focal research subject has most often been the disadvantaged immigrant student (eg Miller 2000) who has permanently settled in a host society (eg Reyes and Lo 2009), not top-performing students who cross national borders on a frequent basis. I thus proposed to plug the research gap by broadening the research gaze to include academically elite students like my informants, as well as to explore the links that localised contexts might have to their trajectories and practices. Such a research agenda is in line with Glick Schiller and Salazar's (2013), and Yeoh and Huang's (2011) calls for a need to lay out the connections between structure and agency (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013:195-196), and to contextualise the mobilities and behaviours of cosmopolitan elites in the "social-cultural-political matrices" (Yeoh and Huang 2011:684) of a particular space.

The discussion led to the crystallisation of two research questions:

1. How are the cultural identities and sociolinguistic practices of academically elite students linked to their aspirations, trajectories, and wider circulating discourses in the local context of Singapore?
2. In what ways does an investigation of these links complicate and contribute to theorisations of cosmopolitan elite migrants as engaging in frictionless and rootless moves, mainly motivated by economic logic?

In order to answer these two questions, I suggested (in Chapter Three) a qualitative study relying primarily on interview data, but also drawing on my own experiences as a former teacher and student of the same school environment, an individual who received the same brand of state scholarship, and member of a peer group that some informants are a part of. Following a contextualisation of my informants' trajectories (in Chapter Four), I identified three areas important to understanding their transnational movement and lives in Singapore: (a) racial politics and the racial criterion of immigration; (b) the scheme of scholarships offered by the state; (c) St Thomas' School in an elitist education system. I thus proceeded to apply my broader research questions to each of these three contextual aspects, interrogating the notions of frictionless and deterritorialised movement as I went along. I examined how informants discursively positioned themselves to, and made sense of: (i) aspirations and educational trajectories linked to their socialisation into St Thomas' school environment (Chapter Five); (ii)

undergraduate state scholarships targeting citizens (Chapters Six); and (iii) the notion of race in their accounts of self-differentiation (Chapter Seven). Findings in Chapter Seven then led me to consider the role that a localised register, Singlish, might play in differentiations and disaffiliations amongst academically elite students in Singapore (Chapter Eight).

9.3 Findings in relation to theorisations of cosmopolitan elite migrants

Recall that theorisations on the mobility of cosmopolitan elite migrants tend to describe their movement as frictionless, deterritorialised and motivated by economic logic. In this depiction, the notion of 'frictionless' suggests the migrant's presumed ability to move, actual easy movement, and that the migrant can adapt easily or quickly to new host societies (Salazar 2010:54). The notion of deterritorialised movement suggests the migrant's weak ties and cultural affiliations to a particular locality [cf Yeoh and Huang's (2011:682) critique of Cheah (2001) and Robbins (1998)]. The emphasis on economic logic suggests the pre-eminence of objectives such as career options and the opportunity to accumulate more material wealth in the migrant's list of priorities. I argued that these notions do not quite characterise my informants' discursive positionings during interviews in local contexts. I summarise my findings in Chapters Five through Eight as follows:

- *Chapter Five* – In their accounts on aspirations and trajectories, my informants generally positioned themselves as favouring international mobility to the US and UK, compared to remaining in Singapore (unless it was to read Medicine or Law locally). However, there are also nuances in my informants' accounts that suggest that their trajectories are: (i) not about easy movement between Point A to B, as some might face obstacles such as a lack of money or poor academic results; (ii) not entirely motivated by economic logic, as they show glimpses of personal interests and the valuation of local social relationships; (iii) not absolutely deterritorialised as there are signs of their socialisation into local ways of thinking and acting. In particular for (iii), the conventionalisation of their aspirations and trajectories and ways of talking about these can be linked to the ethos of academic ability and globalist programmes in St Thomas'. Informants perceive an expectation that they ought to conform to the conventional track, which might also be conflated with high academic ability (due to the ethos of ability in St Thomas'). Informants who did not

embark on the track thus feel a compulsion to explain themselves and defend their academic ability.

- *Chapter Six* – I argue here that my Singaporean informants' positioning to state scholarships shows signs of rootedness to Singapore, rather than deterritorialisation in their migratory moves. In interviews, immigrant informants tended not to talk about or consider prestigious state scholarships that the government offered to citizens. On the other hand, Singaporean informants especially portrayed aspirations aligned with, not opposed to the idea of returning to Singapore. These aspirations held by Singaporean informants are commensurate with the state's strategy of sending academically elite citizens to top universities abroad, while tying them to the nation through contractual bonds. In addition, Singaporean informants often talked about the scholarship in terms of offering "stability" and "comfort". These stances taken by Singaporean informants might be explained by Singapore's political economy that I described as a nationalistic regime (available only to citizens and geared towards state interests) linking an elitist education system via scholarships to the local sphere of social and political power. The sensibilities portrayed by my Singaporean informants are thus signs that they do not necessarily mind being, and in fact at times, demonstrate a desire to be rooted to such a nationalistic regime.

- *Chapter Seven* – I make two main arguments here: (i) that social tensions exist between immigrants and locals amongst academically elite students, and that this tension can lead to impedance or friction when recruited immigrant students move into Singapore; and (ii) that the uptake of local discourses and strategies of adaptation presents further evidence of my informants' connections to local spaces. While there is a marked racial criterion in the state's recruitment of academically elite students from neighbouring countries, my informants (both immigrant and local) did not invoke ethnicity in their accounts of self-differentiation. Instead, they positioned themselves (and others) along a continuum of 'Singaporean-ness', using official classifications of nationality and time of entry into Singapore (eg SM1/2/3) as sources of cultural and structural differentiation. Specifically, Singaporean informants positioned immigrants as less Singaporean (but with those from Southeast Asia being relationally closer than individuals from China); immigrant informants positioned themselves as more Singaporean than more recent

immigrants; immigrant informants (both from Vietnam and China) produced the same 'anti-PRC' attitudes as their Singaporean peers. These accounts point to social tension and disaffiliation amongst academically elite students. The adaptation of recruited immigrant students to local spaces cannot be construed as entirely easy and without impedance.

These accounts can be partially explained as a reflection of widespread public discourses that are anti-immigrant and anti-PRC in nature. The accounts can also be linked to local ideologies regarding the label of being 'cheena', where overt Chinese practices such as speaking Mandarin with one's peers are associated with a lack of sophistication and education. Consequently, despite their supposed racial similarity with the majority of Singaporeans, immigrant informants from China enter the cultural space of Singapore schools with low status unless they can acculturate. They manage this situation by disavowing close associations with being from China (including engaging in anti-immigrant discourse themselves), and abandoning practices that index their migrant status in the presence of locals. At the same time, they claim to adopt acceptable practices such as using English and Singlish when interacting with Singaporean peers. Such strategies of adaptation (by immigrants) and uptake of anti-immigrant discourses (by both immigrants and locals) demonstrate how my informants have been socialised into local spaces.

- *Chapter Eight* – This penultimate chapter argues for my informants' valuation of Singlish as a source of tension and token of embeddedness in Singapore amongst academically elite students. Chapter Seven had uncovered how Singlish was often referenced by informants as a marker of localisation. I thus wanted to consider the role Singlish might play in contributing to differentiations amongst academically elite students. In examining my informants' expressed ideologies about Singlish and Standard English in interviews, I uncovered that they generally reported a consistent valuation of Standard English in scholastic domains, while claiming to prefer Singlish as a marker of Singaporean-ness when interacting with Singaporean peers. This is in contrast to more recent immigrants [ie Yang's (2016a) informants from China] who tend to devalue Singlish, while upholding the value of standard forms of English. Invoking Bourdieu's (1991) theory, I posited that my informants were orienting to two different social fields in interviews: a field of education where Standard English is uniformly valued by people in Singapore, and an informal field

of socialisation amongst academically elite students where the value of Singlish is contested. These differences in the valuation of Singlish possibly lead to disaffiliation between two groupings amongst academically elite students in Singapore: (i) recently recruited immigrant students who do not value Singlish; and (ii) localised peer groups (that include my informants) who claim to value and practise Singlish in their informal interactions. Singlish can therefore be seen as potentially contributing to impedance or friction in the adaptation of immigrants to local spaces. Accordingly, the identity of localised academically elite students in Singapore is connected to the practice of both registers of Standard English and Singlish. My informants' claim to practising and valuing Singlish is indicative of their ties to and affiliations with localised peer groups.

9.4 Contributions to theorisations of cosmopolitan elite migrants

Crucially, the narrative of frictionless and deterritorialised moves underplays the processes of adaptation and socialisation that immigrants necessarily face when moving into new host societies. It neglects how all individuals (both immigrants and locals) in society are embedded in "the politics of moving (and belonging) and the politics of place" (Yeoh and Huang 2011:683). All of Chapters Five through Eight offer instantiations of my informants being involved, to various degrees, in such local politics. I argued in each Chapter how these processes might be better seen as *en*-territorialisation – taking up local circulating discourses; being socialised into local ways of thinking and behaving; developing ties to and affiliations with local peer groups and spaces. Thus, my informants' structured talk about their conventionalised aspirations and trajectories is linked to St Thomas' (Chapter Five); my Singaporean informants' stance toward state undergraduate scholarships is connected to the local political economy (Chapter Six); their accounts of self-differentiation and strategies of acculturation are related to wider anti-immigrant sentiment and connotations of being overtly Chinese (Chapter Seven); their consistent valuation of Standard English and Singlish is a reflection of their participation in and affirmation of localised peer groups, with Singlish being a mark of distinction vis a vis other Singaporeans and academically elite students (Chapter Eight).

In these local contexts (presented in each data chapter), friction in mobility becomes an inadequate lens through which to understand the subtleties and nuanced variations

amongst individuals in processes of en-territorialisation that my informants undergo. The following table summarises how, as a running motif through all data chapters, I (a) considered en-territorialisation as an aspect of friction, and how friction is inadequate as a lens to understand mobility; (b) identified the different forms of embedding and re-embedding that takes place; (c) acknowledged from the data that en-territorialisation presents itself in complicated and nuanced ways for the individual.

Table 9.1: Summary of how 'en-territorialisation' might have traction

Different forms of en-territorialisation	**The inadequacy of 'friction' as a focal lens** (considering en-territorialisation as an aspect of friction)	**Complications and nuances** (involving degrees of embeddedness or being re-embedded)
In the context of St Thomas' School (Chapter Five), transnational mobility as structured and conditioned. *'En-territorialisation' as being socialised into local ways of thinking and behaving, taking up local circulating discourses.*	Frictionless mobility (in the sense of easing movement) does not encapsulate the pressures in the elitist school environment that culminate in transnational moves. Rather, these pressures are better seen as part of a process of being embedded in local practices and ideologies.	En-territorialisation and deterritorialisation need not be contradictory processes. It is being embedded in localised pressures in St Thomas' that students are conditioned to want to attend overseas universities. Informants display nuanced differences in the ways they resist and negotiate these pressures to move abroad (eg Chang won a place in Cambridge but chose to remain in Singapore to pursue her passion for Chinese Orchestral music).
In the context of a nationalistic scholarship regime (Chapter Six), the Singaporean citizen's open-ness or predisposition to return to Singapore via state scholarships sponsoring university education overseas. *'En-territorialisation' as developing ties to local spaces.*	Friction does not show how transnational mobility is facilitated by scholarships that compel return migration.	Again, en-territorialisation and deterritorialisation need not be contradictory processes. In the case of state scholarships, transnational movement is part of the individual's career trajectory in Singapore's civil service. Immigrant informants generally do not consider these state scholarships that only citizens are eligible for. Yet, there are also individuals who have been dis-embedded previously (ie migrating from China), now being re-embedded in Singapore's local political economy (eg Ling and Yang, immigrants from China who aspire to gain Singapore citizenship in order to win these scholarships). Even amongst Singaporeans, there are degrees of embeddedness (eg Adam is open to staying abroad for a longer period of time).

In the context of prevalent anti-immigrant sentiment and overt Chinese practices deemed to be unsophisticated (Chapter Seven), informants taking up xenophobic discourse, disavowing Chinese-ness, acculturating to local spaces and peer groups. *'En-territorialisation' as being socialised into local ways of thinking and behaving, taking up local circulating discourses.*	Social tension might exist between Singaporeans and immigrants, and such tensions might lead to impedance or friction in immigrants' adaptation to local spaces. However, focusing on friction (in terms of the ease of mobility) does not show the relative ways in which individuals positioned themselves and others along a polarity of Singaporean-ness (according to various nationalities and times of entry into Singapore).	While tension between locals and immigrants might serve to prevent immigrants from developing connections to local spaces, the data suggests that informants are sufficiently embedded to produce accounts that reflect circulating discourses regarding immigration and Chinese practices. Also, not all informants produced xenophobic discourse to the same extent. Phey, for example, explicitly stated that he does not treat more recent Vietnamese immigrants differently despite acknowledging their cultural differences.
In the context of local valuations of Singlish (Chapter Eight), informants' recognition and claim to practising Singlish as a token of localisation. *'En-territorialisation' as: (a) being socialised into local ways of thinking and behaving, taking up local circulating discourses; (b) developing ties to and affiliations with local spaces and peer groups.*	Different valuations of Singlish might serve as a source of differentiation and social tension between localised academically elite students and more recent immigrants. Such disaffiliation between groupings might lead to impedance or friction in the immigrants' movement into local spaces. However, focusing on friction (in terms of the ease of mobility) neglects the competitive nature of the social fields in which individuals are embedded and orient to in their talk.	Informants present different degrees of embeddedness by having different valuations of Singlish. For example, Xavier, who had no desire to remain in Singapore, claimed never to have picked it up and continued to view it as a debased form of English.
Different forms of en-territorialisation	**The inadequacy of 'friction' as a focal lens** (considering en-territorialisation as an aspect of friction)	**Complications and nuances** (involving degrees of embeddedness or being re-embedded)

This thesis therefore makes two sets of contributions – (a) empirical detail of cosmopolitan mobile elites lacking in the literature on migration, elite schooling and language and education; (b) in theoretical terms (based on Bourdieu), it opens up an area of inquiry when examining the mobilities of global elites.

First, this thesis presents empirical evidence of en-territorialisation amongst cosmopolitan mobile elites, through a case study of academically elite students in Singapore. These individuals are *en*-territorialised – being embedded in and conditioned by local social, cultural and political spaces. This can occur in two main ways: (a) being socialised into local ways of thinking and behaving, thereby taking up circulating discourses; (b) developing ties to and affiliations with local spaces and peer groups. This is not to say that both processes of (a) and (b) must occur in tandem, to the same extent, in all individuals. As aforementioned, individuals do present different degrees of en-territorialisation in each context of St Thomas' School, state scholarships, or local peer groups. An example is Xavier, who is wholly aligned with the discourse of transnational migration in St Thomas' School. He moved to the US without a state scholarship, and appears not to value Singlish at all. Yet, there is also Wong, who moved to the US on a state scholarship despite expressing attachment to his local peer group. Despite these individual nuances, as demonstrated in Chapter Eight, the valuation and use of Singlish does appear to be a fairly strong indicator of how deeply embedded one is in local spaces and peer groups in Singapore.

It is also worth considering how processes of en-territorialisation and deterritorialisation need not be contradictory nor mutually exclusive. As much as my informants' transnational trajectories reflect their physical disconnect from specific territories (ie deterritorialisation), these trajectories are bound to and conditioned by local ways of thinking and acting in St Thomas' School and the Singapore government's scholarship regime. In other words, both processes can indeed co-occur, and be intricately linked to each other.

Such a recognition of en-territorialisation is in contrast to prominent theorisations such as Appadurai's (1990) description of the "deterritorialisation" of people, ideas and capitals, and also Giddens' (1991) "disembedding" of social practices. This is to say that there is a tendency for past characterisations of elite mobility to over-emphasise deterritorialisation without adequately addressing en-territorialisation. This thesis has

presented a more balanced and nuanced perspective by bringing to attention empirical details of how such individuals do undergo processes of en-territorialisation. While they might intensely engage in transnational aspirations and trajectories, my informants are certainly not "rootless merchant sojourners" (Cheah P. 2001:135) and "cosmopolitans" who are "basically indifferent to where they lived", nor "cosmopolites" who are "habitants of a vast universe"(Robbins 1998:3). It is also not entirely accurate to characterise them as "nobility without a state" (Kenway and Koh 2013:287). Rather, these are individuals "involved in the localised politics of place-making in the co-presence of others" (Yeoh and Huang 2011:682), with transnational aspirations, trajectories and practices that are rooted in and intertwined with localised territory, culture and ideologies (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013:186-187).

Again, I must emphasise that my findings do not show how past descriptions of frictionless mobility and deterritorialisation are totally misguided. Indeed, these descriptions have been valuable in highlighting the fluid nature of elite mobility. What my thesis does, is portray such mobility in a more nuanced light, involving interwoven aspects of deterritorialisation and enterritorialisation that have seldom been addressed before.

Second, applying Bourdieu's theory of social fields to my informants' talk has revealed two key points when analysts investigate transnational mobility. There is a need to remember that social fields are necessarily "imbricated" (Noble 2013:354) or "embedded" in larger fields (Hanks 2005:74)[1]. This is also why Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004:1009) describe a transnational social field as "interlocking" and "multi-dimensional", where there is a sense of "interdependency" and "overlapping systems" (Vertovec 2001:24). In Chapter Six, Singapore's education system is shown to be embedded in the wider political economy of the nation, so that a transnational trajectory to study abroad is a capital that enables one to attain an elite career in Singapore's civil service. Thus, any social field ought not to be analysed as a self-contained unit in isolation. Even if one might describe the field of education as being transnational in nature, allowing academic elites from Singapore to easily enter other education systems in the US and UK, there is a corresponding need to examine how this field of education

[1] Inter alia, Bourdieu has a concept of homology to describe how certain fields are similarly organised with parallels regarding positionings, distribution of resources and so on (Hanks 2004:74). For example, comparisons may be drawn between an artist who is an outsider in the field of artistic production, and a poor person in the field of economy, where both are positioned in the margins. This is not the same as saying that the fields overlap.

might be folded into other fields within particular societies so as to gain a more comprehensive picture of how mobility is enacted.

This then brings me to another area of inquiry often neglected in the study of elite mobility – the field of informal socialisation. In describing transnational movement, there is a tendency to focus on the field of education and labour market, where such movement is often perceived to be seamless because of the capitals such as language and educational qualifications that individuals possess. This has also been the overwhelming concern of the Singapore state when assessing its own recruitment of foreign students. Less observed and investigated is the field of informal socialisation, or the casual friendship networks formed with individuals and groups outside of institutional control. When individuals move into a new social space, different valuations of various capitals (such as Singlish and Mandarin in Chapter Eight) are likely to translate into inequalities and sources of disaffiliation between social actors, especially locals and immigrants. If we were to gain a more accurate understanding of transnational mobility engaged in and frictions encountered by global elites, analysts must attend to both official domains such as the field of education, as well as the field of informal socialisation.

9.5 Wider implications of my informants' trajectories and lives as en-territorialised in local contexts

It is then pertinent to consider the wider significance of my informants' en-territorialisation in local contexts. I suggest implications for: (i) understanding the cultural practices of cosmopolitans; (ii) the state's policy of recruiting talented immigrant students; (iii) public perceptions of elite immigrants.

My empirical findings of en-territorialisation serve to plug the research gap and thicken the account of cosmopolitan behaviours in localised settings (Skey 2013). My findings support Ho's (2011) claim that cosmopolitans are not free from valuing certain practices over others in line with circulating discourses and ideologies. For example, even if Phey [in Chapter Eight Extract (ii)] might say that Singlish is not good English (and acknowledges the unequal value of Singlish and Standard English in different domains), he still engages in it in order to fit in with his local peer group. Phey's behaviour makes sense because we know he is embedded in multiple linguistic markets (cf Park and Wee

2012:29) that value different linguistic practices in various contexts. This is contrary to idealisations of cosmopolitan behaviours, where there is a "penchant for diversity" (Vertovec 2009:6), and where cosmopolitans "are characterised by their recognition of others because of their value and integrity as human beings, quite independently of their national affiliations. They share an open and tolerant world view that is not bound by national categories..." (Mau et al 2008:5). Not all cultural practices are valued in the same way all the time by these transnationally mobile elites like my informants, with Xavier's blatant disdain for Singlish another prime example. My informants' xenophobic discourse and expressed ideologies about Singlish suggest that social actors cannot live lives abstracted from the conditions of local contexts.

Pertaining to the state, Singapore's strategy of co-ethnic mobilisation (targeting Chinese individuals) in its immigration policies presents another angle to the emerging limits of the neo-liberal globalisation paradigm. The anti-immigrant sentiment in Singapore cannot but remind us of similar insurgent racism and xenophobia particularly pronounced in the US (eg Trump's rhetoric leading to his election) and much of Western Europe (eg Brexit and rise of far-right political parties) today. The Singapore state's recruitment of immigrant students is not completely straightforward despite supposed cultural similarities between immigrants from China and the polity's ethnic Chinese majority. A case might be made that state categorisations of academically elite students (by nationality and time of entry into Singapore) is reflected in the discourse on social relationships that they form amongst themselves. The state's project of augmenting the local talent pool with immigrants who are supposedly racially similar is therefore complicated, impeded even, by the government's own policies of distinguishing citizens from immigrants. If the Singapore state is serious about retaining recruited immigrant students, then it cannot just attend to the field of education where these immigrant students often possess the right cultural capitals, such as Standard English, or have the wherewithal to accumulate them to succeed. It is in the domain of informal socialisation amongst their academically elite peers where disaffiliation might abound due to different valuations of and access to locally-prized capitals. However disparaging the state's view of Singlish might be, it is through this vernacular that affiliation to and embeddedness in local cultural spaces and peer groups are often developed, and Singaporean elite-ness displayed through ease with the vernacular. Perhaps a way forward might be for the state to revise its assumptions about racial

characteristics in its immigration policies and recognise the value of Singlish in acculturation processes.

On the same note of xenophobia, evidence for the en-territorialisation of my informants in local contexts provides an important nuance to the Singaporean public's narratives of elite immigrants. As mentioned, part of the widespread anti-immigrant sentiment includes stereotypes of recruited immigrant students as rootless "scroungers" who simply use national resources as a platform to the US and UK (Chong 2014). It is crucial for the public to understand that while it is true that the aspirations and trajectories of these individuals are generally geared towards leaving Singapore, these aspirations are partly conditioned by St Thomas' school environment. Singaporean academically elite students, too, develop the same aspirations for transmigration through St Thomas' globalist curricula, and where the ethos of ability is conflated with trajectories abroad. Furthermore, and contrary to common perception, many recruited immigrant students do take up Singaporean practices with their valuation of and claim to using Singlish an indicator of their engagement in local spaces with Singaporean peers.

9.6 Similar academically elite students in other localities

The focus on Singapore's context in my study of academically elite students does not necessarily suggest that their en-territorialisation is unique. A comparable case might be found in Hong Kong. I suggest that academically elite students in Hong Kong share similar processes of en-territorialisation in the same forms of: (i) being socialised into local ways of thinking and behaving, thereby taking up circulating discourses; (ii) developing ties to and affiliations with local spaces and peer groups
This occurs in two contexts: (a) conditions in the civil service that are favourable to locals who have attended top universities in the West; (b) prevalent anti-PRC sentiment, coupled with a local vernacular (Cantonese) serving as source of disaffiliation (between locals and immigrants) and token of localisation.

First, Hong Kong's political economy appears similar to Singapore's by favouring academic elites with transnational education trajectories who are then drawn to serve in the local civil service (some via government scholarships). 14 out of 17 highest-ranking officials (ie secretaries of department and directors of bureau) in the Hong Kong SAR

administration (Hong Kong Government website) are individuals who have studied in universities in the West at undergraduate or postgraduate level. This includes Carrie Lam, current Chief Executive, who studied in Cambridge University on a Hong Kong government scholarship. Such a phenomenon is in light of Hong Kong's historical trend of students who aspire to study in top-ranked universities in the US and UK[2], though the number of scholarships offered by the state is comparably less than in Singapore (Ip 2013). Hong Kong's academic elites who have studied abroad might thus not be compelled to return to their country of origin in the same way that Singapore's state scholarships enforce return migration. Nonetheless, their dominance in local politics and civil administration suggests that, like their Singaporean counterparts, they do not mind returning to the local.

Second, Hong Kong's demographic of academically elite students is complicated by immigration, the majority of whom are from China. Like in Singapore, the sources of disaffiliation amongst academically elite students include a local register that is linked to localisation (ie Cantonese), as well as a wider anti-PRC sentiment. Though in Hong Kong's case, the anti-PRC discourse is not traced to large-scale immigration per se, but must also be understood in the context of creeping political influence from Beijing. Since its return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, Hong Kong is a special administrative region in China. Despite the often-cited 'One Country Two Systems' principle of governance, Hong Kong's development has been characterised as increasingly dependent politically on Beijing and economically on China's hinterland (Hui and Lo 2014). This is concomitant with an increase in immigration from China to Hong Kong, including amongst the student population. For instance, the number of mainland Chinese students pursuing undergraduate studies in Hong Kong's universities increased ten times over the last decade (Xu 2017:610). In this backdrop, there has been a proliferation of discourse by native Hong Kongers that is decidedly about "anti-mainlandisation" and upholding Hong Kong's autonomy[3] (Xu 2015).

Linked to this anti-PRC sentiment, the local vernacular of Cantonese has developed as a source of differentiation amongst students, so that Cantonese has become a token of localisation. As in Singapore's case for Singlish, differences in valuation of and access

[2] Ip (2013) suggests that the moneyed classes form the majority of students who study in top universities abroad, primarily because the scale of state scholarships is still rather small, especially when compared to Singapore's.
[3] The Umbrella Revolution of 2014 (Wong 2016) is one of the most conspicuous of such protests.

to Cantonese is found to exist amongst academically elite students in Hong Kong, exemplified through immigration. In Xu's (2017) study of academically elite students from China in a top-ranked Hong Kong university, she notes the difficulties that these students faced when moving into Hong Kong's local spaces:

> "Moreover, when competing against other Hong Kong students who were likewise 'educated locally' in Hong Kong universities, more than two-thirds of these MLC (mainland Chinese) students felt they were lacking a competitive edge, mainly due to insufficient linguistic capital or a lack of understanding of the local context. For instance… not only did Min lack the prized currency in Hong Kong's linguistic market (Bourdieu 1991), Cantonese, the hiring managers' concern about whether she could fit into the team also reflected their reservations about Min's understanding of Hong Kong's local business culture."
>
> (Xu 2017:618-619)

Thus, academically elite students in Hong Kong face similar pressures of differentiation and tension as their counterparts in Singapore. These differentiations occur in spite of the fact that the groups in question are notionally ethnic Chinese.

This is also where similarities with Singapore end. While the role of Singlish in Singapore as a marker of national pride is unlikely to change for the foreseeable future, the scenario for Cantonese in Hong Kong is fraught with more political complications. Lai and Byram (2003:325-326) characterise two opposing camps amongst Hong Kong's political leaders as 'national ruling elites' who are politically aligned with the interests of China as a nation, versus 'local ruling elites' who are aligned with local Hong Kong interests. Contestation between the two groups in the crafting and implementation of language policy is described as such:

> "Thus, with regard to Chinese, complexity arises as the patriotic groups (and national ruling elites) and the liberal [local] groups do not share the same view on which Chinese variety is adopted when mother tongue education is concerned. In the politics of bilingualism, the patriotic groups would like Putonghua [ie Mandarin], the national language, to be the high language, and be used in class teaching. The liberal groups, however, would like to keep 'the present independent development in language and

> communication' and see their majority language, Cantonese, be formally used at all levels of society and be used as the principal medium of instruction in school."
>
> (Lai and Byram 2003:325)

It remains to be seen how the resultant language policies might affect the valuation and practice of Mandarin and Cantonese amongst various social domains, and in turn the competition for elite social positions.

9.7 Some final words

The comparison with Hong Kong suggests how case studies of academically elite students can contribute to existing knowledge about cosmopolitan elites and transmigratory phenomena. This thesis has thus enriched conceptualisations of cosmopolitan elite migrants engaging in transnational movement by shifting the research gaze to focus on high-achievers in schools. In so doing, I have also addressed implications for understanding the cultural practices of cosmopolitans, the state's policy of recruiting talented immigrants, and the exigency of better informing the Singapore public on their impressions of elite immigrants.

If a fuller picture of cosmopolitan elites in "regimes" (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013) and local "social-cultural-political matrices" (Yeoh and Huang 2011) were to be established, then this can probably be done through an ethnographic study that uncovers the practices of these individuals in everyday life. As it stands, my sketch in this thesis of local contexts remains thin, and based on the claims of informants in interviews (albeit corroborated with my own experiences in St Thomas' and a peer group). An ethnography conducted in institutional settings such as the school or family would yield thicker description in the vein that Geertz (1973) proposes, something a qualitative study like this thesis cannot hope to attain. There remains a lack of critical inquiry within applied linguistics in general and Singapore's schools in particular (Sanderson 2002) regarding the experiences of top-performing students, and especially the interactional practices between immigrants and locals among them. Future studies must endeavour to overcome the institutional barriers to gaining access to fieldsites, so as to bridge this gap.

It is perhaps apt to end with where I first begun – my puzzlement with dominant narratives of cosmopolitan elites. Bourdieu (1998) outlined neo-liberalism as a programme that advocated the extension of pure market logic at the expense of collective structures. The spread of neo-liberal notions itself has been detailed in a voluminous amount of work, for instance from its beginnings in the Chicago School (Peck 2010), through the field of education (Exley and Ball 2014), and in political discourse and labour policies (Fairclough 2000). In some way, the narrative of cosmopolitan mobile elites engaging in frictionless, rootless moves (Yeoh and Huang 2011) and being 'flexible' labour (Fairclough 2000) might be seen as an extension of neo-liberal discourse, where elite individuals are described as constantly pursuing an economic rationality in fulfilling their own desires.

Yet, in seeking to understand the frictions and rootedness of cosmopolitan elites such as my informants in their transnational movement, we also see the limits of neo-liberal dogma, at least in the Singapore context. Thus, I addressed Singapore's education system as "neo-liberalism as exception" (Ong 2007). Individual performativity is emphasised through high-stakes examinations in elitist and stratified schools, but top-performing students are also enticed by a statist system to serve the national interest. In fact, the centrality and pervasion of the state in Singapore's political economy acts as a counterpoint to much of its neo-liberal economic policies of privatisation and deregulation (Liow 2011).

Beyond state engineering, we have also seen evidence of my informants' adherence to the collective, somewhat incongruent with Bauman's (2011) depiction of high-achievers who "do not harbour a desire for guarantees of communal security, and considering the price of any long-term obligations, do not have much enthusiasm for them either" (Bauman 2011:82). Most of my informants claim to value and use Singlish as an affirmation of the significance of their local friendship groups.

I witnessed at first hand and became involved in this friendship, being part of a peer group over the course of eight months. These are some of the best performing students in Singapore, with trajectories to the most reputable universities in the US and UK. A handful amongst those who won state scholarships might indeed be destined for political greatness in the nation. In the course of my writing, individuals such as Fang have begun their careers as lawyers, while Pang and Zing have qualified as medical

doctors. They are high-flyers in every sense of the word. Notwithstanding these, it is somewhat comforting to see how they are also grounded, in both senses of being anchored to the local (ie en-territorialised), and being sensible and level-headed. These individuals are not necessarily high-handed, elitist snobs. They are willing to accept immigrants in their peer groups (even if they might be prone to foibles of xenophobic discourse); they retain their connections with Singaporean friends despite transnational trajectories; Singlish persists as a marker of who they are and where they have been.

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Appendix A

Profiles of informants involved in life history interviews

Informant	Place of birth	Trajectory	Post-secondary school status[1]	Government Scholarships[2]	Citizenship	Gender[3]/ Age	Father/Mother's Occupation
Andy	Vietnam	Vietnam → S'pore → UK	Reading Engineering in Imperial College	ASEAN Scholarship at age 15	Vietnamese	M/23	Self-employed business / Secondary school teacher
Bay	Vietnam	Vietnam → S'pore	Reading Chemical Engineering in NUS	ASEAN Scholarship at age 15; ASEAN Undergraduate Scholarship	Vietnamese	M/22	Both secondary school teachers
Cassandra	Taiwan	Taiwan → S'pore → US	Graduated with Business degree from NYU; reading MA in Public Relations in Columbia University	NA	Taiwanese and Australian; acquired S'pore Permanent Residency	F/24	Self-employed business / homemaker
Chang	China	China → S'pore	Read Mathematics in NUS; Reading MA in Chinese Studies in NUS	SM1 Scholarship at age 15; Undergraduate Scholarship offered by S'pore government	PRC[4]; acquired S'pore Permanent Residency	F/25	Both civil servants in education ministry
Dong	China	China → S'pore	Graduated with Business degree from NTU; broker in a ship broking firm in S'pore	SM1 Scholarship at age 15; Undergraduate Scholarship offered by S'pore government	PRC; acquired S'pore Permanent Residency	F/25	Both civil servants
Fang	China	China → S'pore → US	Read Business in University of Chicago; reading Law in UCLA	NA	PRC; acquired then gave up S'pore Permanent Residency	M/24	Both civil servants

[1] Some abbreviations:
NUS – National University of Singapore, ranked 22nd in the world and 1st in Asia in the 2014/15 QS rankings (QS website).
SMU – Singapore Management University, established in 2000 and specialises in Business and Management Studies.
NTU – Nanyang Technological University, ranked 39th in the world and 4th in Asia in the 2014/15 QS rankings (QS website).
All three universities are highly regarded in Singapore, with each having its own subject specialisations.
[2] Details on abbreviations and the prestige of scholarships have been explained in Chapter Four.
[3] The majority of my informants are males. This is not by design and is a result of the circumstances of my data collection (See Chapter Three). Phey led me to become a participant-observer of an all-male peer group that played football regularly.
[4] PRC – People's Republic of China

Felicia	China	China → S'pore	Read Business in NUS; working in a multinational bank in S'pore	SM1 Scholarship at age 15; Undergraduate Scholarship offered by S'pore government	PRC; acquired S'pore Permanent Residency	F/25	University academic / secondary school teacher
Gabriel	S'pore	S'pore → UK	Reading Economics in UCL	Undergraduate Scholarship offered by government ministry	Singaporean	M/23	University academic / homemaker
Gin	Vietnam	Vietnam → S'pore	Reading Engineering in NUS	ASEAN Scholarship at age 15; ASEAN Undergraduate Scholarship	Vietnamese	M/23	Both secondary school teachers
Hans	Saipan	Saipan → S'pore → Cambodia → S'pore → US	Read Finance in NYU; working for a start-up in New York	NA	US; acquired then gave up S'pore Permanent Residency	M/23	Missionaries
Henry	Vietnam	Vietnam → S'pore	Reading Electrical Engineering in NUS	ASEAN Scholarship at age 15; ASEAN Undergraduate Scholarship	Vietnamese	M/23	University academic, secondary school teacher
Ling	China	China → S'pore	Reading Law in NUS	SM1 Scholarship at age 15; Undergraduate Scholarship offered by S'pore government	PRC; acquired S'pore Permanent Residency	F/23	Both lawyers in civil service
Ming	China	China → S'pore → US	Graduated with Economics degree from Cornell University; Graduated with MA in Finance from MIT; analyst for a multinational bank in Wall Street	SM1 Scholarship at age 15	PRC	F/25	University academic / civil servant
Phey	Vietnam	Vietnam → S'pore	Reading Finance in SMU	ASEAN Scholarship at age 15; ASEAN Undergraduate Scholarship	Vietnamese	M/22	Both civil servants
Quentin	Vietnam	Vietnam → S'pore	Reading Building and Estate Management in NUS	ASEAN Scholarship at age 15; ASEAN Undergraduate Scholarship	Vietnamese	M/23	Self-employed business, secondary school teacher
Seng	Singapore	S'pore → UK	Reading Aeronautical Engineering in Imperial College	Undergraduate Scholarship offered by government-linked corporation	Singaporean	M/21	Secondary school teacher / homemaker

Vas	India	India → S'pore → US	Reading Engineering in Carnegie Mellon	SIA Scholarship at age 15	Indian	M/23	University academic / homemaker
Xavier	China	China → S'pore → US	Read Liberal Arts in Swarthmore College; working for a start-up in Chicago	SM1 Scholarship at age 15	PRC	M/25	Both secondary school teachers
Yang	China	China → S'pore	Reading Pharmacy in NUS	SM1 Scholarship at age 15; Undergraduate Scholarship offered by government-linked corporation	PRC; acquired S'pore Permanent Residency, then S'pore Citizenship	F/23	Both lawyers in civil service
Ying	China	China → S'pore → UK → S'pore	Read Civil Engineering in Imperial College; working in an Engineering firm in S'pore	SM1 Scholarship at age 15	PRC; acquired S'pore Permanent Residency	F/25	Civil servant in education ministry / secondary school teacher

Profile of informants in peer group discussion

Informant[5]	**Place of birth**	**Trajectory**	**Post-secondary school status**	**Government Scholarships**	**Citizenship**	**Gender/Age**
Bay	Vietnam	Vietnam → S'pore	Reading Chemical Engineering in NUS	ASEAN Scholarship at age 15; ASEAN Undergraduate Scholarship	Vietnamese	M/22
Phey	Vietnam	Vietnam → S'pore	Reading Finance in SMU	ASEAN Scholarship at age 15; ASEAN Undergraduate Scholarship	Vietnamese	M/22
Seng	Singapore	S'pore → UK	Reading Aeronautical Engineering in Imperial College	Undergraduate Scholarship offered by government-linked corporation	Singaporean	M/21
Adam	Singapore	S'pore → UK	Reading Economics in Cambridge	Undergraduate Scholarship offered by government ministry	Singaporean	M/21
John	Singapore	S'pore	Reading Mechanical Engineering in NUS	NA	Singaporean	M/21
Kendrick	Singapore	S'pore	Reading Law in NUS	NA	Singaporean	M/21

[5] Bay, Phey and Seng were also involved in the life history interviews.

Pang	Singapore	S'pore	Reading Medicine in NUS	NA	Singaporean	M/21
Siew	Singapore	S'pore	Reading Law in NUS	NA	Singaporean	M/21
Wayne	Singapore	S'pore	Reading Business in SMU	NA	Singaporean	M/21
Wong	Singapore	China → S'pore → US	Reading Engineering in Carnegie Mellon	Undergraduate Scholarship offered by government statutory board	PRC; acquired S'pore citizenship at age 10	M/21
Zing	Singapore	S'pore	Reading Medicine in NUS	NA	Singaporean	M/21

Appendix B

What is Singlish?

Termed Singapore Colloquial English (eg Gupta 1998) or Singlish (eg Wee 2005, Tan and Tan 2008) by scholars, it has traditionally been described within local academia as a contact variety of English[1] drawing influences from other local languages such as Hokkien, Cantonese, Malay and Tamil (Platt and Weber 1980:18). I use the term 'Singlish' in this thesis, as this is also the label used by my informants (see Chapter Seven and Eight). Wee (2011:77) provides some examples of Singlish features including a lack of (a) inflectional morphology; (b) productive use of reduplication; (c) discourse particles; and (d) lexical items borrowed from languages like Hokkien and Malay:

a. He eat here yesterday. [He ate here yesterday.]

b. I like hot–hot curries. [I like very hot curries.]

c. I won't get married, lor. [I have no choice but to not get married.] *lor* indicates a sense of resignation here.

d. Don't make me suay, ok? [Don't bring me bad luck, ok?] *suay* is borrowed from Hokkien.

(Wee 2011:77)

Scholars have conventionally identified two forms of English in Singapore, and depicted them to co-exist in diglossic patterns of use (Gupta 1989, 1994; Pakir 1991): Standard Singapore English and Singlish. The standard form closely resembles other international standard varieties such as Standard British English, though with certain phonological differences (Deterding 2005). Singlish has been widely described by a vast body of research in its systematicity, all of which suggest that it can be considered a variety of English in itself (eg Alsagoff and Ho 1998, Bao and Wee 1999, Lim 2004, Deterding 2005). It is only in the last six to 10 years that the conceptualisation of Singlish as a 'variety' (ie ontologically distinct) has come to include the view of 'style',

[1] Interestingly, Gupta (1994:43) surmises that the origins of Singlish might be traced to the playgrounds of the earliest schools in Singapore, such as St Thomas', where children of Chinese and Malay backgrounds would interact in informal contexts.

that is, Singlish exists as "a range of lingua-cultural resources speakers use in order to identify or mark a change in cultural orientation or style" (Alsagoff 2010:126).

Leimgruber (2012) offers a detailed account of how this development is paradigmatically reflected in the variationist models that have been proposed to pin down Singlish use in Singapore society. Platt's (1975) 'speech continuum' first posited a seamless succession of sociolects, with Standard English as its acrolect and 'Singlish' as its basilect. This was followed by the diglossia model (Gupta 1989, 1994, 1998, 2001). Here, Standard (Singapore) English (SSE) is called the H(igh) variety, and Colloquial Singapore English (CSE) the L(ow) variety. The choice of when to use one or the other of these two varieties is, according to Gupta (1994:7), based on considerations of domains of use, as it is in Ferguson's (1959) diglossia.

The linguistic reality, as always, is more complex than the classic Fergusonian diglossic view. The problem lies in the non-homogeneous character of H and L, which, in a 'pure' diglossic situation, would be taken for granted. Gupta (1998:8) concedes that there is no "hard division between H and L", but "degrees of aim at H and L". She calls this situation one of 'leaky' diglossia (Gupta 2006:22), where elements of one sub-variety can appear in the other, in a phenomenon akin to code-switching. This analysis can, however, be problematic, not least because it too, like Platt's (1975), does not account for code-switching into languages other than Singlish (L) and the standard (H). Also, analysis of actual utterances makes it difficult to ascertain when strings of language use may be (H) or (L), with no clear constellation toward one or the other (Leimbruger 2012:8).

It is the inadequacies of these two models that led Alsagoff (2007, 2010) to introduce a third paradigm entitled the 'cultural orientation model'. This model attempts to overcome the shortcomings in the continuum and in diglossia by proposing two sub-varieties of International Singapore English (ISE, broadly equivalent to Standard English) and Local Singapore English (LSE, Singlish), which are at the extremes of a continuum of cultural orientation. According to this model, speakers are able to express a number of orientations including, but not limited to, levels of formality, authority, and closeness. Additionally, speakers may wish, in a given situation, to stress either educational attainment or community membership, or economic or socio-cultural capital, and do so by choosing the adequate variety.

The utility of the model lies in its ability to combine these orientations, such that a speaker can stress closeness while at the same time, for instance, emphasising economic capital. This leads to its main advantage over the diglossia model, namely the ability to satisfactorily explain the presence of L features in otherwise H speech, which can be reanalysed as the insertion of 'local' features into a 'global' utterance. This is done by a decision "to orientate towards ISE to indicate authority" while at the same time "exhibit[ing] some degree of Singlish features to indicate a local perspective in order to stress membership in the community" (Alsagoff 2007: 40). The inclusion of Singlish features is called by Alsagoff 'style-switching', which she prefers to *code-switching* as the latter suggests "a binary movement between two varieties" (Alsagoff 2007: 40).

It is thus important to note that Singlish does not exist as "a fully extensive social language" (Wee 2011:78). To Wee (2011), Singlish, unlike Standard English, does not possess sufficient lexicogrammatical resources that allows it to be used as a medium for conducting entire exchanges. He concludes that, "most Singlish usage involves switching between Singlish and Standard English… Singlish is usually interspersed with other lexicogrammatical constructions that are more or less standard" (Wee 2011:79). This view of Singlish is significant, for it means that any analysis of its use ought to avoid treating it as "an abstract language" but instead focus on "the actual and densely contextualized forms in which language occurs in society" (Blommaert, 2005:15).

It is with Alsagoff's (2010), Wee's (2011) and Blommaert's (2005) theoretical conceptualisations in mind that I prefer to use Agha's term of *register* in this thesis to describe what is referred to as 'Singlish' and 'Standard English'. In Agha's (2004) own words,

> "A register is a linguistic repertoire that is associated, culture-internally, with particular social practices and with persons who engage in such practices. The repertoires of a register are generally linked to systems of speech style of which they are the most easily reportable fragments."
>
> (Agha 2004:24)

In Singlish, these "most easily reportable fragments" might include that of discourse particles, lack of inflectional morphology, productive re-duplication and word-borrowings from Malay and Hokkien, as seen in Wee's (2011) examples.

In addition, these repertoires "are identified by appeal to metapragmatic models of speech, that is, culture-internal models of actor (role), activity (conduct), and interactant relationship (social relations) associated with speech differences" (Agha 2004:25).

The metapragmatic stereotypes of Singlish use are instantiated in the highly ideologised ways that people, including my informants, refer to Singlish and Standard English. This is seen in Chapter Eight when I examine the ideologies about Singlish and Standard English expressed by my informants.

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Appendix C

Example of transcription and analysis

Excerpt (basic first transcription) Appears in Chapter Five Extract (xii) pp. 126		**Notes**	**Codes**	**Possible themes**
Wong:	actually I don't want to go overseas		Refusal to go overseas	Resisting conventional aspiration in St Thomas'?
Luke:	then? you are going in two weeks leh			
Phey:	you're on scholarship		Reason to go overseas – scholarship	Pressure to conform to conventional aspiration?
Siew:	hello what are you saying	Why the protests from others?		
Wong:	no I'm serious I don't want to go overseas because			
Wayne:	because of Sharon			
Wong:	not just because of her			Evaluating value of state scholarships?
Luke:	oh so there's another Sharon or			
Adam:	there's another Sharon			
Wong:	I'm talking about you all ah! no next time weekends every time I want to play soccer I play with who sia you tell me		Reason for refusing to go overseas – friends	Resisting conventional aspiration in St Thomas'? Non-economic reason
Wong:	no la no la but seriously to be frank I don't want to go overseas. It's just ever since I was young my parents has always said that I will only be successful if I get a scholarship and I go overseas		Reason for going overseas – overseas scholarship	Pressure to conform to conventional aspiration? Economic reason
Luke:	ok			
Wong:	so they didn't really care what school or what scholarship they just wanted me to get ah. so when I got already they were like very happy then I don't want to disappoint them also-cos to be frank I wanted to study with you all in Singapore. cos I thought law was a something that might suit me ah. but parents expectations		Reason for going overseas – overseas scholarship; parents' expectations	Pressure to conform to conventional aspiration?

Excerpt (second transcription)	Notes	Codes	Possible themes
Wong: actually I don't want to go overseas (1) Luke: then? ((some people start sniggering)) Unknown: that's w(h)hy Luke: then? ((some continuous laughter)) Luke: [you are going in- you are going- you are going in two weeks leh Phey: [you're on scholarship] Siew: [hello: what are you saying?] Wong: no I'm serious I don't want I-I don't want to go overseas because= Wayne: =because of Sharon Wong: n-not just because of her ah (1) Siew: a:h ((everyone joins in chorus of ahs and ohs)) Luke: o:h so there's another Sharon [o:r Adam: [>there's another Sharon<] ((everyone laughs)) Wong: I'm talking about you all AH ((everyone in chorus of ohs and cheers))	Why this long pause? Why this uproar and continuous laughter? Is not going overseas so ridiculous? Why the protests from others? Teasing and making fun of Wong's reasoning? That his statement of not wanting to go overseas cannot be taken seriously? Does it show how difficult it is for someone to state that he doesn't want the conventional track?	Refusal to go overseas Reason to go overseas – scholarship	Resisting conventional aspiration in St Thomas'? Pressure to conform to conventional aspiration? Evaluating value of state scholarships?
Wong: no next time weekends every time I want to play soccer I play with who sia you tell me ((everyone responds at same time; inaudible response cries))		Reason for refusing to go overseas – friends	Resisting conventional aspiration in St Thomas'? Non-economic reason
Wong: >no la no la< but seriously I-I tsk to be frank I don't want to go overseas is just ever since I was young my parents (0.2) has-has always said that I will only be successful if I get a scholarship and I go overseas= Luke: =ok=		Reason for going overseas – overseas scholarship	Pressure to conform to conventional aspiration? Economic reason

Wong:	=so they didn't really care what school or what scholarship they just wanted me to get ah (0.2) so when I got already they were like very happy then I don't want to disappoint them also-cos (0.1) to be frank I wanted to study with you all in Singapore (0.2) cos I thought law was a (0.1) something that might suit me ah-but (1) parents expectations		Reason for going overseas – overseas scholarship; parents' expectations	Pressure to conform to conventional aspiration?

Symbols in second transcription:

(1.2)	pause duration in seconds and tenths of seconds.
:	colon marks slowing of local tempo, segment lengthening.
[ ]	overlap in sequence.
wor-	word with hyphen indicates truncated or cut-off word.
((words))	analyst's comment.
=	equals sign come in pairs, indicating continuous utterance with no break or pause.
> <	combination of 'less than' symbols indicate talk between them is rushed or compressed.
?	rising intonation, not necessarily a question.
WORD	Upper case indicates loud talk.
(h)	audible aspiration within the boundaries of a word.